The abstract police: critical reflections on contemporary change in police organisations.

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Reform and emergent police practice in Scotland: in search of Situated Policing

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Introduction

This chapter applies Wenger's (1998) social learning perspective on communities of practice to the reform of policing in Scotland in 2013, which saw eight regional police services amalgamated into a single organisation: Police Scotland. The analysis identifies considerable evidence of the reforms creating or further emphasising features of policing in Scotland that might be characterised as abstract policing, including: increased distance from local communities; loss of localised knowledge; extensive use of regimes of targets; and, feelings of disconnection and professional anomie. Wenger's perspective sensitises us to the possibilities of reform and to how change is not always as intended. People actively negotiate practice around whatever changes reform has wrought. We therefore draw upon empirical qualitative research from the period that documents experience of those living through reform. We focus on three interlinked aspects of local policing – response and community policing on the frontline, call handling systems, and local police governance arrangements – because it is local policing that is often assumed to be the location of police/community connection and context-sensitive policing. It is local policing that might most obviously be assumed to be the antithesis of the abstract police. Indeed, drawing again upon Wenger we argue that another ideal type of policing that stands in perennial and necessary tension with the abstract police is, 'situated policing' - policing that is informal, consensual, judicious, skilled and contextualised (see: Bittner, 1970; Banton, 1964). Situated policing continues to loom large, underpinning ideals of policing with consent, and policing drawing upon and activating community values (exemplified by Banton's 'peace officer') – things that are generally assumed to happen when the police are part of and connected to communities, not distant from them. The reform in Scotland, as well as producing abstract police in practice, also made explicit appeals to these older ideals in the enabling legislation by articulating police principles that invoked commitment to community, partnership, welfare, and harm reduction. These principles reflect the residual possibility that a more situated police could, in theory, still be implemented. However, our account concludes that abstract police and its reliance on systems and processes over frontline craft is here to stay, and that it is even colonising aspects of police work more associated with situated policing. The trick going forward will be to find, cultivate and broker police communities of practice in ways that address disconnect and professional anomie.

Police reforms as particular institutional designs

In setting out the thesis of Abstract Police Terpstra et al. (2019) interrogated recent organisational reforms in the Netherlands and Scotland, using the particularities of these cases to illustrate what they saw as much wider tendencies in the direction of policing and police reform apparent throughout western jurisdictions. At the heart of the concept is the increasing systematisation and formalism of police and policing processes, and the disconnection and anomie that are their outcomes. All of this has occurred incrementally, the result of decades of change in the police, social relations more generally, and in the growing ubiquity of technological systems of management, communication, accounting and governance. In short, the idea of abstract police is that:

"both internally and externally, the police have become more at a distance, more impersonal and formal, less direct, and more decontextualized. The Abstract Police are also less dependent on personal knowledge of officers, as this is increasingly being replaced by 'system knowledge', framed within the 'logic' and categorisations of computer data systems (Ericson and Haggerty 1997)" (Terpstra et al. 2019: 340)

The information age, supported by technological leaps in the capacity and speed with which to record, store, analyse, and share information has arguably been the most pronounced development, intersecting as it does with other directions of travel. Ericson's (1994) characterisation of the police function as becoming ever more orientated around 'knowledge brokering' predated the exponential developments in digital capacity that followed, and which have become ever more pronounced. Whether labelled as crime intelligence analysis (Innes and Cope, 2005) or intelligence-led policing (Tilley, 2008) the practice of information brokering, and its role in the tasking and coordination of policing resources , is now both characteristic of domestic low policing, and positively defining of that which constitutes global and high policing activity (Brodeur, 2010; Bowling and Sheptycki, 2011). This has not simply been a consequence of technological changes, important though they are. Rather it reflects, and has often facilitated, other ongoing currents of change and police reform.

As well as providing the intelligence tools and products deployed in police investigations and priority-setting, information systems also dovetailed with the rise and embedding of New Public Management and, especially from the 1990s onwards, an approach towards governing both whole police organisations, and individual officers, through regimes of target-setting and managerial and accounting information requirements designed to direct police actions in 'efficient and effective' directions, as well as to hold them to account (Hough 2007; Jones 2008 ; Golding and Savage 2008). Shaping and being shaped by such developments, risk and 'risk management' (Ericson and Haggerty 1997; Ericson, 1994) became defining lens through which policing was to be organised, internally through rising control, visibility and procedural regulation of what police officers do (Jones 2008; Bullock and Johnson, 2012; Bradford et al. 2009), and, externally through prioritisation and valorisation of anticipatory methods of identifying and modelling threats through intelligence analysis (Kaufman et al., 2019; Innes and Cope, 2005). The events of September 2001 and the construction of global (and local) terrorist threats (Innes and Thiel, 2008), alongside growing concerns about organised cybercrime utilising the same technological developments for purposes ranging from individual predation to state-sponsored espionage (Wall and Williams, 2013) have intersected with these processes, lending additional urgency and credence to their development. All of this lies behind the abstract police thesis. Where the use of technology, risk-assessment and intelligence processes, performance targets, management and coordination systems may well have been justifiable in terms of the nature of local and global threats facing police organisations, and on account of legitimate requirements of organisational and individual police accountability, they nonetheless had the effect of placing larger proportions of officers behind closed doors, in front of computer system screens, and at the behest of formal, monitored, and prescriptive determinants of their working days (from targets to tasks, legal protocols to risk assessment procedures). There are good arguments that these developments have been necessary for efficient, targeted policing in an increasing complex and connected external environment , and the internal malpractice and abuse of powers that also drove them should not be forgotten (Bowling et al. 2019: 82-90; Smith, 2007). However, cumulatively they also had the recognised effect of narrowing police interaction in ways risky in terms of public confidence; ways that created a real and symbolic distance between police and between police and people (Smith 2007: 275; Terpstra et al. 2019). Perhaps for that reason, we see many examples of police reform that appear to have been aiming in the opposite direction,

