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Determination of Consensus amongst Professionals for Community Safety Terms through a Delphi study

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Abstract

This article reports the findings from a study of Community Safety Professionals (Academics, Policy-makers and Practitioners), using the Delphi method to determine common definitions, if any, for Community Safety terms in current usage. The study investigated the differences in the way that the terms were used and understood by the members of the three groups. The study was predicated on the view that the groups of community safety professionals probably use the language of Community Safety in different ways. It is suggested that work in the field would benefit from a shared terminology, where the same term has the same meaning for different professional groups.

Key words:

Delphi, Community Safety, Lexicon, Consensus, Professional-groups,

Introduction

The experience of the authors in working with different Community Safety organisations (including the Police, Youth Justice Teams, NHS staff as well as Local Government departments) suggested that whilst the broad concepts of the terms within the Delphi were commonly understood, there were differences in interpretation between agencies that could lead to tensions in terms of service delivery. This raises questions of the relationship between language and reality which have exercised philosophers from Augustine to Wittgenstein. One way into this relationship is to examine the ways key words are defined by participants. Wittgenstein distinguishes between lexicographic, logical and ostensive definitions. Lexicographic and logical definitions are the kind found in dictionaries whereas ostensive definitions derive from studies of the way in which the words are used to structure perceptions and actions. Whilst it is recognised that definitions for some of the Delphi terms have been proposed within the academic literature, Government policy documents as well as local Plans and Strategies, the current study was designed to provide a degree of empirical evidence for the definitions presented.

This study is essentially lexicographic in that participants were asked to produce and comment on definitions of key terms. Through these definitions the study aimed to explore the constructions of meaning that three different groups of Community Safety professionals attached to a number of terms associated with the discourses of Community Safety with a view to establishing common meanings for the lexicon. The study also aimed to gauge the strength of agreement or disagreement amongst Academics, Policy-makers and Practitioners for the meanings of the terms selected.

These insights should inform our understanding of the way that these professionals use the selected terms in framing their own professional decision making.

In parallel work (Warren 2010) these definitions were related to other ways of exploring cognition and models of decision making and these will be reported in due course.

Review of the Literature

In principle the aims of this review are both to determine the extent to which professionals share a common understanding of frequently used terms and to identify ways in which these terms have been defined in the literature. Additionally the review provides a background to the Delphi method used to reach consensus in this study.

In fact no studies were found of the ways in which professionals construe and use community safety terms in practice. There is however a literature made up of *a priori* definitions and a summary of this follows. A brief background to the Delphi method is also given.

The concept of Community Safety was explored by Wiles and Pease , where they discussed the concept in terms of the management of risk and deploying resources towards those events that are most likely to result in harm to members of the community. Ekblom provides an alternative exposition on the meaning of Community Safety that seeks to define the term in relation to the multiple factors that can impact upon quality of life. However, these definitions, whilst providing valuable context and explanation of how Community Safety may be understood, do not provide the brevity or clarity that are often required from a working definition of a concept that can then be used in an operational context by practitioners.

An alternative definition was provided by Ekblom in his theoretical piece on the '*Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity*', where he stated that Community Safety should be regarded as:

Community Safety is a concept more closely related to quality of life – freedom from (actual or perceived) hazards, and ability to pursue the requirements and pleasures of living.

This definition is much closer to that achieved by the current Delphi exercise when compared to the previous definitions presented.

In an attempt to model Fear of Crime based upon data from the British Crime Survey, Box, Hale and Andrews derived a number of factors as being important in contributing to the fear of crime within a particular neighbourhood, including neighbourhood cohesion, confidence in the police, levels of local incivility, experience of victimisation, and perception of risk . In a review of the manner in which crime is reported within the British media, specifically newspapers, Williams and Dickinson found that the demographic factors identified by Box, Hale and Andrews were independent of the manner in which crime was reported by different newspapers; concluding that broadsheets carried fewer crime / Fear of Crime stories than their tabloid counterparts, and those which were reported by the broadsheets were done in a less sensationalist manner .

A definition of Crime Reduction was provided by Ekblom , where he states:

Crime reduction is simply about decreasing the frequency and seriousness of criminal events by whatever (legitimate means).

