

‘We’ve stood on that precipice’: Police, organisation, and the anomalous Child Protection Unit.

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Abstract: UK police services constantly endure pressures to reduce spending and to reorganise in ways thought to be more efficient. In these moments of scrutiny, non-standard work practices become more noticeable. We report a study of a specialist unit, the Child Protection Unit (CPU), in one police service. In 2011, an initial exploratory interview with the unit head was followed by two discussion groups carried out with a three month gap between them. We found the unit existing and working dynamically between two forces: (a) the needs and expectations of society regarding child protection and (b) how more general expectations and needs regarding crime are normally met by the police service. While ‘traditional’ policing might see the offender successfully prosecuted, there can be deleterious effects on the victim. In consequence, CPU members are: more focused on and sensitive to the victim leading to a risk management philosophy; are more team-oriented with greater awareness of and sense of responsibility for each other; receive greater public support than other parts of the service. These differences result in the CPU members having non-standard organisational and operational work practices: they are less performance target-based; they investigate and prosecute a smaller number of cases; they use different documentation; they are not available to help with other work at times of greater general demand on the police service. Thus existing dynamically and anomalously, the unit’s very vulnerability that helps its members to do their difficult job also raises their profile and increases vulnerability to financial cuts. Their precipice in the title quotation is at several levels. We theorise our findings using contingency and cultural theories believing the findings relevant to other organisations with specialist units.

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Introduction

Society is particularly intolerant of any form of child abuse; paedophilia is undoubtedly one of *the* 'moral panics' (Cohen, 1972) of our age. Protection of children and their future is such a powerful force that it is one of the reasons that societies form in the first place (Freud, 1979) and has been 'high on the political agenda for many decades' (Munro 2011, p.5). For social scientists (including social workers), the topic has implications in relation to multi-agency working, care, protection, and recovery of the victim and sharing of intelligence to prevent further harm. Knowing organisational influences on police practice in respect of child protection is important for practical reasons but there is also much to be learnt about the working of specialist units in any organisation.

Latest available figures suggest that, on 31st. March 2010, there were 46,705 children on child protection registers or subject to child protection plans (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), 2011). There are, however, no easily comparable national statistics, partly because there is no single category of offence of 'child abuse' (NSPCC, 2012). For example, the Home Office for England and Wales (2010) reveals that, for the latest available figures (2009/2010), there were 17,383 sex crimes against children out of a total of 54509 reported (just under a third).

It is also difficult to find national data on the numbers of police officers involved in child protection (NSPCC, 2012); neither national nor comparable statistics are available. For example, London's Metropolitan Police have '18 Child Abuse Investigation Teams' (Metropolitan Police, 2012) while the Police Service who participated in our study reported that 43 police officers worked in a public protection role; 6% of all serving officers.

To gain greater understanding of the workings of a Child Protection Unit (CPU) we have used cultural theory and contingency theory arguing that together they offer a greater understanding of the dual forces experienced by most organisations, holding itself together from the inside and responding to pressures from the outside. Cultural theory - from a social constructivist stable (Ford and Airhihenbuwa, 2010) - focuses on the values and actions of a group; it is concerned with the forces within the group that propagate its values and guide its members' actions (Douglas, 1992). Contingency theory is a structural, deterministic approach (Ford and Airhihenbuwa 2010) emphasising the external factors that work on a group (Perrow, 1970). We believe that this is the first time these two theories will have been reported as being used together to understand an area of practice which is relevant to modern day policing and social work.

There is no standard way in which a police service is required to deploy its resources for child protection. Each service makes its own decisions: some have the function as part of a larger unit; others, including the police service studied, have a small dedicated unit.