implicitly at least working to alleviate the effects of abstract police, throughout precisely the same period.

Terpstra et al. (2019: 343) describe the abstract police concept as an 'ideal type' , one that characterises discernible, emergent features of police organisations, but which does not claim encapsulate the full "empirical reality" of contemporary policing. Certainly there have been tendencies that might be readily understood as directly running counter to the abstract police thesis. In terms of the internal relationships within the police - although it does not directly counter the argument that police practice has become more formalistic, micro-managed, and systematised - growing acknowledgement of the emotional labour of policing (and other emergency services work) (Martin, 1999), and the physical and mental challenges entailed by it, have generated whole programmes of work and interventions designed to enhance officers' 'wellbeing' (Demou et al., 2020). In terms of external connections there is a venerable history of police reforms specifically designed to cultivate them, whether couched in terms of community, reassurance or neighbourhood policing (Crawford 2007; Tilley 2008), or more directly as community partnership working with local stakeholders (Crawford 1997; Henry 2012). Indeed Millie (2013) has argued that we have seen regular 'oscillations' between articulations of the police role that have emphasised such engagements and connections (generally in the name of prevention, legitimacy and equity) and those that have prioritised a function more narrowly construed around law enforcement and delivery of service. This is indicative of the uneven, contradictory, character of post-war police reform, but it does not itself contradict the abstract police as a meaningful ideal type articulating the most prominent, deep direction of travel. Drawing on the sociology of Simmel, Harkin (2015) showed how, in the context of police-public engagement interventions, there were important, structural limits to the reform of police. Their core Bittnerian function around decisive action and order maintenance places limits on the nature and form of their external interactions as it does on their internal orientations and identification. The direction of reforms associated with abstract police, although seemingly not directly about the core police function, are nonetheless consistent with their efficient, controlled and monitored achievement, whereas those running in the other direction reflect oscillations towards broader, more ephemeral objectives that are harder to measure or systematise (Hough, 2007). As such, they have been transient in terms of the hard implementation of reforms, even though they have been resilient as institutional principles, aspirations, and myths. Continued oscillations towards them reflect both their ongoing symbolic appeal and their real operational potential. Acknowledging that there are likely are limits to police reform, we argue that the present direction of reform leading towards abstract policing was not inevitable and was always a matter of political and ideological choice. These choices were reflected in the particular institutional redesigns implemented. It is firstly to a sketch of the particular reform agenda and context in Scotland, and then towards more conceptual understanding of reform as an interaction between institutional design choices and the emergent practice enabled within these newly configured spaces, that we now turn. The latter framework was chosen precisely because it demands attention be paid to the active processes and negotiated practice of reform, and the possibilities and disappointments this might entail. Ideas of abstract police were undoubtedly apparently in the Police Scotland that emerged in 2013, but they were neither inevitable, nor impregnable to the possibilities of further change.

Designing Police Scotland: the possibilities of enhanced efficiency, equity, and engagement
On the 1st April 2013, a new chapter in the development of policing in the UK began with the creation of a national police force in Scotland. For those looking for evidence of a criminal justice

reform that most clearly illustrated differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK, then this change to policing provided an excellent example. While in England and Wales, there continued to be a commitment to localism based around 43 largely autonomous forces, the merger of Scotland's eight regional police forces to create a 'single police service' signalled a very 'different and divergent trajectory' (Fyfe, 2014; Fyfe and Henry, 2012). Indeed, the changes in Scotland showed much closer alignment with developments in several northern and western European countries. In 2013 the Netherlands merged its regional police forces to create a single national police organisation; while in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland the national police forces have all been undergoing a gradual process of centralization by merging police districts to create a smaller number of larger territorial police units (see Fyfe et al., 2013).

There were a complex range of reasons underlying these macro level redesigns of police organisations. In some jurisdictions reforms appeared to be driven by New Public Management thinking around greater efficiency and effectiveness; in other countries reform has been seen more as a response to a decline in police legitimacy or an attempt to reconfigure power relations between police and the state (see Terpstra and Fyfe, 2013). In Scotland, the political narrative setting out the need for reform was very much informed by what Giacomantonio (2015: 110) calls an 'evolutionary theme': 'The world around the police is changing, and the police must change with it'. In the report of the Sustainable Policing Project established by the Scottish Government to explore three design options for reform (enhanced collaboration between the 8 established regional forces; limited mergers to create 3 or 4 larger regional forces, and a single national police force) unequivocal support was given to a national police force: it 'provides the greatest opportunity to manage change, drive efficiency and in delivering efficiency when the change is complete', while the current 8 forces model 'represents the opposite' (Scottish Government, 2011: 5).