This definition does not make explicit the need for a point of reference, i.e. a baseline measurement is required if one is to be able to state that a reduction has been achieved, this requirement will be explored within the responses from the Delphi.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998¹ defines a person as having acted in an anti-social manner and therefore eligible for the imposition of an anti-social behaviour order if:

... the person has acted, since the commencement date, in an anti-social manner, that

is to say, in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself.

A search of the academic literature suggested that Community Engagement was an under-used term in terms of previously published work, although Andrews, Cowell *et al* used the term to suggest that local authorities have a general duty to engage with the community that they serve and within that general duty, also have a responsibility to provide support for active citizenship .

Carter utilised the term Stronger Communities in suggesting that increased tolerance in schools would lead to their development ; whilst Kerley and Benson asked if Community-Oriented Policing would assist in the development of Stronger Communities , concluding that it had no significant effect. This lack of a defined meaning for the term provides an additional justification for it to be included within the Delphi project.

Crime Prevention could be regarded as an obvious term that does not require definition. However, Ekblom provides a possible definition for comparison purposes:

Crime prevention is intervention in the causes of criminal and disorderly events to reduce the risk of occurrence and/or the potential seriousness of their consequences

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Published work on Crime Prevention appears to be classified in terms of references for specific crime types, for example burglary ; or situational approaches that can be deployed with the intention of disrupting a wider range of criminal or anti-social behaviour e.g. Closed Circuit Television systems or changes to the physical environment .

Harm Reduction, in the context of community safety, has been used previously to reference the harm caused to individuals by their participation in substance-misuse

activities that have a detrimental effect upon the body. Mastache *et al* provided an overview of the characteristics and dynamics of the partnership approach to the management of alcohol abuse, according to a set of principles that had previously been established in the United States; namely, that the community should be conceived as a system, that change can be effected through mobilisation of the whole community, an approach that requires effective leadership and responsibility, using evidence-based strategies and integrating with partnerships at local and national levels .

As well as being a term that encompasses general feelings of goodwill towards fellow human beings, Respect was also the title given to the then government's initiative designed to tackle issues of Anti-social Behaviour in a constructive manner. A recent search² of the Government website indicated that this initiative has been removed by the current coalition administration.

A search of the relevant academic literature did not reveal a large body of evidence as to what constituted Acceptable Behaviour, however the following papers used Acceptable Behaviour as a main reference point rather than just mention of the term in passing. It almost goes without saying that Acceptable Behaviour (AB) is the preferred goal of the community safety professional and Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) that which is unacceptable. As a mechanism to encourage AB, agencies concerned with the reduction of criminal behaviour or ASB have sought to utilise the creative capabilities of the individuals that they believe need further support to behave in a manner that is acceptable to the other members of their communities .

The literature revealed several studies which referenced Quality of Life but without providing a definition for what was meant by the term. Such a finding provides further justification for the term to be included within the Delphi instrument. Quality of Life was referenced in terms of people receiving a service from different healthcare agencies, whose main priorities were to ensure that those in their care experienced the best

outcomes possible . Whilst other researchers referenced Quality of Life in terms of the physical environment and the impact that this has upon the emotional state of those that live in that area .

The presentation of the concept of Sustainable Communities within the literature appears to fall into two main classifications, the development of the infrastructure of an area in terms of maximising sustainability through the planning and design processes; and the implementation of 'green' processes and technologies that reduce waste and increase the ability of a community to sustain itself over time . The concept of Sustainable Communities is now being driven by central government with a requirement upon local government, in partnership with its local strategic partnership, to produce sustainable community strategies. These are planning documents that are developed to give a long-term structure to the delivery of services within a local area that can then be used to define the details of Local Area Agreements between providers and commissioners.

The concept of Intelligence Led within the Community Safety literature was largely connected with the change in police tactics, known as Intelligence Led Policing. This change has resulted in a change of emphasis for police activity, away from a reactive model of detection of crimes once they have occurred, towards a pro-active model of disrupting the factors that drive the commitment of offences in the future. This model has been adopted in the UK , mainland Europe and America , allowing law enforcement agencies to share information and disrupt the activities of organised crime gangs, that do not respect international boundaries.

