

POLICE PERFORMANCE, IMAGE AND A DESIRED FUTURE

Abstract

Designed as a follow-up of an earlier study, the present investigation aimed at identifying Strengths, Weaknesses and a Desirable Future as perceived by the Senior Police Officers. The study revalidates the previous self-assessment of police performance and shows that while Police excels in providing VIP security, it is somewhat ineffective in enforcing the rule of law. It also highlights the acknowledged low public image of police and prevalence of several undesirable behaviour patterns in the force that have crept in over time.

The perceived strengths of the police force include Discipline, Capacity to Withstand Hardships and Quick Response to Crisis. Coupled with the desire to see Future as a peaceful, democratic society that is free from discrimination, these strengths provide a base on which organizational changes can be built. The study recommends a program of internal workshops to introspect and examine findings in an atmosphere of openness and trust with the objective of identifying steps for change in the organization and build societal support for the same.

Police Performance, Image and A Desired Future

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Police is eternally in news; good, bad, indifferent.

The societal concern with the functioning of police heightens every time there is an adverse report concerning public harassment, corruption, crime or use of excessive force by police. The present study was initiated as a follow-up of an earlier research and included a revalidation of the previous findings. The limited objective of the present report is to initiate a process of thinking among senior police officers with regard to the need for change and desirable steps for improvement.

The Earlier Study

In the earlier study, published in Indian Police Journal, 1989, a group of thirteen top ranking police officers with designations ranging from Director General to ACP and an average service of 24 years, were asked to evaluate police on two broad parameters: Performance and Public Image. Briefly, the results of the earlier study are as below:

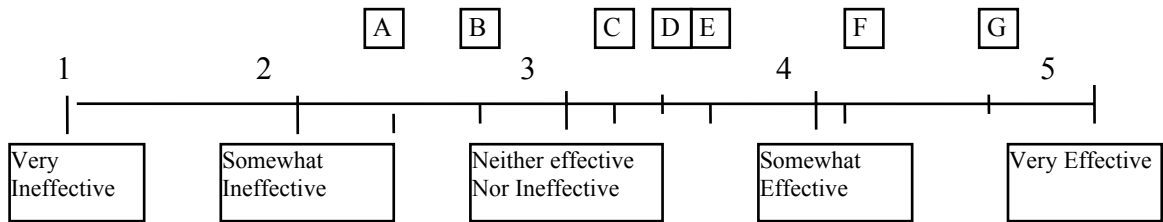
A. Seven Dimensions of Police Performance

Seven dimensions of police performance were identified through group and individual exercises with Police Officers who had assembled for a workshop. These were:

- A. Enforcing rule of Law
- B. Social Legislation Enforcement
- C. Preventing and Detecting Crime
- D. Gathering Intelligence
- E. Handling Crowds
- F. Maintaining Law and Order
- G. Providing VIP security

Ratings from the officers were obtained on a five-point scale ranging from 'Very Ineffective' to 'Very Effective' for each one of these seven dimensions as shown in Figure 1 below.

Fig 1: The Rating Scale and Performance Appraisal



Given below in Table 1 are the averages of the ratings obtained from individual Police Officers on each of the seven dimensions of performance. Figure 1 also shows, with small boxes, these ratings.

Table 1: Self Appraisal of Police Performance: Average Ratings

Dimension	Average Rating	Scale Point
A. Enforcing rule of Law	2.31	‘Somewhat Ineffective’
B. Social Legislation Enforcement	2.69	‘Neither Effective nor Ineffective’
C. Preventing and Detecting Crime	3.38	Between ‘Neither Effective Nor Ineffective’ to ‘Somewhat Effective’
D. Gathering Intelligence	3.46	
E. Handling Crowds	3.53	
F. Maintaining Law and Order	4.15	Somewhat Effective’
G. Providing VIP security	4.61	Close to ‘Very Effective’

Based on the above results it can be stated that the officers consider their force to be doing a good job of only providing VIP Security and in Maintaining Law and Order. On all other dimensions, performance rating is low.

These results, in a way indicate where the efforts and energies of the force are directed and where the police priorities lie. These are:

- a) A clear objective of protecting the VIP’s.
- b) Act as a wall between the VIPs and the public like in handling crowds and

c) Enforce the rule of Law, if necessary and if time permits.

Significantly, analysis of individual responses showed very little variation in their ratings, thereby indicating a high degree of agreement among the officers with regard to their appraisal of the force.

Public Image

Making an assumption that these officers have a fairly accurate impression of the public image of their organisation, they were asked to give their assessment of the extent to which certain behaviour patterns exist in the police force. Once again, ratings were obtained on a five-point scale indicating extent of occurrence ranging from 'Very Low' (1) to 'Very High' (5) and with Average (3) in the middle.