Despite public and political concerns about the fairness of a national structure, including anxieties that it would draw resources away from more rural and remote areas and concentrate these in the most urbanized area of the country Edinburgh and Glasgow known as the Central Belt, the Scottish Government pushed ahead with establishing a national police force and set out three strategic objectives of reform: to protect and improve local policing services despite financial cuts; to create more equal access to specialist support and national capacity; and to strengthen the connections between policing and communities.

The 2012 Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act (hereafter the Police Reform Act) set out 4 major design changes to policing in Scotland (see too Fyfe and Scott, 2013). First, it established a national police force under the direction and control of a chief constable with responsibility for the administration, allocation and deployment of resources and the provision of information. Second, it established the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) with responsibility for resourcing the police service, supporting continuous improvement, and holding the chief constable to account. Third, the Act has made 'local policing' a statutory requirement at the level of the 32 council areas. Each area has a local commander with responsibility for preparing a local policing plan and for consulting with the local council over this plan. The local council must also establish arrangements for the scrutiny of local policing but the Act does not prescribe what form this scrutiny should take. Fourth, the Act sets out a normative vision for policing in the form of a set of 'principles' (with deliberate echoes of the Peelian principles of policing drawn up for the Metropolitan Police of 1829) which offer a narrative of policing based on partnership working, community well-being and harm reduction:

> the main purpose of policing is to improve the safety and well-being of persons, localities and communities in Scotland, and that the Police Service, working in collaboration with others where appropriate, should seek to achieve that main purpose by policing in a way which (i) is accessible to, and engaged with, local communities, and (ii) promotes measures to prevent, crime, harm and disorder' (Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act, 2012, para.32).

Informed by these principles, the duties of a police officer were re-stated to include not only preventing and detecting crime, maintaining order, and protecting life and property, but also to act with fairness, integrity and impartiality, uphold fundamental human rights, and give 'equal respect to all people, according to the law'.

The reform in Scotland therefore showed tendencies towards both an abstract police (evident in the commitment to seeking greater efficiency and effectiveness based on enhanced coordination and centralisation) and what we describe here as situated policing (demonstrated in the requirement for local policing and a narrative of being accessible, engaged and working in partnership with communities). When we come to the analysis of local policing post-reform we will see that the tendencies apparent in implementation initially at least favoured abstract policing.,. The analytical framework we use to explore this process is Wenger's communities of practice, to which we now turn.

Abstract policing and situated practice: probing tensions between the designed and the emergent
Wenger's communities of practice is a social learning perspective. It explores how people experience and give meaning to the world, negotiating their identities and affinities through their everyday participation in social groups, including those to be found in the workplace (Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2002). It has proven influential across diverse fields (business, medicine, social work) and we have used it previously in our own work on community safety partnerships (Henry, 2012), knowledge brokering (Henry, 2021; 2017), and local police governance (Henry et al., 2019).

Communities of practice give recognition to the physical and social structures around and through which activities are framed, but it also emphasises the possibilities of agency, learning and active negotiation of practice around them. Indeed, Wenger's critical understanding of theories of structure and agency, and his own perspective on their mutuality, talks quite directly to our intended application of his work:

> "Theories of social structure give primacy mostly to institutions, norms, and rules. They emphasize cultural systems, discourses, and history. They seek underlying explanatory structures that account for social patterns and tend to view action as a mere realization of these structures in specific circumstances. The most extreme of them deny agency or knowledgeability of actors.

> "Theories of situated experience give primacy to the dynamics of everyday existence, improvisation, coordination, and interactional choreography. They emphasize agency and intentions. They mostly address the interactive relations of people with their environment. They focus on the experience and the local construction of individual or interpersonal events such as activities and conversations. The most extreme of them ignore structure writ large altogether." (Wenger, 1998: 12-13)

Structures in this account are decontextualized rules, processes and systems. They are abstractions from reality and it has been the emphasis on such forms across decades of police reform that has underpinned the constrained, stultified and disconnected experience Terpstra et al. characterise as abstract policing. Situated experience on the other hand emphasises a more active, emergent and contextually embodied experience that would seem to stand in stark contrast to it, but Wenger argues that, properly understood, situated experience is embodied and "agent, activity and the

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world mutually constitute each other." (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 33). This is an important point for us to emphasise as we are not making what would thus be a false binary argument for situated experience in preference to abstract structure. Rather, like Terpstra et al. we are seeking to use 'abstract policing' and 'situated policing' both as ideal types, the former embodying more of the characteristics of abstract structure, the latter the characteristics of situated experience. All policing involves the situated experience of police officers, which will be on a continuum comprised of both the abstract and the situated.