The Delphi technique was developed by the Rand Corporation in the 1950s , whilst working under contract to the United States Government. The method was designed as a rapid assessment technique for achieving consensus amongst a group of acknowledged experts in their chosen field; where the choice of the expert panel can

be construed as both a strength or a weakness of the method . In essence, the members of the expert panel are asked to provide their own definition for the terms to be addressed, these are then consolidated into an initial summary definition that the experts are asked to assess, and provide an alternative if they do not agree with the summary. This process continues until the ratings provided the expert panel conform to the pre-determined parameter for consensus.

The Delphi technique comprises a series of rounds, during which each of the participants see all of the responses that have gone on before and have the chance to alter their own response in the light of what the other experts have said, as well as commenting upon the summaries provided by the researchers at the end of each round. Many of these published applications of the technique have come from the fields of nursing and medicine (both human and veterinary); however the technique does not seem to have been taken up by criminology or community safety researchers to the same extent. That having been said, Hert and Harris utilised a Delphi method to develop a 5 year mission statement for a statistical abstract publication that was widely used by criminological researchers in the United States.

Design

The study was designed to have up to four Delphi rounds, with an acknowledgement that participant fatigue may result in this being shorter.

For the first round of the study, all those who had agreed to participate were sent (via email) an initial document to complete, which asked for their definitions of each of the thirteen terms. Participants were given four weeks to complete the document and an email reminder was sent after three weeks. The responses to the round one document were collated by the Delphi facilitator and an initial summary definition produced for each term. It should be recognised that this summation process included an element

of interpretation on the part of the Delphi facilitator but information about the influences upon each of the experts to the terms assessed was not collected as it was felt that it would overcomplicate the data collection instruments and possibly lead to reduced response rates. The round one responses and summary definitions then formed the basis for the round two document. At this point participants were asked to review the definitions produced in round one, provide feedback on their level of agreement with the summary definition via a seven point Likert type scale, and provide a refinement of their round one definition should they so wish. The summary definitions were revised in the light of the round two comments and the round three document was produced as an extended version of that presented to participants in round two. For the purposes of the current study consensus was determined by means of the median value (indicating level of group agreement) and inter-quartile range (indicating degree of consensus) from the rating values presented by Yates *et al* , recognising that there was still a level of disagreement between participants when the criteria for consensus were reached.

Sample

A review of government strategy documents relating to community safety and youth justice identified an initial ten terms that were frequently used, but in slightly different contexts and appearing to mean slightly different things, (see Table 1 below), depending on the context and the professional standpoint of the writer (Home Office, 2006; Tilley, N. 1992).

The initial selection of experts was based on an opportunistic sample of speakers from a conference held at the University of Chester in September 2005, entitled 'Community safety: Innovation and Evaluation', which was organised by the author. In addition, panel members were recruited from a search of the academic book literature, using Community Safety as the search term⁴. As well as the above methods, the Home

Office Directors in each of the government regional offices were invited by email to participate. In a 'snowball' fashion, some panel members contacted the researcher after having been forwarded the original email, often as the original invitee was unable to participate due to pressure of work commitments, as with the ACPO⁵ representative who was asked to take part. The above descriptions of the professional status, and therefore experience of the panel members stands as testament to the quality of the definitions that were derived from the project.

Many agreed to participate on the basis of the invitation alone, some needed further information on the time and effort required before committing themselves. All panel members received brief details of what was going to be expected from them and the amount of time that they were committing to should they agree to participate.

In all, 56 individuals were asked to participate, with 41 agreeing to do so (73.2%), 10 replied that they were unable to participate, 3 were on maternity leave, whilst 2 did not reply. Of the 41 who agreed to participate 21 were classed as academics, 10 as policy makers and 10 as practitioners.

Table 1: Revised Delphi panel member response rates

The Academics were defined as those that had written or contributed to books on community safety, the Policy-makers were all civil servants with a responsibility for drafting or contributing to community safety policy, whilst the Practitioners were members of those professions that have a responsibility for putting community safety policy into practice at a local level.

