

Outsourcing – an answer to cut UK crime

Every UK police force is under considerable pressure to deliver against key performance indicators, with clear objectives to reduce crime and the fear of crime, improve public safety and contribute to the service of justice. However the fact of the matter is that officers spend something like 40% of their time in the station and 40% of this time is spent preparing files and paperwork.

Issues of police bureaucracy and unnecessary paperwork are having a significant impact on the amount of time an officer is able to devote to front line duties. Effective policing is about collecting, recording, analysing and sharing information on a more consistent basis – so says the National Policing Plan. The same plan predicts that by reducing bureaucracy, reorganising business processes and releasing officers from administrative tasks it will be possible to make efficiency gains equivalent to transferring 12,000 officers to frontline posts.

Having recognised the need for more affective processes, the Police have been given £50 Million which will be used to buy a total of 10,000 handheld computers to help them increase police officer time on the beat¹ distributed across 27 police forces in a bid to help increase police officer time on the beat.

To improve performance and efficiency many forces are now looking to streamline information management and provide consolidated access to information stored across the organisation.

However the quest for process efficiency and putting “Bobbies back on the beat” cannot be complete without looking at outsourcing within the police force.

Police authorities have not been shy from undertaking business performance improvement initiatives, however beyond technology outsourcing; these authorities have not given serious consideration to outsourcing as a valuable tool for business improvement.

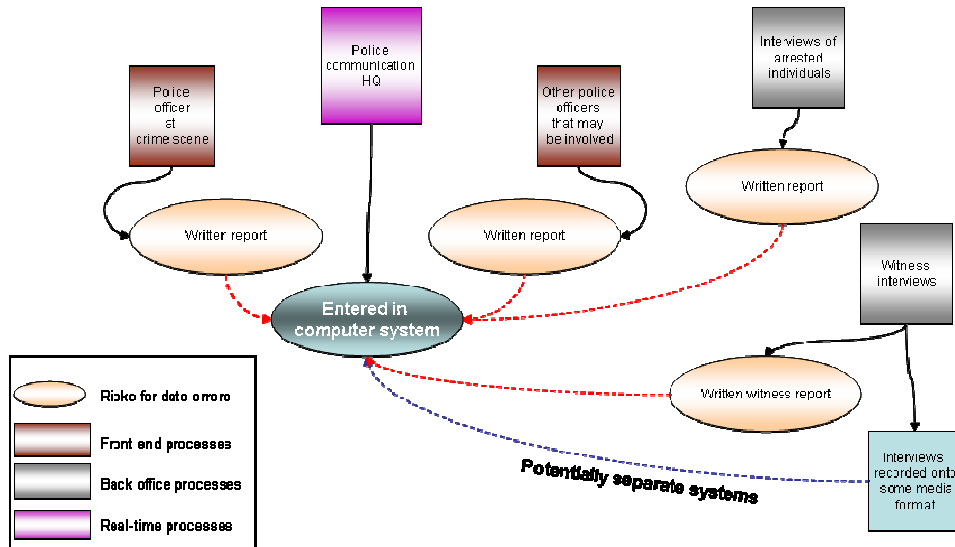
It is accepted that some of the traditional models of outsourcing and in particular offshoring may not be wholly appropriate given the requirements for data protection and data integrity. However outsourcing is not only equated with offshoring, Local outsourcing or in other cases, shared service centres, across all the police authorities may be appropriate. The reluctance for the police authorities to work together to build an outsourcing strategy, means the cost benefit analysis for each individual authority, given the requirements for initial investment, means it has been difficult to justify outsourcing, given that labour arbitrage is not one of the benefits that can be achieved (which would be the case in the case of offshoring) – outsourcing as a strategy must be considered holistically across all the police authorities, for significant improvement and efficiency to be achieved.

A key issue as mentioned above is data quality, given that such data will be used as evidence in criminal cases that the Crown Prosecution Service may bring to the courts. This implies that significant data processing and cross checking must be inherent within whatever outsourcing process adopted. As all process consultants know too well, the risks to quality of data and indeed any process is the number of hand-offs – interfaces where one person / department hands over data / information to another. For data integrity, the number of hand-offs must be reduced and wherever possible the process must be automated to reduce the risks of data being compromised by human interaction.

By thinking about outsourcing as a strategy, the authorities will in the process also be analysing opportunities for improving the process and quality of the data and information being captured and stored.

¹ National Policing Improvement Agency

Process improvement analysis



Our very high level analysis (back of a fag packet) of the process suggests that even under the current process, there may be significant risks to data quality. In many cases these risks can be reduced by eliminating the “written report” process step, and instead have media files stored onto the computer system and where required such files can automated to be transferred onto written media – this however requires investment in content capture and management systems.

Our high level process map identifies the core competence for the police authority is front end processes, the police at the crime scene who collects and analyses and coordinates with other police officers – as such these should not be outsourced.

The back office processes are not really adding any value to the “policing process” - they however consume significant resource in terms of police time and introduce the potential for poor data quality. This may suggest that these should be considered for some form of outsourcing – either a shared service model or outsourcing to a local specialist data conversion firm.

Our very high analysis suggests the scope for improvements are significant – saving time and money on non-core activities, which can be used to allow more Bobbies on the beat. Imagine what would be possible if a thorough business improvement study was conducted.

This Perspective has been written by Bharat Vagadia, CEO Op2i - a business improvement firm specialising in outsourcing. Services offered include: advisory, training, project management, governance and arbitration services throughout the outsourcing lifecycle.

Bharat is a Board Director of the UK National Outsourcing Association (NOA) and an author of a leading book on outsourcing.

The views expressed in this Perspective reflect only the views of its author and not the NOA.

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