Cultural theory

In social theory the word 'culture' becomes an extra resource to be wheeled in after other explanations are defeated. (Douglas, 1992 p. 167)

Questioning the concept of culture grows partly out of the easy (ab)use of the word. T.S. Eliot (1948, p.17) wanted to 'rescue this word' from 'the use ... which nobody bothers to examine' (ibid, p.14). *Culture* has to help understanding and/or explaining if it is to avoid Douglas's accusation of those who use it as an obfuscatory or desperate manner. Hollis's (1994) notion of explanation and understanding reminds us of two aspects of knowledge: both can be applied to *culture*. Seeking explanatory laws for *culture* - the positivistic endeavour of some social theorists which requires a level of abstraction at which we see Hume's *constant conjunction of events* - might have some success where, like Talcott Parsons (1964, p.21) we can find a 'sufficiently generalised system of categories'. Such generalisation leaves *culture* as a *grand theory* which does not bear much scrutiny with any Popperian notion of a science (Magee, 1973). It is, however, as a tool for gaining greater understanding that *culture* serves us better.

While the existence of *culture* is questioned by some, the definition is disputed by many. Eliot (1948) sees culture as an outcome, what we witness. For others, the beliefs and value system result in the outcomes (see, for example, Freud 1979). Hall and Neitz (1993), however, warn against restrictive definitions, offering a range of aspects encapsulated in the notions of *materialistic* and *idealistic* culture which interact and work together.

Douglas's (1966, 1970, 1985, 1992) cultural theory defines culture by the way it classifies and orders its universe. Culture is, therefore, threatened by anomalies; what does not fit into the classification system threatens the system and hence the culture. Cultural threats must be addressed for survival with successful risk management involving protecting the classification system, achieved by such methods as forbidding and sanctioning; also by attributing the cause of harm (for example, death and injury) to cultural deviants. Douglas (1992) called this the forensic use of risk. Famously, she developed a classification of cultural types each with a typical risk orientation using her dimensions of grid and group (Douglas, 1970). *Grid* is the degree of differentiation between people in a cultural set (for example, division of labour) and *group* is the degree to which there is social cohesiveness. A culture is allocated as *high* or *low* on both dimensions resulting in four cultural types: see Figure 1. Classic applications include Bellaby (1990a, 1990b, 1999), Douglas (1970, 1985, 1992), Douglas and Wildavsky (1982), Mars (1982, Raynor (1986), and Thompson (1992). More recent applications and developments include Dowty and Wallace (2009) and Linsley and Shrives (2009).

A hierarchical culture values rules along with division of labour and experts to whom we listen; it resists challenges to its rules or people who flout them. Risk is managed by attributing harm to someone who has not followed the rules. An

Fig. 1:
Simplified version of Douglas' Grid and group and attitude to risk (after Douglas 1970 and Bellaby 1999)

Grid			Group	
High	High			Low
	A Hierarchical: rule-following, risk averse	C Fatalist: fatalistic acceptance of harm		
	B Egalitarian: harms can strengthen, outsiders are distrusted as threats	D Entrepreneurial: risk attracted, accepts that harms might occur		
Low				

egalitarian culture values the group as a separate entity but with a flatter structure with all members having the possibility of leading it. It can promote stoic attitudes to harms believing they can make their members stronger. Risk management emphasises and protects the group boundaries, being suspicious of the new and accepting of 'familiar' potential harms (for example, heavy carrying – Bellaby, 1999).

Such a socially constructivist approach to risk sees culture as active and productive rather than responsive, as controlling rather than passive (see later for modification of this). It will protect and promote itself which can lead to clashes where two different cultures attempt to occupy the same ground.

Douglas's oeuvre is commonly misunderstood as suggesting that all members of a culture behave in the same manner; for example, assuming an entrepreneurial culture consists only of risk takers. The mistaken view leads to stereotypical thinking and easy attribution with consequent field application of the (mistaken) theory leading to rejection. Douglas's focus is at the cultural level: for example, the risk-taking culture has resource-accumulating more risk-averse individuals: this helps other members of the cultural group to take risks (see Douglas's, 1985, description of one

hunting-based culture). Similarly, culture is sometimes seen as imposed, managed (and manageable), and monolithic but Bellaby (1990b) warned that it is difficult to talk of a single culture in a workplace; see also other literature above.