The particular insights of communities of practice into the tensions between organisational structures and dynamic practice are illustrated through reference to three intersecting sets of distinctions made by Wenger, all of which lend insight into processes of organisational reform: designed and emergent structures; identification and negotiability; and boundaries and brokering (Wenger, 1998; see also: Henry 2012: 418-422). All contribute to the core idea framing the analysis in this chapter: organisational reform reconfigures (to greater or lesser degrees) the institutional spaces within which practice (to greater or lesser degrees) will necessarily be renegotiated (Henry 2012: 414-415).

Designed and emergent structures. Organisations are, for Wenger, always comprised of both designed and emergent structures (Wenger 1998: 244-246). The designs include the formal and physical manifestations of the organisation: the role descriptions; process and procedures; departmental hierarchies and links; technologies (which will, depending on the work, variously include: communications and information technologies; lab facilities; vehicles; machinery; uniforms and/protective equipment etc.); and even the physical buildings and spaces where the activity takes place. The emergent structures are the social routines, short-cuts, rituals, practices, stories, values and shared knowledge that are negotiated around the organisational designs by those doing the work. The emergent practice may be quite closely aligned with the formal designs, but it is not the same thing and is never identical, and it can also vary considerably where local communities of practice actively resist or work around formal designs (Wenger 1998: 245). This distinction is crucial to our account, where the reform of Police Scotland is characterised as a newly configured institutional design for policing, around which police staff negotiated emergent practice. In Scotland, as elsewhere, police reforms have shied away from fully acknowledging emergent practice, still operating with working assumptions of the rigid rule-bound nature of police work (Ericson, 2005). In Wenger's thesis there is always emergent practice – practice is never a facsimile of design – but it can be limited and stifled, leading to problems of identification and negotiability.

Identification and negotiability. How committed you are to an organisation, and your particular functions within it, are dependent on the ever-present tension between identification and negotiability in communities of practice (Wenger 1998: 188-203). Identification with a community of practice and its work is a signal that you are invested in it, it is important to you, part of how you feel about yourself and, as such, something you commit to. Wenger argues that identification tends to be stronger where there is also negotiability. Here the idea is that we direct our energies and feel commitment where we can influence what counts within a community of practice, where we can exercise some creativity, where we can prioritise and focus upon what is meaningful to us. Where there is negotiability there is scope for the emergent practice noted previously. Identification is something hitherto well-documented in the sociology of policing, where some officers have a strong sense of vocation and mission, whereas others can become disillusioned 'uniform carriers' (Loftus 2009). Some of this may be explained in terms of negotiability. Although the police have always been relatively hierarchical in terms of the formal designs of the organisation, there has also been an

element of negotiability in the form of constabulary independence - the discretion and judgement afforded even (or especially) to officers on the frontline (see: Wilson, 1968). In fact, the open-textured Bittnerian function of police (order maintenance backed by capacity for legitimate force) cannot be managed with justice, parsimony and context sensitivity through robotic rule-adherence. It is a function that requires discernment and critical thinking. It is thus a function characterised by a necessary degree of negotiability - constrained by law, ethics and accountability, certainly - but still enabling, even requiring, officers to participate in the construction of what 'good' police work looks like in that role. Where roles, and so the communities of practice that animate them, are denuded of scope for exercising negotiability the commitment to and identification with them will wane. In the language of Terpstra et al. police officers will become disconnected.

Boundaries and brokering. Wenger describes community of practice as 'deepening' as the shared knowledge and practice within them evolves, becoming more particular to participants immersed within them, and as a result more alien to outsiders (Wenger 1998: 126-133; 253-255). This idea - of boundaries forming between participants occupying different social worlds - is implicitly understood and familiar to work on occupational cultures (Loftus, 2009) as well as in methodological literatures, particularly ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) but also in relation to knowledge exchange across distinct professional worlds of research and practice (Henry, 2017; 2021). All of this work explores how members of particular communities of practice - with unique terms of reference, rituals, stories, short-cuts, and ways of framing and understanding the world more generally – can have difficulty in understanding non-members and vice versa. Boundaries form, created by the distinct focus and practice of communities of practice. Within a complex organisation there are recognisable boundaries between different specialist communities of practice within them – most obviously between management and workforce, but also between different functionary groups, which in the case of the police would include detectives and beat officers, staff analysts and sworn officers, and many others no doubt. For the organisation to work there has to be some level of brokering between them, where at least some individuals participate across different communities of practice and can thus translate across them and connect them up with one another (broker them). Boundaries and brokering are therefore quite natural elements of complex bodies involving multiple communities of practice but they do not always work seamlessly and organisational designs can work against them, where, for example, links and possibilities of participation across communities of practice are impeded. In work related to the themes of this chapter, we found examples of what we called 'structural disconnect' in the context of the new local governance structures of Police Scotland where those participating in local governance had no formal lines of communication to national specialist units whose actions were the basis of local concerns (see Henry et al. 2019). The point is that the institutional designs of reform necessarily create spaces for new and emergent communities of practice but brokering across them will be necessary, even if not necessarily clear from the outset.

