

Pearls in Policing

"The Luster of Pearls"

A summary of the independent study into the results of Pearls in Policing

Introduction

Pearls in Policing (PIP) is a global platform that annually unites executives of international law enforcement. During a small-scale informal meeting, prominent international participants are challenged to think about the future of the police profession. Their sources for reflection include the findings from the International Action Learning Group (IALG), feedback from the academic world, intensive discussions, input from working groups, and peer to peer consultation. In 2015, the Pearls conference will be held for the ninth time. Over the past years, the conference was attended by representatives from 43 different countries.

Independent study

The Ministry of Security and Justice of the Netherlands commissioned 'Pro Facto', a Dutch research consultancy, to carry out an independent study into the way PIP has developed over the past eight years and the extent to which PIP's objectives have been realised. The bureau also viewed the way funding was used for the conference. A document study was carried out, financial reports were examined, and the experiences of Pearls and IALG participants were included in the study by means of interviews and surveys.

Policy theory

Before the start of the study, the researchers collected data on the thoughts, assumptions and objectives that were at the basis of Pearls and used them to form a policy theory. This helped them formulate statements about Pearls' effectiveness and the degree to which its objectives had been achieved.

Within this policy theory, the following three Pearls in Policing functions were identified:

- 1) Network
- 2) Competence
- 3) Think tank

1) Network function

The annual conference

The study showed that Pearls has created a sustainable and relevant network (page 7). About 50% of the survey respondents agree with the statement that the organisations and countries most relevant to their own organisations attended the conference. Most participants attached importance to cooperative operational partnerships with these countries and organisations. What emerged is that more than 80% of the participants actively use the contacts they established at the conference (page 51). They have used each other as sparring partners and are using the network to discuss strategic subjects and cooperation. One of the respondents summarized the influence of the network as follows:

.....The good thing about this network is that it has not been created within an institutional and operational structure. The diffuse benefits this generates in terms of private chats that take place at a later time should not be underestimated. (...) Trust is a key by-product resulting from the set-up of Pearls in Policing. At key moments, this can be very valuable in an operational context (page 51)....

The IALG

IALG participants, too, feel that their participation has increased the scope and quality of their international network (page 49). The IALG participants highly value the opportunities to acquire new contacts through their participation in the programme. The programme's set-up encourages mutual trust and personal ties (page 50). They work together intensively and share a unique experience. For more than 50% of the participants the contact has resulted in some form of cooperation. Over 90% of the IALG participants actively use the established contacts, most of all to "keep the pot boiling" (page 52). More than 40% of the participants sometimes contact former fellow IALG members to discuss tactical or operational cooperation (page 52).

2) Competence function

The annual conference

PIP influences the way in which police leaders view the world, perceive problems, analyse them, and place them in a global perspective. The conference participants consider their ability to develop a global perspective on the police competence that improved most: 75% of the respondents feel their competence in this field to be significantly or greatly improved (page 53). At the conference, competence development mainly results from peer to peer contact: police leaders learn from each other through the interaction during the various sessions. The academic input has a key facilitating role.

The lasting influence of the competence objective can mainly be felt in the participants taking on board and applying the substantive reflection on the position and challenges of police leadership in their everyday work. According to the participants, the open and interactive nature of the discussions, free from the issues of the day, prompts critical reflection on one's own performance and the performance of the police organisation one is part of (page 55). The lasting influence of the acquired competences is often strongly linked to the participant him/herself, and is not systematically embedded in the police organisations (page 70). Improvement of the embedding process may enhance the impact of the programme, which is regarded as highly valuable.

The IALG

The picture emerging from the survey and the interviews is predominantly positive: the IALG is considered a unique learning programme that contributes considerably to the personal development of future police leaders. In time, the IALG participants discern an influence on their careers (page 7). The development of one's own knowledge and being able to contribute to a body of knowledge are the elements rated highest by the participants (page 55).