The terms chosen for the Delphi were selected on the basis of phrases that appear within government literature and the speeches made by politicians. The terms were also subject to checking through the on-line version of Hansard (see Table 2). After piloting with two community safety experts the original list of 10 items the list was

extended to 13 items.

Table 2: Results of Hansard search for Delphi Terms

The results shown in Table 2 demonstrate the time periods over which the different terms were used within the House of Commons and the House of Lords, as well as the number of times the different terms were used by speakers. However, as the on-line records for Hansard only go back to November 1988 it is not certain that the dates above represent the first use of these terms within either parliamentary chamber.

Results

Table 3 below presents the final definitions for each of the thirteen terms in the project, alongside the criteria for consensus for each term. At the end of Round 2, agreement was reached for seven of the thirteen terms: Community Safety, Fear of Crime, Crime Reduction, Acceptable Behaviour, Sustainable Communities, Intelligence Led and Stronger Communities; possibly indicating that the usage of these terms by the members of the three groups was closer than for other terms in the study. At the end of Round 3, agreement was reached for a further three terms: Harm Reduction, Crime Prevention and Anti-social Behaviour; with supplementary comments made by the members of the three groups indicating a larger degree of difference in their understanding and usage. At the end of Round 3, agreement was not reached for the remaining three terms: Community Engagement, Respect and Quality of Life as it was suggested that they were too jargonistic and more like political sound bites than useful descriptors of Community Safety practice.

Table 3: Term definitions and levels of agreement

Each of the thirteen terms was reviewed for similarities and differences in terms of the definitions provided by each of the three groups. It was found that all three groups used the terms in broadly similar ways, but that the responses from the Academic

group were more strategic in nature, whilst those from the Policy-makers and the Practitioners were more operationally focussed. This would not necessarily have been predicted before the start of the project, for the Academics might have been expected to be more theoretical in their answers, the Policy-makers to be more process focussed and the Practitioners to be more focussed on service delivery. In terms of the answers provided, the three groups either had a greater theoretical or practical focus than might have been predicted *a priori*.

It may have been expected that a greater number of comments and revised definitions would be provided for those terms that did not meet the consensus criteria, however it was seen that as many comments were received for those terms which met the criteria as those that did not. It is interesting to note however that those terms, which failed to meet the consensus criteria were more likely to have been commented upon but without an alternative definition being provided by the participant.

Discussion

Each of the thirteen terms will be examined in turn, with comparisons and contrasts drawn from the different responses provided by the members of the three identified professional groups.

Community Safety

Academics tended to define Community Safety in terms of the actions taken by statutory agencies that are designed to support communities and to minimise crime and disorder effects on that community. Implicit in the term is their view that these Crime Reduction / Prevention activities occur at the level of the community as opposed to being designed to support particular individuals. Many of the academics and practitioners expressed their definitions of Community Safety as a quality of life issue, where people are free to go about their daily business free of intimidation, harassment

or fear. This will be returned to later, as Quality of Life is also a term that was included in the Delphi. However, there were also concerns expressed about the nature of 'community'; whether it should be seen as a defined geographical area, or should it be seen in more human terms where individuals are joined by a common set of values or goals. The Policy-makers took the view that Community Safety should be seen as a much wider issue than simply a reduction in crime or prevention of disorder; but should be seen as preventing harm to the members of that community, howsoever caused.

Fear of Crime

The Academics and Policy-makers on the panel expressed Fear of Crime as being a negative emotional state of mind which impacts upon perceptions of personal safety; an emotional state that also has a significant impact upon their perception of the risk that they will be made a victim of crime. It was also recognised that levels of Fear of Crime do not necessarily correlate with actual recorded levels of crime. In contrast, the practitioners tended to view Fear of Crime in terms of levels of crime at a community level, where community was defined in geographical terms. It was recognised that the negative effect of crime can be experienced directly or vicariously; i.e. Fear of Crime levels can be affected to a similar extent whether one has been a victim of crime, or knows of someone who has been a victim of crime. Whilst the Policy-makers also defined Fear of Crime in terms of the negative effect upon an individual's state of mind, they also recognised that the impact of high levels of Fear of Crime is to hinder or prevent that person from carrying out the behaviours of day-to-day living.