The theory lacks precision in delineating between cultural types which can lead to difficulties of allocation. The problem is partly the effect of over-simplification of the theory by Douglas herself: originally, the two dimensions were not used to create 'boxes' (see Douglas, 1970). Such imprecision might also explain her later taxonomy of cultures into hierarchical, sect, and individualist (Douglas, 1992); the newer categories are, however, mappable onto the original theory. The continued survival of grid and group, while not refuting the accusation of imprecision, does suggest that researchers can live with (and fruitfully apply) the theory.

Bellaby (1990a) identified that a problem with Douglas's cultural theory is its inability to explain change in culture. Thus explanations/understandings of cultural phenomena suffer from being an 'inside-outwards' approach with insufficient cognisance of external influences. Thompson (1992) hinted at the problem in his consideration of cultural beliefs about the nature of the environment but did not consider the effects of that environment.

We address the cultural/environmental problem using contingency theory.

Contingency theory

Whereas cultural theory is an 'inside-outwards' approach to organisation, contingency theory is an 'outside-inward' one, that is things are 'as they are' in response to the environment in which they exist. It sees organisational form as dictated not by personal desires or rationalising necessities of a manager or cultural will but by external forces (contingencies). It contrasts with organisational and management theories such as Taylorian notions of the manager in charge, making rational scientific decisions. Originally the particular technology used for production was identified as the contingent force (Woodward 1958, Perrow 1972), but latterly contingent forces are seen as the environment in which the organisation (the system) exists (Donaldson, 2001). Various taxonomies of operation have developed in response to contingent forces beyond the choice of the would-be ruling minds but all reveal the power of contingencies; for example Perrow (1972) argues that there is a technology (including equipment and ways of organising and working) that best achieves the particular targets. Having invested heavily in a particular plant or piece of equipment, an organisation will work with it as long as possible. Similarly, having invested in training, support and accommodation (and nowadays information technology), it will not want to reform too quickly; these technologies too will shape organisational form. Contingency theory now talks of the environment rather than technology, partly to overcome the commonly restrictive view of technology (Perrow, 1972) but also to include all potential influences such as politico-socio-economic circumstances.

Donaldson (2001) take this a stage further seeing contingency theory about gaining the optimum fit between the system and its environment. Thus, despite resistance and resilience of the system, other environmental contingencies will eventually force change including the technology of the organisation. Culture can be a contingency for another culture and the identification of and responses to a contingency can be culturally mediated (even if unwise or disastrous in the longer term).

Contingency theory's problems lie partly in the inevitable ontological disagreement with cultural theory's social constructionist viewpoint. Within its own more objective view of the universe it can be criticised for the prescriptivism that can follow: social determinism has to work hard to accommodate people making decisions. Its evolution and the partial theories along its pathway also hints at problems: it is not easily defined. Popper (Magee, 1973), however, would see the changes in response to inadequacies as a strength, as more 'scientific'.

In concluding this introduction, we note two major forces that shape the form and behaviour of any organisation: the internal cultural forces and the external contingencies. There are, however, inadequacies in both. While organisations hold an internal resolve to shape their form and their future, they might not be so in control of their destiny as they would wish. On the other hand, theories that cannot easily accommodate individual and group aspirations - or the complications of people's motivations and interpretations - offer an impoverished future and are counter to the world experienced by many. Bringing the two approaches together overcomes the potential accusation from attribution theory that one is simply seeing explanations from either actor (inside-outward explanations) or observers (outside-inward explanations).

Furthermore, as one culture can be a contingency for another, large organisations with different cultures will see uncertain co-existence; sometimes they will 'rub along' but other times the imperialistic tendencies of cultural promotion will be manifest in expansions, takeovers, and demise. During these times of crisis, cultural values and activities become more noticeable.

The current moral panic regarding child protection led us to consider the way that the enforcement agency executes its duties while protecting its members from pressures both internal (for example the emotional threats innate in their work) and external pressures (for example meeting social expectations while giving value for money). We aimed to identify the forces and see how the dynamics played out in a large public organisation in the UK.