On the whole, the participants indicate that the international operational competences, the academic and methodological skills required and their international leadership capacities were further developed as a result of their participation in the IALG. The most significant development could be seen in the field of international leadership and the application of so-called future methodologies (page 53). What stands out once again is the development of a global perspective on the police profession (page 54). This once again emphasises that almost all of the problems police professionals have to deal with have an international dimension.

Nearly 50% of the respondents took part in another international leadership programme (page 55). One of the IALG alumni phrased the learning experience and the way it has an effect on his professional performance as follows:

... I was at times under-confident in my ability to operate at both a senior and international level. Attending the IALG stretched me intellectually but also proved to myself I could operate effectively at a senior level. This confidence has been sustained and contributed to my current temporary promotion. I frequently call on my experiences at IALG to get me through current work situations. The learning and benefit from the programme continues in how I intellectually respond to challenges, interact with officers and consider international co-operation...(page 56)

3) Think tank function

The annual conference

Pearls as a think tank is in line with the spirit of the times, addresses current problems and responds to the strategic and other current challenges the police organisation has to deal with. As a think tank, Pearls helps police leaders to determine, adjust and prioritise subjects for their own organisations' policy agenda (page 60).

PIP serves as a *pracademic* think tank. The discussions are aimed at translating global problems into the police and security domain (page 59). It is more a matter of applying the existing academic and other insights within the security domain than the development of new, trail-blazing concepts, paradigms and academic excellence. When asked about the role of the academic input, the conference participants pinpoint the scientific input for the discussions and inspiring contributions and critical feedback, and not so much the scientific validation and scientific context for the ideas that were brought to the fore by participants (58).

Despite the discussions being highly appreciated, the think tank objective has not yet come into its own. The impact of the think tank as a producer of cutting edge innovative knowledge and concepts is limited (page 69). From a wider international perspective, the bar should be set higher. Embedding of the knowledge in the various police organisations and within the academic world leaves to be desired. Knowledge gained remains private knowledge and does not reach the police organisation at large or other forums. If this knowledge were to be developed further at concrete level, it would enhance performance (page 69).

....All of it is so far away, which is why things remains pleasant and you can keep your cards close to your chest. Differences of opinion are not fought over. Of course this is also a condition for this type of activities to take place at this level. Being a good think tank is a struggle if things have to stay pleasant. In this situation, cutting edge knowledge is difficult...(page 65)

The IALG

The learning assignment encourages intellectual growth and is relevant to the work of the police leaders. The most striking aspects are the contribution to the knowledge about society's future development and the role of law enforcement. Nearly 90% of the respondents agree with this statement (page 59).

Conclusions

- Pearls has created a sustainable and relevant international network for a large group of police leaders worldwide. This is evident from the consistent participation and commitment at the highest level. Contacts established at the conference influence police leaders' professional performance.
- Interviews and target-oriented searches have not resulted in the identification of initiatives with similar objectives or content. This is why it was virtually impossible to compare the programme to other initiatives.
- The individuals and parties involved in PIP highly value the programme. Pearls has been called a unique platform and a unique learning experience. This results from the unique characteristics in the organisation of the conference: it is shielded from the press, the Chatham House Rule is observed, and a personal approach is key.

- PIP is most successful as a network, but no more than mediocre as a society-oriented think tank. The success of the competence function lies somewhere in between these two. It is clear that the current PIP set-up, with a particular emphasis on personal perspective, makes that the lasting influence of the programme largely depends on the commitment and the priorities of the individual police leader. A number of programme-related choices strongly benefit the network function, while they hamper the think tank element. Seclusion and working methods aimed at the individual development of the police leaders promote their competences and network opportunities, but are not really compatible with academic principles, which, in essence, demand openness and a substance-oriented working method. PIP is aiming to serve three objectives within a single programme, while in this context these three functions cannot be served simultaneously at the same ambitious level.

The full report in the Dutch language can be found at: www.pearlsinpolicing.com