Crime Reduction

The Academic group discussed Crime Reduction in terms of an aggregate reduction in levels of crime, achieved through the implementation of actions that are taken to minimise the impact of crime and disorder and increase quality of life. The

effectiveness of those activities relying upon the correct identification of the causes of crime and effective disruption of those causes that will have an overall effect of reducing crime. The Practitioners also recognised that Crime Reduction should be seen in terms of the number of criminal events that occur in the future as opposed to the number that have occurred in the past; but this group were more explicit in the way that the reduction should be defined, stating that it needs to be defined in statistical terms, rather than just talking about aggregate reductions.

It was also recognised that Crime Reduction activities involve the use of both situational and softer measures (e.g. education) methods that will have the effect of reducing crime in the future. The Policy-makers expressed similar views to the Practitioners in that Crime Reduction should be seen in terms of activities that result in an observable reduction in crime between two defined points in time. It was also recognised by this group that Crime Reduction should be measured against an agreed local or national indicator; otherwise it is difficult to assess the relative success or failure of the activities that have taken place in an area. It was noted that these reductions could be achieved through environmental and / or social improvements, where communities and statutory organisations work together to reduce crime in a particular area.

Harm Reduction

There was a difference in opinion in the Academic group about the nature of Harm Reduction, with some seeing it in terms of a 'Mitigation of the effects of crime once suffered', whilst other groups viewed it in more general terms, not necessarily that which was caused by criminal activity. This would include the impact on the individual of engaging in behaviours involving the abuse of alcohol or substances. The view was also expressed that, in a similar view to those discussed in relation to Crime Reduction, that Harm Reduction should be seen in actuarial terms, as a targeted reduction

between two defined points in time. The Practitioners agreed with the Academics that Harm Reduction should be seen as a reduction in the effects of crime and disorder, as opposed to reduction the level of crime itself. It was acknowledged that some people will always engage in risk-taking behaviours and that such individuals need to receive education interventions so that they are able to make an informed judgement of the risks that the behaviours pose to themselves. The Policy-makers recognised that this term referenced a reduction in the harm caused by crime rather than a reduction in the levels of crime, e.g. deterrence in the use of weapons or firearms.

Crime Prevention

The Academics perceived Crime Prevention in relatively simple terms, as being interventions in the causes of crime that lead to a reduction in overall levels of crime. Within this, members of the group differentiated between physical or situational crime prevention and social crime prevention. It was also noted that the term could be seen to be used interchangeably with Crime Reduction (hence the need for work to determine consensus and consistency in the use of such terms). The Practitioner group perceived of *crime prevention* in terms of the reductions in the harm caused by crime and a reduction in the opportunities to commit crime. Crime Prevention can be explored in terms of education, substance misuse treatments that remove the need to commit crime in order to finance a drug habit, or in terms of designing out crime when at the planning stage of new buildings. One expert noted that Crime Prevention could be seen to be solely a police responsibility compared to the wider term of community safety that is often perceived in multi-agency terms.

Crime Prevention can refer to interventions that are used at an individual level to reduce the probability of a person becoming a victim of crime, or at the situational level where the intervention is designed to be effective against a range of different criminal behaviours. All three groups felt that Crime Prevention had as much to do with the

reduction of harm caused by criminal behaviour as it did with the reduction of levels of crime.

Antisocial-behaviour

The Academic group defined the phenomenon of Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) as a Quality of Life issue that contravenes the accepted norms of behaviour within a given community. There was a level of disagreement amongst the members of this group as to whether ASB should be regarded as criminal activity; or behaviour that whilst causing significant distress to the members of a community, is nevertheless at a level that falls short of a threshold that would make it a criminal act. The definitions provided by the Practitioners went a little further than those provided by the Academics as they defined ASB as being behaviour which is offensive or damaging to other members of the community. This wider definition also includes a judgement about the degree to which ASB can increase the perception of risk in community, relative to the level of risk already present. As with the other groups in the panel, the Policy-makers recognised that not all ASB is necessarily criminal, but occurs at a level that falls just short of that threshold. This distinction means that for the members of this group ASB is that which falls short of major damage to property or physical assault but that nevertheless causes significant distress to those that experience it. These can be expressed as transgressions of unwritten social standards held by a community.