In different ways these dualisms speak to the abstract police thesis. In particular, they help develop a more nuanced understanding of the abstract police, one in which: there are clear tensions between the 'designed' aspects of reform and the 'emergent practices'; the ways in which more abstract forms of policing compromise processes of identification and negotiability; and the ways in which designs have inadvertently compromised the scope for brokering; all with serious consequences.

Police reform in Scotland: towards an abstract police?
Many of the features of an abstract police were already in evidence in Scotland prior to the creation of a single service. However, in the years immediately following the reform these features became pronounced, prompting claims about police disconnect from communities and partners, as well as concerns about a resultant anomie amongst police and civilian staff within the organisation. It does need to be recognised that this occurred within a period in which policing in Scotland had become politicised as never before, although the need for such scrutiny pre-dated the reform given that some of the problems had been gestating for some time (Murray and Harkin, 2017). Some of the issues that would come to occupy political and media discourse included broad questions about control, governance, and funding of the police. Many of them coalesced around the early weaknesses inherent in what was arguably the most significant new institutional design of the process: the creation of the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) as an independent body tasked with resourcing and holding the new Police Scotland to account (see: Malik, 2017). These macro issues, important though they are, provide only a background to the present discussion, which instead focuses on what might have been assumed to be the most likely location of policing that is contextualised, direct and close to those served: local policing.

We noted previously how local policing was placed on a statutory basis through the reform and how the 2012 Act also articulated a set of policing 'principles' (emphasising partnership working, communities and engagement) that, at face value at least, seemed to run counter to police forms identified in abstract police. Even so, many of the issues that attracted political and media attention as instances of Police Scotland becoming distant and unresponsive were issues relating to the local experience of policing. The most prominent of these included: revelations about very high levels of stop and search; the closure of local police stations; the systematic arming of frontline constables without adequate local consultation; a shift towards enforcement in parts of the country where the sex industry had been managed through toleration; and, a more diffuse sense that local policing was becoming subject to 'one size fits all' policies, systems and expectations that did not accord with prior local practice or current sensibilities (Murray and Harkin, 2017; Henry et al., 2019; Fyfe et al., 2021).

In the sections that follow, we re-examine three aspects of local policing through the lens of Wenger's communities of practice perspective: the frontline officer experience; call handling centres; and, local governance and scrutiny arrangements. An important caveat to acknowledge is that we do so by drawing upon diverse studies undertaken for different purposes (evaluation, PhD research, academic research, formal inspections), all in need of updating. However, we argue that they do nonetheless help to illustrate Wenger's dualisms, showing how they provide valuable tools for diagnosing the effects of reform. In this case, we argue that post-reform local policing in Scotland became more constrained, less resourced, and less negotiable as a skilled practice. It demonstrated characteristics of an abstract police.

Policing the frontline: local policing and the community. The aim of the reform had been, in part, to emphasise local policing and the links between police and community. However, concerns quickly emerged. This culminated in a series of media reports of elevated levels of resignation and retirement over the first eighteen months of Police Scotland (Scotsman, 2014), with a staff survey being urgently commissioned to give voice to concerns (Herald, 2015). The findings of the survey were far from universally bad. They confirmed a general sense of disenchantment but also a resilient commitment to policing and to local policing teams. The real concern was the low

confidence in senior management's likelihood of acting upon frontline officers' experiences[1]. Alongside the official evaluation (SIPR et al., 2017; Fyfe et al., 2021) and qualitative research on the frontline (Hail, 2017a; 2017b) the survey contributes to a snapshot of frontline experience within the new institutional designs of the reform. We focus here on three intersecting design decisions that were illustrative of the general direction of travel: the centralisation of specialist services; the commitment to maintenance of the number of sworn police officers; and, the ending of designated beats.

One rationale behind the creation of a single service was that specialist resources could benefit from centralisation, both through economies of scale and the enhanced opportunities for professional development created by the critical mass of expertise. For some local officers this was perceived as opening up positive career opportunities now that applications to work in specialist services would be made through a single process in a single organisation (SIPR et al., 2017: 27). There were also perceived advantages in being able to call upon specialist services (such as the Major Investigations Team) to take on challenging issues, and their expertise was recognised (SIPR et al., 2017: 20-21). It may well have been the case that within these specialist units there were high levels of professional identification (around roles that fostered expertise), but they also contributed to the thinning of identification with local policing roles. In part this was because an increased proportion of officers were to allocated these roles, leaving fewer to have routine frontline face to face contact with members of the public (SIPR et al., 2017: 18). Given the commitment to maintaining the numbers of sworn police offices in a period of fiscal austerity, where substantial cuts to police budgets were required, frontline capacities were eroded further by this emphasis on specialist units. They had already come under pressure due to the need for sworn officers to backfill positions (including administrative and desk-based roles in stations and custody suites) previously occupied by civilian staff whose jobs had not been ideologically protected (Reform Scotland, 2016). In short, designs around specialist services and civilian redundancies were experienced as resource cuts by those delivering local policing. Coupled with the rationalisation of the physical estate (i.e. the selling-off of local stations) this made previous commitments to designated beats (where officers worked in specific geographic locations for ongoing periods in order to build up rich contextualised knowledge of the places and the people, see: Hail, 2017b: 3) unsustainable. Necessary emergent practice included longer drives to book apprehended people into sparsely spread out custody suits and a physical distancing from known neighbourhoods as officers routinely had to cover much larger geographic spaces (SIPR, 2017: 18-19). For officers previously designated as community officers these factors interacted to reduce the negotiability of their practice. Where previously they had some autonomy in their everyday routines and engagements with local institutions this was largely gone, and for many caused them to question their identification as a community officer, or indeed as a police officer:

> "It's sometimes hard, as much as we are community officers we don't always get to be community officers a lot of the time because the response police are quite often so small in numbers that a lot of the time we are missing community meetings. We don't get to … pop into schools – we should be visiting the schools every couple of weeks. We don't get to do it a lot of the time due to all the other factors – covering front bar, police officers covering prisoner watches, just doing different things that a lot of the time it does feel like that you're not a police officer." (SIPR et al., 2017: 23)

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[1] At the time of writing – June 2021 – there are calls for a follow-up survey to give voice to ongoing staff experiences as well as the particular challenges faced throughout the Covid lockdown.

Whether this loss of identification with the police officer role resulted in the resignations and retirements noted previously we cannot be sure. Other matters around working conditions (including pension rights) were in flux at the same time (Fyfe et al., 2021). They do however illustrate Wenger's point that where roles become so constrained that holders of them lose their sense of ownership of them they also identify with them less. The roles lose meaning and possibilities for negotiated practice. As a result, people become less committed to them.

Tasking the frontline: call-handling centres. A further shift in local policing towards distant, decontextualized response policing was provoked by the redesign of call-handling systems and how they exemplified a (perceived) wider tendency of Police Scotland to police through tasking and performance targets (Hail, 2017a; 2017b; Fyfe et al., 2021: 269-272). As part of the institutional design of the new police service, the focus had been to reorganise the 8 legacy call-handling centres into 3 covering the north, east and west of the country. With increased capability, resulting from investment in new call-handling technology, the objective was that this institutional redesign would both improve service to the public and result in savings to the public purse of £5 million per annum. This part of the reform programme had been of relatively low visibility until a tragic road accident and the failure of the call-handling system to deploy officers to it despite a call being received from the public resulted in a review by HM Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS, 2015)[2]. This review provided insight into experience within the call handling centres. Problems with the new technology resulted in risky emergent practices to keep things running (such as using pen and paper to record incidents off-system) in an environment in which staff were subject to performance targets to process calls quickly. HMICS found what Wenger would characterise as serious problems of brokering throughout the call-handling system and on its boundaries with frontline policing.   For example, call-handling staff were found to have received inconsistent information on key process to be followed in dealing with calls, and there had generally been poor communication in relation to the implementation of and changes in ICT systems. All of this resulted in limited information being communicated to local control centres; appropriate perhaps if efficiency, narrowly understood, is the aim, but not conductive to communication that is contextually sensitive and nuanced. In this sense the low negotiability of the call-handling role (tightly designed around systems favouring response times) further narrowed the negotiability of local policing by becoming orientated around direction and tasking and by being seen to undermine the autonomy (and contextualised local expertise) of frontline managers (the Sergeants) better placed to manage the realities of their team:

> "they have brought out this 'task not ask' from the Area Control Room and as far as they are concerned they are not bothered if you are a community or a response officer, you are just a number, just a number to be used to be deployed." (Hail, 2017b: 260).

> "(T)he ACR [Area Control Room] has started saying, 'Oh, I see your next appointment isn't until ….' There have been sergeants getting into trouble because they have interjected on the phone saying, 'No, I would rather my cops do…', and it's 'No, we will decide'. To my mind, the sergeant on the ground has the knowledge where his [sic] troops should be." (Hail, 2017b: 261).

Governing the frontline: local accountability. Low negotiability of functions and problems of brokering between parts of the new organisation were felt particularly strongly in the context of

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[2] A series of investigations were triggered by the tragedy, some of which remain live more than 5 years later.

local police governance in the early days of Police Scotland. Many of the problems noted earlier – from officers appearing armed on the streets to stop and search targets – were perceived as having been imposed in a top down 'one size fits all' manner in which local government and police scrutiny boards had not been consulted (Fyfe et al., 2021: 264; Henry et al., 2019: 579). This was despite the fact that, on paper, the 2012 Act had deepened local accountability by giving each of the 32 Local Authorities[3] a direct liaison with Police Scotland. Previously most would only have had representation to a larger Police Board covering all of the Local Authorities served by a legacy service (see: Henry et al., 2019: 577-578). This enhancement of the design of local governance and accountability was, however, illusory. A key illustration of this relates to what Henry et al. characterised as 'structural disconnects' within the local governance landscape. The 32 local authorities were now served by a liaison 'constable' (often an Inspector in practice) but this compared with pre-reform local Police Boards being chaired by the Chief Constable of legacy forces. Post-reform local boards (generally committees of the Local Authority) had no connection to the Chief Officer, or the connections to all parts of the organisation (including specialist units) that this would have facilitated. They were 'structurally disconnected' from the very services (such as firearms) whose decisions local officials wished to challenge:

> "We have lost the boundaries of the previous forces with Police Scotland but we have created new boundaries with the specialist forces that we never had before." (Divisional Commander in Henry et al., 2019: 585)

However, where frontline officers and call-handlers seemed to have little scope to negotiate practice beyond the constrains of tasking and targets there was evidence of creative emergent practice in this context, quite probably because the officers involved were of higher rank. In the early years of Police Scotland more senior Divisional Commanders (Chief Superintendents) took over the police liaison roles in local governance, immediately giving local committees greater autonomy. For example, many of these officers understood the frustration of local officials with the stark quantitative reports and standardised templates that Police Scotland sought to use to 'inform' local committees. They were able to exercise negotiability and respond positively to local requests for more qualitative and contextualised information as well as information on particular matters of interest to them. This emergent practice beyond the formal institutional designs made a considerable difference to the sense that the police were actually engaging with local officials in these committees (see: Henry et al., 2017: 581-585). However, even the Divisional Commanders encountered problems in brokering the boundaries between different regions and specialist units. As in all large organisations – Universities being another good example – their unifying identity masks internal variation and segregation of function and expertise that require brokering. This will always be an issue for Police Scotland but at least in this context there was some evidence of emergent practice actively seeking to negotiate and ease the, sometimes unintended, boundaries created through structural reform.

Our overall conclusion is that local policing was rendered less negotiable through the creation of Police Scotland.   Reforms moved resources towards specialist functions, further required frontline officers to back-fill tasks that took them further away from their beats, reconfigured the beats themselves into much larger geographic units, and prioritised efficiencies in call-handling tasking that served to further deprioritise the autonomy of local teams. The immediate effect for many

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[33] Scotland's system of local government responsible for many local services including education, social work and town planning and licencing.

officers was a loss of identification with the police role, probably compounded by the well-known tendency in police organisation for rank and file officers to feel left out of reform processes (see: Bevir, 2010). It was only more senior officers in the context of local governance who demonstrably seemed able to assert the negotiability of their functions. We reflect on these issues and what they might tell us about situated policing, the abstract police thesis, and the possibilities suggested through Wenger's perspective, in the concluding discussion.

Discussion and conclusions

Right from the beginnings of police scholarship an apparent dichotomy was identified. It has continued, in various, sometimes implicit, guises, to be reflected throughout police practices, police research, and the many incremental attempts at police reform. One side of the dichotomy is captured by Terpstra et al.'s (2019: 340) concept of 'Abstract' police, which they characterise as policing that is "more at a distance, more impersonal and formal, less direct, and more decontextualized… less dependent on personal knowledge of officers, as this is increasingly being replaced by 'system knowledge', framed within the 'logic' and categorisations of computer systems." The other side of the dichotomy might usefully be characterised as 'Situated' policing; forms of policing emphasising direct encounters, personal relationships, informality and the individual craft skills of officers in negotiating problems using discretion and parsimony whilst attuned to shared community values. The former is epitomised as a development of Ericson's (1994) characterisation of policing becoming orientated around 'knowledge brokering', the latter as Banton's (1964) 'peace officer'. Both are ideal types and, strictly speaking, are not true dichotomies at all. Rather they are expressions of contradictory imperatives that arise from complex police functions in which law enforcement intersects with imperatives to provide service, maintain order and symbolise state legitimacy (Reiner, 2010). We previously noted that although reform agendas have continued to recognise the Situated (particularly as potent myths about policing and community), they have tended to be more ephemeral in their effects, seemingly being more challenging to inscribe in resilient organisational designs and practice. This has been confirmed by our analysis of post-2013 local policing in Scotland.

We conclude by re-examining our starting assumptions about situated policing (informed by classic police sociology). We speculate that even situated policing has been colonised by abstract police forms. This might look at first glance to be very pessimistic, but it also might just be Ericson's reality come full circle. However, it does come with its own possibilities; possibilities that the abstract police thesis might constructively grapple with utilising communities of practice as both a theoretical framework and an organizational strategy.

Our characterisation of situated policing as "connected" to local experience and "active, emergent and contextually embodied", involving "personal knowledge" - all in stark contrast to abstract police - initially had us assuming that it was about frontline policing, and that it would be embodied by the community cop who 'knows' their beat. This has probably not really been the case for a long time. The recurrent changes that have 'stuck' – reliance on motorised response, increasingly bureaucratic tasking and coordination, information hoarding, and the importance of 'knowledge brokering' and information systems (see: Reiner, 2010; Hough, 2007; Ericson, 1994), as but some examples - have all corroded the reality of the community cop even as the myth endures and is reified in policing principles, such as those articulated in the 2012 Act. We fully acknowledge that more up to date research on what frontline officers do is needed. Practice may have opened up again following the early criticism of Police Scotland. However, we speculate that the general picture likely remains