Methodology

This case study focused on a small number of people seeking to identify what happened within a unit in one particular police service. The study, as a close investigation of a

particular set of dynamics, requires thick description (Geertz, 1973/2000). Rather than try to find something representative of something else, we wanted to ask ‘what’s the main story here?’ (Strauss, 1987). We accept that ‘generalising from case studies can be difficult [but] the same is true for quantitative studies’ (Hartley, 1994, p.225). Further points we make supporting our methodological stance are: the work can be ‘valued for its intrinsic interest’ Schofield (1993, p.201); here Henwood and Pidgeon’s (1993) concept of *transferability* is a more useful test; similarly Schofield (1993) wrote of *fittingness*, that is the “fit” between the situation studied and others to which one might be interested in applying the concepts and conclusions of that study’ (ibid, p.221). Since, here, we offer a clear illustration of how economic, social, and human forces play out in one arena, its findings might illuminate the examination of other similar situations.

Method

Needing to gain trust, (particularly among police officers) (Punch, 1993), our research strategy was emergent starting with an interview of the supervising head of the unit. To counter possible perceptions from the unit members that the study was being

Table 1

Phasing and components of study of CPU (names have been changed)

Phase	Comments	Guiding areas of interest
Interview of supervising head, Derek (Male - detective superintendant)	Two interviewers, one covering operational issues, one covering human resource issues	Unstructured reflexive inquiry into the working of the unit
Discussion Group One: Researchers along with Des (Male - detective sergeant), Alison (Female - detective constable) and Rosie (Female - detective constable)	Four researchers in the group	Structure and working methods of the Unit How they worked with each other How they managed the risks to which they are exposed
Discussion Group Two: Researchers along with Esther (Female - detective constable), Harvey (Male - detective constable), and Elliot (Female - detective constable)	Three researchers in the group	Elaboration of the Unit aims and working methods Identification of perceived differences between their unit and other parts of the police service Their relationship with other agencies

imposed by management, we were helped by the operational manager of the unit who had the trust of both management and of CPU members. We had originally aimed to run separate interviews between interviewers and participants but they expressed a preference to remain together and so two discussion groups were ran with members of the unit; see Table 1 for composition. Perhaps the wish to stick together has its roots in the cynicism which Reiner (1985) characterised as a key facet of policing. Perhaps such cynicism along with anticipation of an ‘interrogation’ by potentially hostile academics led to their desire to remain in relative *safety* and *anonymity* of their group. Aware of the limitations and strengths of such a form of enquiry, the researchers decided to proceed: research is always the art of the possible. The details of these phases are summarised in Table 1 overleaf.

In keeping with the emergent nature of the research, the first discussion group was run in a semi-structured but phenomenological and reflexive manner and Discussion Group Two remained semi-structured and reflexive but focused on areas brought up or omitted in the Discussion Group One and seen as pertinent by the researchers.

Findings

The ‘main story’ (the dominant narrative emerging from the findings) was one of the vulnerability of the unit existing at the nexus of political, social, and human forces (Des’s *precipice*). Like organisations in Hedberg et al’s (1976) famous paper, they were ‘camping on seesaws’; they existed in a constantly changing social and political environment. With the need to have a fast and flexible response attitude in such an environment, they had to organise in a non-bureaucratic way. They exist as a manifestation of a public moral will and have a strong identity which helps them to do their work. They were subject to constant scrutiny by other members of the police service and threatened by political and economic forces.

Nature of their work

The CPU exists to investigate horrific, socially taboo crime; it is, *‘absolutely mind-warping, the sadism and acts we deal with’* (Des) so no wonder that unit members have a rather different outlook on what they attempt to achieve and how they go about it. Rather than having the imprisonment of the offender as their central driving force (a common perception of ‘traditional’ policing), they aim to do what is best for the victim, describing this approach as *‘... victim led [because] some of the children can’t go to court ... The victim might not want to go to court. You have to accept.’* (Rosie), even though this can be *‘frustrating’* (Des). The unit might also decide not to go to court in an effort not to *‘criminalise parents for something they have done as a result of snapping’*

(Harvey). Being victim-led means managing risk and because ‘at each stage it changes’ (Rosie), they have to be ready to alter their strategy as the case progresses.