Community Engagement

The panel suggested that Community Engagement describes the levels of involvement of citizens in the decisions that affect them, in addition to giving them a voice in terms of the services that are provided for them. This process requires statutory agencies to engage members of communities in a consultation dialogue about the crime and disorder issues that are important them.

The term was also taken to describe the degree of attachment that members of the statutory agencies, including local and national government, can forge with members of a community that will ensure that the needs of that community are met. The Practitioner group took a wider view of the term and described it in terms of communicating with individuals or groups in order to achieve a common objective. It was suggested that this could be achieved through a process in which contact is established and maintained between a community and the agencies that serve it. The Policy-maker group perceived Community Engagement as the involvement of communities in the planning and delivery of the services that affect them.

Respect

The members of the Academic group defined Respect in terms of the consideration of the rights and feelings of others, which includes an appreciation of the rights of others to behave and hold views that may or may not coincide with those held by oneself. There was also recognition that Respect was the name given to an initiative of the previous Labour Government that was designed to tackle issues of ASB. The Practitioners recognised that Respect involves an appreciation for the fact that different communities operate under different rules of conduct and so in order to show Respect an individual may have to alter their own behaviour so as not to cause offence or disrespect. The Policy-makers took a wider view of Respect by placing it on a society-wide basis, rather than at the level of the individual, expressing the idea as an appreciation of the social norms of the law-abiding majority. Such a wide-ranging view of Respect would also subsume constructions of Respect at the individual level, where it can be seen as having consideration for others in the framing of one's own actions and recognition of the dignity of others. There was also a recognition that Respect involves the extent to which members of a group will alter their own views or behaviour so as not to cause offence to the members of another group within the same society.

The definitions as given were felt to be too narrow and legalistic and not getting to the heart of respect by expressing a fundamental empathy with others. This was expressed by members of all three groups, stating that Respect should be framed in terms of consideration for and appreciation of the rights and feelings of others in that society.

Acceptable Behaviour

Responses from the panel were similar across the three professional groups suggesting that Acceptable Behaviour could be regarded as those actions that are framed with Respect, where they are deemed to be appropriate within the norms of that community. This also suggests that Acceptable Behaviour is that which is that is considerate of the rights of others to live free of negative influences, or behaviour that does not provide a detriment to the quality of life experienced by others within that community.

The definition of the term is more complex than simply the anti-thesis of ASB, although some experts saw it in those terms. The majority of the panel saw Acceptable Behaviour as that which met the standards that others in the community expect or permit others to engage in, i.e. that which does not cause harassment, harm, alarm or distress.

Quality of life

It was recognised that Quality of Life is something of an all encompassing term that includes all aspects of person's life, including the ability to maintain a healthy balance between work, recreation and family commitments. This balance would by necessity include an estimation of the emotional, social and physical well being experienced by an individual. It was recognised that people may experience tensions in terms of Quality of Life through differences between expectation and reality in terms of

economic, social, cultural and environmental conditions. The Practitioner group took a more active view of what constitutes Quality of Life, recognising that individuals often need to apply a degree of effort to a situation in order to achieve the best outcome for themselves and their family. This effort would seek to recognise the positive factors in their lives, which could be maximised to increase their sense of well being in spite of any perceived or imposed limitations. The Policy-makers described Quality of Life in terms of a set of measures that can be applied to an individual or community that describes their overall sense of well being about their lives and the area in which they live. This overall sense of well-being includes the degree to which people can undertake the normal activities of day-to-day living free of intimidation or fear.

The responses from the panel at the end of the third round did not meet the criteria for consensus as there appeared to be such a large number of factors that impact upon Quality of Life, to include them all would make the definition too long and / or complicated to use in practice. Several areas were identified as causing particular disagreement including the difference between actual personal circumstances and way in which they are perceived by individuals, the factors that impact upon an individual's sense of personal fulfilment and the degree of personal safety that they enjoy as they go about their daily lives.