Table 2 below shows the averages of the self-assessment ratings of public image of police on each dimension. As in case of performance, the behaviour patterns being rated were arrived at through prior individual and group exercises with the officers.

Behaviour patterns have been arranged in the table below in the ascending order of their occurrence, from low to high.

Table 2: Occurrence of Behaviour Patterns among Police Officers.

Dimension	Average Ratings
Lack of Courteous Treatment of Complainants	2.24
Lack of Fairness in Disposal of Complaints	2.31
Time Taken in Investigating Crime	3.40
Corruption in the Force	3.46
Suppression and Minimization of Offence	3.46
High Handed Behaviour/ Public Harassment	3.61
Criminality in the Force	3.76
Time Taken for Disposal of Complaints	3.84
Pliability to Political Whims	4.00

Results show that in their own assessment, the extent of occurrence of several unfavourable behaviour patterns among Police Officers is rather high. While 'Pliability to Political Whims', 'Delays in disposal of complaints' and 'Criminality in Police Force' have a 'High' degree of occurrence, only on two dimensions namely 'Lack of Fairness in Disposal of complaints' and 'Lack of Courteous Treatment of Complainants' can one express a certain degree of satisfaction with regard to the extent of their occurrence. Even here, there appears to be some internal contradiction. One cannot be fair in disposal of complaints and simultaneously suppress and minimise offence. The very act of suppression and minimising of an offence would automatically mean lack of fairness to the aggrieved party.

Overall, the emerging scenario is not very edifying and is a clear self-indictment of police performance in the country. One can also conclude from the above data that in their own assessment, police image in public mind is rather low. One can further state

that the senior Officers are quite aware of the shortcomings of the force and honestly acknowledge the prevalence of undesirable behaviour patterns in Police.

Validation

A quick check through personal interviews with five officers of the rank of DGP or Ex-DGPs indicated that results of the earlier study are valid even now, although over a decade has passed since its report. The only disagreement expressed related to the extent of prevalence of corruption. These officers held that instances of corruption in the force have come down lately. This perception may be more due to the acceptance of corruption as a general norm than any reduction per se.

The Present Study

Since the major aim of the present study was to generate data for initiating an Internal Dialogue in the Police Force, a new small sample of senior and high level police officers was contacted.

The Sample

Data for the present study was collected from 25 officers, 16 of whom were from Delhi Police. Additionally, four officers each from Gujarat and Tamil Nadu and one from Goa were also contacted. All officers were of the rank of DCP and above and had a long association with the police force. The rank-wise distribution of officers is as under:

Rank	Nos.
DGP/ADGP	5
Spl. CP	2
DIG	1
ACP	6
JCP	5
DCP	1
Not mentioned	5

Total 25

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire for data collection was developed partly based upon the earlier study and partly on the basis of individual discussions with select senior police officers. The questionnaire was divided in two parts. Part I focused on the Strengths, Weaknesses and Thinking about Future, while part II focused on the Need for Change.

The following dimensions were included in part I of the questionnaire.

- A. Strengths of the Police Force
- B. Weaknesses of the Police Force
- C. Probable future of Indian Society

D. Desirable future of Indian Society

Part II - was aimed at identifying the necessary changes in each of the following three areas to meet the future challenge:

- A. The Police Force
- B. The Government
- C. The Society

A simple open-ended questionnaire was designed to elicit information.

A. Strengths

A set of 18 statements was provided as Possible Strengths of Police Force. These statements were developed through prior individual and group exercises as part of the earlier study. Officers were asked to tick mark statements that they agreed with and leave out others. A provision to add a new statement or a dimension that may not have been included in the given set was also available.

Table 3 below shows the Perceived Strengths of Police Force in the descending order of the number of officers who indicated a given statement as strength. The table also separately shows the number of officers from Delhi and other states to highlight and distinguish any differences that may show up between the two categories.

Table 3: Perceived Strengths of Police Force

PERCEIVED STRENGTHS	All Officers	Delhi (16)	Others (9)
Discipline	22	14	8
Capacity to withstand hardship	21	14	7
Quick response to crisis and calamity	19	12	7
Loyalty	18	12	6
Fellowship and team feelings	17	10	7
Communication and mobility	17	9	8
Adaptability	16	11	5
Indispensability	16	11	5
Usefulness	15	10	5
Courage	15	11	4
Flexibility	15	10	5
Dedication and commitment	13	10	3
Survival capability	12	8	4
Professional approach	12	8	4
Government/Legal Support	11	7	4
Good training	8	6	2
Public hope	6	5	1
Responsible citizen behaviour	4	3	1
Supervision and control	3	2	1

Additional items mentioned by at least one respondent, included:

Integrity
Management Abilities like Planning and Monitoring
Touch with the Field
Determined Approach
Documentation

Obviously, the above data cannot be taken on its face value as is obvious from the critical comments made by some officers. These include:

Table 4: Some critical comments by officers on the Perceived Strengths.