The work of the CPU has much greater moral if not financial support from members of the public than other parts of the police service: ‘the public sit up for child protection care’ (Des) and ‘If you tell people, for example GPs, that you’re from the child abuse unit, they’ll sit up and listen’ (Esther). Even ‘criminals will help the CPU in providing information’ (Alison).

Another fundamental difference in the nature of the work is that they rarely have to look for the offender: ‘you often know where to locate the offender ... it’s not a problem identifying them’ (Elliot) which results in a further difference, that ‘There is no detection culture’ (Esther). Bearing in mind the victim-led principle, their police-work is more about collecting and collating good quality evidence (see later).

The CPU’s work is seen by its members to be of the greatest social importance. No wonder, it is contrasted with ‘a shed being broken into’ (Des) or ‘dealing with a burglary’ (Elliot). Such crimes are ‘not life and death ... [whereas] child protection is on a different scale’ (Des)

Different kind of officer, different kind of working methods

‘The jelly-tot brigade, that’s what they call us’ (Elliot)

In response to the nature of the crime and the unit’s victim-led focus, working methods are different and are achieved partly by the kind of people who work in the unit. Recruitment to the unit is initially self-selection for application. ‘Women seem attracted to the department’ while many ‘men outside say that they could not cope’ (Rosie). Table 1 reveals that, of the people involved in the study, 3 were men and 4 were women; both the managers were men. Once an officer joins the unit ‘the majority stay ... [but] some tick it off after a year’ (Rosie). The longest ‘stay-er’ has been with the unit eighteen years; they all share the commitment of the team and learn their strategies for survival (see later).

The strength of association and the methods of working within the team gives it a distinct identity, one that differs from much of the police service. With the victim-led philosophy, working practices emerge which ‘... are home-grown, not imposed from the top; it is not too regimented’ (Harvey). These are: emphasis on team co-operation, support and information sharing; multi-agency working; lack of performance targets; smaller case numbers; and use of evidence logging software.

The CPU’s work requires close team working: ‘We’re a team. If one of your team is struggling’ (Des) then ‘you tend to take ... [them] under the wing and carry them for a couple of weeks’ (Alison). This strong sense of team with shared values, language, and metaphor supports the sense of an identity. While this separates them from the main service it helps them, for example the strength of cooperation they receive from

outside (mentioned above) and multi-agency working (discussed below). Multi-agency working provides *'joined-up thinking'* (Des) resulting in working with *'social care, those in education and health'* (Alison). Being *'ahead of other forces in terms of sharing'* (Elliot) where the CPU's *'walls are lower in terms of sharing with third party agencies'* (Des), can also separate them from much of the force. Yet sharing is particularly important when the victim is too vulnerable to go to court and so, Des tells us, *'we give it to the agencies to help to protect the child. It's our intelligence, our information'* (Des).

The unit's work is measured more in terms of successfully helping victims which they contrast with the 'performance culture' said to pervade much police work. Thus, for example, it is more important for a child to *'thank you' and to have 'exit strategies [for them, such as] ... the victim care project'* (Des). As well as the emphasis on quality of outcome, the work simply *'can't be quantified ... one case may have a number of strands.'* (Elliot).

The lack of performance targets and the smaller number of cases is clearly a difference noticed by other parts of the service who

'don't know what we do ... they might look at our workloads and see that we only have a couple of cases ... they don't know about the other enquiries we are conducting that sometimes don't lead to crimes' (Esther)

The phasing of work is different for the CPU with duty weeks (when visits and appointments are kept) alternating with weeks devoted purely to administration and follow-up. Since new case work is only allocated to an officer during her or his duty week, an officer's follow-up work is not interrupted. According to statistics provided by the department, this has led to faster process times for cases.