broadly true as local officers remain distanced from local beats and subjected to styles and levels of tasking that orients their working lives around what used to be called 'Fire Brigade' policing. This servicing of public demand is itself laudable – responsiveness being an important principle of democratic policing (Jones, 2008) - but within it the scope for frontline officers to develop and apply skilled contextual knowledge is limited. Thinking again about Ericson, and the growing bodies of work on crime intelligence work (Innes and Cope, 2005) and predictive policing systems (Kaufman et al. 2019) we wonder if the myth of the knowing community cop, or the peace officer, needs to be put to bed. Rather the 'knowing' of context, community, person and place has shifted to those doing the data analysis and the tasking – the crime analysts and their police managers (perhaps even to some extent the call handlers?). If this is right, deep knowledge of context has itself become a technical specialism within an abstract police - one that probably is more reliable than the individual knowledge of officers, even if concerns about bias and partiality remain pertinent (Kaufmann et al. 2019). Frontline policing remains essential in responding to the public and acting on tasking. But their value and skill lies in their ability to apply universal procedural proprieties (with perhaps some local adaptation) in the conduct of their work. What they are not, are repositories of knowledge of the histories, values and dynamics of the places and people served on their beats, or skilled and sensitive interlocutors in their conflicts. This is now the work of the specialists and the analysts: the abstract police.

We'll limit ourselves to a further three, somewhat speculative, points that follow this conclusion that contextualised 'knowing' of communities can very readily itself become a distinct function and system within the abstract police. All merit further analysis in terms of abstract police and communities of practice in policing, and we state them here in the spirit of seeking to prompt further development of both.

The first point is that principles that appear to reify the virtues of a more situated police – community engagement, 'keeping communities safe' etc. – may also be readily colonised by abstract police forms. Indeed, our sense is that this is the case. Early proponents of community policing were radical, understanding it as a wholesale inversion of traditional ways of doing policing (Alderson, 1979; see also: Mackenzie and Henry, 2009: 14-20) but in time the term became distant, hollowed out, and abstract; like 'local', little more than a geographic container to be managed and understood through data. There is nothing, for example, about 'keeping communities safe' that *requires* intervention beyond crime analysis, community surveys and targeted enforcement much of which can be readily carried out at a distance. The second point follows directly from that. To conclude that even community policing has become a component of abstract police is not to say that this was inevitable. It wasn't. It has been a result of political decisions and institutional design decisions over decades. The recurrence of discriminatory and illegal frontline police practices – the murder of George Floyd in 2020 being the latest in a very long and tragic line of them – have necessitated some of the developments underpinning the rise of abstract police and which have narrowed the negotiability (and discretion) of officers. Management and surveillance of what the police do is not going away, and nor should it, but nor need it necessarily stand in opposition to situated and 'soft' 'peace officer' styles of policing that genuinely seek to connect police to communities. But whether you actually have such policing or not cannot be gleaned from policies and principles. Reifying them as a 'good thing' or even things that are claimed aspects of practice is not sufficient. To actually cultivate practice requires attentiveness to institutional designs and the emergent practice that can be negotiated around them. If, as in the cases we examined, resources are spread thinly, and priority is given to fast response and targets - without the focus of designated beats and the support for informal community interaction - then the possibilities for officers to

develop deep contextual knowledge and sensitivity just are not present, regardless of policy platitudes. If we *do* want police practice (or some of it) to accord more with the peace officer ideal then Wenger warns us to look at the institutional designs and whether they do in fact enable it. This leads to the third and final point: how to make frontline policing something that is positively experienced and valued by the people who do it. Many extraneous things affect this – working conditions, pensions, benefits etc. – but for Wenger strong identification with a role is related to its negotiability for participants – the idea that people have at least some scope to 'make a role their own'. James Q. Wilson's (1968) well-worn observation that police departments are distinctive organisations because discretion increases the further down the hierarchy you go is, we argue, no longer tenable. In our own examples it was the more senior officers involved in governance who demonstrably exercised some discretion and negotiability around their practice where this was seemingly absent in the contexts of frontline policing and call handling. Accepting the need for constraint on individual police discretion on the frontline and that contextual knowledge of patterns, people and places has, to a significant degree at least, become the specialism of the analyst and statistician, is not to argue that negotiability has been excised or is necessarily being corroded within frontline police roles. Rather it is to make the standard claim that further research needs to be done to identify what, if anything, the emergent practice of these officers is, and a less standard argument that there would be strategic value for the police themselves to think carefully about the communities of practice animating frontline policing. There are possibilities to re-articulate the role, function and craft skill of frontline local policing in ways that might positively engage with officers' ongoing commitment to their local teams. Where they may no longer be all-knowing peace officers they might yet, for example, be identified as skilled brokers of community knowledge and the eyes and ears of the specialist units; or as skilled-problem solvers working across the boundaries of local services and police intelligence. They have many other plausible emergent roles but low morale, resignations and retirements suggest that they urgently need to be cultivated, and then supported by institutional designs around which they can actually happen, and brokered within the rest of the organisation so that they have wider institutional value. Meaningful communities of practice *can* be negotiated within an increasingly abstract police and their active cultivation has promise as an antidote to disconnect and anomie.

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