Adaptability - To new bosses Good Training - Outdated methods Main Strength still is the fear of authority and brute force: a colonial heritage. Low motivation only to law laden situations Public hope evaporated after 50 years. Courage - an individual matter. Professional approach - a money making approach Flexibility - Rigid psychological attitudes.

Notwithstanding the critical comments, it will be prudent to accept top five statements, where the response is near unanimous, as the strengths of Indian Police Force. Other statements of perceived strength may have to be modified in light of an open discussion with the officers. On the whole, the list of strengths and the overwhelming agreement at the top end are quite impressive. It is the lower end comprising of public hope, and responsible citizen behaviour, which is a matter of concern. A larger concern will be to explore that given all these strengths, why the general outcome of police effort is not impressive.

Needless to say, a consensus on the perceived strengths as also on weaknesses and the subsequent questions, is essential if any meaningful change has to be brought about.

B. Weaknesses

As in case of Strengths, a set of 20 statements was provided in the questionnaire for identifying weaknesses of the police force. Space was provided for additional statements in case an officer wished to provide some additional views.

Table 5 below shows perceived weaknesses of the Police force.

Table 5: Self-Perception of Weaknesses of Police Force.

WEAKNESSES	All Officers	Delhi (16)	Others (9)
Corruption	22	15	7
Poor image	22	15	7
Lack of environmental/social support	19	12	7
Ineffectiveness in convicting criminals	19	14	5
Partiality	17	11	6
Abuse of power	17	10	7
Lack of resources	16	12	4
Pliability	15	9	6
Misbehaviour with public	14	10	4
Unresponsiveness	14	9	5
Third degree methods and ruthlessness	13	9	4
Lack of compassion or human approach	12	8	4
Public Grievance handling	11	10	1
Wrong attitude	11	9	2
Inefficiency	9	6	3
Lack of creativity	9	6	3
Poor regard to rule of law	9	7	2
Lack of objectivity	8	5	3
Structural implementation of investigation	8	6	2
Lack of direction	6	3	3
Acceptance of weakness	6	5	1
Rigidity	5	4	1
Indiscipline	5	3	2

Once again there appears to be a large agreement on the essential weaknesses of the police force. Interestingly, 'lack of resources' has also received a large support as a weakness. This is in contrast to the perceived strength of 'Mobility and Communication'; the two key resources for police force and therefore needs to be explored further.

Surprisingly, 'Indiscipline' finds a place among the weaknesses of Police force and is mentioned by five out of the 25 officers. This is significant, as 22 out of 25 officers had indicated 'Discipline' as strength of the police force. Perhaps it is indicative of the erosion in discipline that explains its simultaneous mention both as strength and as a weakness. These issues will need to be explored at length.

Several additional significant statements were made by at least one officer each indicative of additional weaknesses. These can be categorised in three sub groups, namely:

- a. Role and Attitudes Related
- b. Systems Related
- c. Social Environment Related

Details of these statements are presented in Appendix I.

It will be fair to reiterate that a forum to discuss these weaknesses openly and without hesitation is needed within the force before any successful change in the police system can be initiated by any authority.

C. The Future

The purpose of including items pertaining to the Future in the questionnaire was to identify Police officers' own needs and desires for the organisation and society. This is important as police, being the implementation arm of Law, is in a unique position to both facilitate and hinder societal change.

The questionnaire provided 10 statements as descriptive of the Probable Future of Indian society. As earlier, these statements were based on the prior individual and group exercises. Once again, the questionnaire provided an option to add statements not included in the questionnaire for an officer to reflect his thinking.

Table 5 below presents results of the perceived probable future.

Table 6: Police Perception of Probable Future

PROBABLE FUTURE	All Officers	Delhi (16)	Others (9)
Increase in population	21	14	7
Increase in crime and violence	21	14	7
Deterioration in moral values	20	13	7
Information explosion	19	13	6
Greed for grabbing	18	11	7
Politicisation of life and criminalization of politics	19	11	8
World comes closer	16	12	4
High level of technology	15	10	5
Increasing struggle for place in social order	13	10	3
Conquest over nature	6	4	2

There appears to be a fairly uniform view of Probable Future among Police officers as there is a large agreement on nine out of ten statements. These are shown in the table 6 in the descending order of agreement. There is only one dimension for which there is a relatively low level of support. This pertains to the view that there will be conquest over nature.