Sustainable Communities

A number of the members of the Academic expert group felt that the phrase was more of political sound bite than a useful descriptor of the characteristics of a community. However, they also expressed the view that Sustainable Communities are those that have a degree of resilience, which provides the capacity to withstand internal and external threats over time. The time element of the definition was reiterated by the members of the Practitioner group, who felt that Sustainable Communities were those where the individual components (residential, commercial & recreational) are mutually

supportive of each other and help to maintain social structures. The Practitioner group also expressed the view that in order for a community to be truly sustainable it would need to be able to meet its own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same.

Intelligence-led

The Academics tended to define this concept in terms of policing activity and crime reduction measures, which are based upon the accurate and timely analysis of data to produce knowledge, upon which operational or resource decisions can be based. This assumes that a clear evidence base exists, which can be used to develop targeted and cost-effective strategies by the systematic analysis of information that can lead to the generation of consistent and reliable intelligence. The Practitioners agreed that *intelligence led* relates to processes that are based upon relevant facts, where subsequent activity is directed by the available intelligence. The Policy-makers recognised that the available data can include both 'hard' i.e. quantitative and 'soft' i.e. qualitative types of information. The group also took a wider view of Intelligence-led than just policing, referring to all aspects of public service, but using the Police as an example of Intelligence-led activity in practice.

The three groups agreed that Intelligence-led includes the following aspects. The actions taken to identify the problem, the implementation of a solution and an assessment of its effectiveness.

Stronger communities

The Academic group recognised the time aspect to the term and defined Stronger Communities as those that were more self-sufficient than previously, making fewer demands on the statutory services. An increased degree of self-sufficiency was also suggestive of a community that was inclusive and able to demonstrate an increased

resilience to threats from outside the community by demonstrating a high degree of cohesion.

The Practitioners appeared to miss the time element of the term, describing instead Stronger Communities, as being those that are safe, cohesive and inclusive; feeling that the members of this type of community would be empowered to take a role in the decisions that affect them and would be more likely to take action for the common good. This group considered Stronger Communities to be those that are able to identify their common objectives and the mechanisms by which they can be obtained.

Although the reported ratings from the expert panel met the criteria for consensus after round two, it should be recognised that a number of the experts suggested that the term was too 'jargonistic' and could not envisage a circumstance where they would use the term in their own writing. This response reduces the usefulness of the term as a descriptor for Community Safety activities and it would not necessarily be included in any repetition of the project.

Conclusion

This study is intended as a contribution to the burgeoning literature that examines the cognitions of the various professions and specialisms that contribute to action for community safety. These cognitions can be explored in a number of ways of which the Delphi method is one.

In this study the Delphi method proved successful in identifying differences and similarities in definitions of key terms and in moving, so far as possible, towards a consensus. The method relies on individuals taking the trouble to give authentic responses to requests for definitions. These definitions are of their nature lexicographic rather than ostensive and the method is based on the assumption that such definitions are an accurate indication of the ways respondents might conceive and

use the terms. Validation of the results would require correlational and predictive explorations of concepts in use which are beyond the scope of this study.

The major practical implications of these findings is that care must be taken in implementing strategies and programmes in community safety, to ensure that all participants have a similar understanding of terms used in setting aims, objectives and operational plans. This would of course normally occur in the framing of legislation, policy-documents and plans but there may be assumptions of shared understanding which studies such as this one might contradict or at least modify. In day-to-day working some time spent ensuring shared understanding of key terms would be worthwhile.

One possible development from this project might be an international Delphi to explore comparative similarities and differences in definitions and conceptualisations of community safety. Differences, if these are found, might be expected to reflect cultural and political contexts.

The project described here was part of a doctoral thesis, Warren, J. (2010), where the differences found in definition and conceptualisation were related to aspects of identity and decision making and these interdependencies would merit further study.

The Delphi method used here in community safety should be transferable to other areas of social policy that depend on interprofessional collaboration, as would the modelling broader interdependencies of conceptualisation, identity and decision-making.

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