Additional comments included by the officers centred primarily on the nature of crime that will increase. These include:

- White collar crime
- Organised crime
- Cyber crime
- Financial crime
- Adolescent crime.

It is also obvious that the officers are aware that crime is one task area that police force will have to address squarely and prepare for in the future.

An interesting aspect of the view of future is the expression of hope as can be seen from the following additional statements made by individual officers.

- Greed for grabbing-will go down sharply
- Deterioration in moral values- will improve in 5-10 years.
- Increase in crime and violence- will go down after 2-3 years.
- Politicisation and criminalization has reached its peak. Can only go down

This provides the small silver lining to what otherwise may appear to be a dismal future.

D. The Desirable Future

Seven statements were provided in the questionnaire as ‘Desirable Future’ as seen from the eyes of a police officer. Table 7 below gives results of this analysis.

Table 7: Desirable Future

DESIRABLE FUTURE	All Officers	Delhi (16)	Others (9)
Democratic society free from discrimination	21	13	8
Society with peace, prosperity and brotherhood	20	14	6
Value based humanistic and enlightened society	19	13	6
Equal opportunity - adequate, proportionate compensation	17	12	5
Pollution free state with commitment for healthy ecology	16	11	5
Freedom from disease and want	15	11	4
Society based on simple living and high thinking	9	6	3

There appears to be a high agreement with regard to the Desirable future with almost all officers expressing a desire for a Democratic Society with Peace, Prosperity and Freedom from Discrimination. The only disagreement is whether a society based on simple living and high thinking is feasible. Thus it would seem that despite the indifferent performance, low image and several weaknesses, Police Officers still hanker for a discrimination free, peaceful life in a good society. This is a sign of hope on which change for future can be built.

Summary

The key findings of the study can be summarised as under:

- A. Appraisal of Police Performance by senior officers is rather low.
- B. Officers are quite aware of the Low Image of Police in the public mind.
- C. Several strengths of the police force are identifiable that can serve as a vehicle for change.
- D. Several Weaknesses are prevailing in the force and need to be acted upon as a priority.
- E. Officers believe that Crime is likely to increase as a result of societal changes in foreseeable future.
- F. There is agreement on what is considered as a desirable future. This provides a hope for positive action.

Follow up

Based on these above findings one can conclude that considerable scope for improvement in the Police Functioning exists. One can also state that an exercise aimed at initiating change in the police force is likely to meet internal organisational support.

The start however, needs to be made with the next logical step of sharing results with the organisation at large and with the respondents who participated in the study. Thus it is recommended that a program to discuss results through internal workshops should be initiated.

Aim of these workshops should be to examine the results and introspect in an atmosphere of Trust and Openness. A key focus of this exercise should be to explore and identify steps that can be internally initiated to bring about change. An additional task of this exercise should be to identify supportive changes in the larger system of Government and the society, which will help sustain change. This is essential as the major burden of identifying change steps and their implementation will have to be borne within the organisation.

It will be easy to brush aside results of this study since data was collected only from the senior officers and thus may not adequately reflect the ground realities.

The fact is that whatever is happening in the field is fully known to the senior police officers. Nevertheless, to overcome this limitation, representative officers from the field can be invited to participate in the proposed workshops.

Notably, the Police Force is an important organisation in any society. In several ways, the Police Force, being the law enforcement agency, determines the quality of life that citizens live in a society. Thus it is necessary that societal change be initiated with a re-look at this organisation.

Appendix I: Additional Statements of Weaknesses of Police

A. Role and Attitude Related

Lack of understanding of public role
Inability to distinguish between criminals and general public.
Rigidity - Authoritarian
Failure to stand up to the unjustified actions of the power to be
Resistance to change and innovate
Lack of compassion or human approach - varies in individuals
Third degree and ruthlessness - Reducing
Public Grievance handling - Insincere
Acceptance of weakness - criminals seen as more effective
Political and IPS level corruption is rampant and major cause of misdirection of values and attitudes systems.

B. Organisation and Systems Related

Welfare of the men needs attention
Outdated laws and Rules
Lack of training
Lack of Research & Development unit
Lack of independent control on tenure of posting
Outdated policing
Lack of Reforms
Non-recognition of merit
Non registration of complaints
Non Booking of crimes
Lack of public participation
Politicisation of Police
Lack of communication with public
Lack of direction - IPS leadership incompetent & below par
Overwork
Psychological stress

C. Social Environment Related

Hostile media
Inadequate help from media
Public Apathy
Weak / irresponsible criminal Justice System
Weak leadership