'Paperwork'

In view of the public attitude and the policing process being more about gathering good evidence, *'Child abuse cases have always been well-documented'* (Elliot). Esther contrasts this with other areas of the police saying *'we are not just doing things for the sake of it.'* To respond to this need, and with great emphasis on information sharing among members, the team use information software called the Child Abuse Tracking System (CATS), an electronic log constantly updated by unit members. Not only does this mean that one has *'a contemporaneous system so you can re-read the log and share with colleagues and partners'* (Esther) but also that *'Once entered on the system [it] cannot be altered at a later date'* (Esther). This helps to produce *'a good log [which] helps you get convictions'* (Harvey). Separate software systems, however, further separates the unit from the rest of the force as, while it *'is at the forefront of developments'* (Esther), helping them to work and respond quickly, there remain *'wider force systems [that]*

need updating and [the unit receives]... emails requesting updates' (Esther). Such an understandable reluctance to repeat data input must also contribute to why the rest of the force 'don't know what we do' (Esther) and perhaps why 'often the police on division are not aware when we get a referral' (Elliot).

Stress, coping, identity, and separateness

The unit experiences many stressors which, in their coping, increases their sense of identity and separateness. Feelings of urgency and emotional discomfort that the members experience must be addressed for the team to function. There are individual starting points such as recalling that *'their miseries are not your miseries'* (Des) and making sure that *'we don't get personally involved. You have to be emotionally detached'* (Rosie). For members of the team, this involves a mentality of *'putting on a suit of armour'*. It is, however, the strong sense of team (see above) as part of the necessary close working and as a coping strategy that creates a strong identity and therefore separateness.

The unique position of the unit with *'a different skill set'* (Elliot) further strengthens internal bonds and separates the unit off to the point where they feel that *'we're sort of at the periphery of the police'* (Alison), that *'We've always been on the edge. We're not central'* (Des) and most tellingly *'we are not really like the police'* (Elliot).

Fears of re-organisation

The CPU members expressed concerns that they might be absorbed into a larger unit or disbanded. This might be because of their feeling of team and identity but is expressed in terms of reduced effectiveness. For example Esther, who speculated being merged into a larger Public Protection Unit (PPU) responsible for a wider remit, feared they *'might get lost in it'* and that in the PPU *'you are often taken off the case to deal with other cases like taking a report of a theft or something'*. This last comment echoes previous contrasts between the CPU and those concerned with *'shed break-ins'*.

Discussion

In Douglas' (1970) terms, police services have historically been characterised as high-grid/high-group with hierarchical and rule-driven ways of working; deviance from them is frowned upon. The CPU is nearest to Douglas' (1970) low-grid/high-group (or perhaps sect – Douglas, 1993) culture with the group's boundary not being fully coterminous with or a sub-set of the police service in which it resides. We can see

Bellaby's (1999) notion of risk immunisation with their management of the emotional risk, for example the metaphorical 'suit of armour'. The CPU's cultural values appear to have greater alignment with their partner agencies such as social services. While both cultures (traditional police and the CPU police) value group boundaries, they can be seen to contrast with regard to grid; the flatter, less differentiated structure has grown partly out of the need of its members for support. Interestingly, while the need for support is recognised by the service, it is not always forthcoming in a readily acceptable format (in this respect see Brunsdon et al, 2012).

The development of the separate culture can be seen as a response to the contingencies of their work. In Perrow's (1970) terms, the differing and contingent goals lead to two different technologies: the traditional police role being set up for 'routine' working while the CPU is more akin to 'craft' working. A 'one best way' (Nalbandian & Klinger, 1980) view of management did not work in the area of child protection; a system was developed that was 'fit for purpose' (i.e. an optimal fit between organisational form and its environmental/shaping forces) (Donaldson 2001). Bellamy et al (2008) have also noted the need for non-hierarchical structures with officer discretion in other aspects of police work.

The high-group/low-grid culture of the CPU not fitting with the high-grid/high-group culture has survived up to now, partly because it achieves what it aims to achieve, i.e. protecting children and values espoused by most in society (and certainly all parts of the police service). For Douglas (1992), had the CPU not been successful, the high-grid/high-group culture would have been quick to use this forensically; they would blame the low-grid/high-group culture of the CPU for the error with typical accusations such as their not having a sufficiently structured hierarchy of command, their not following the rules (whoever's they were) or perhaps that they worked too closely with their victims.

Our case study reveals how contingent forces change and their effects. At a wider socio-politico-economic level, the CPU has been part of a machinery that potentiates and operates society's wishes regarding child protection. We now witness an emergence of the potentially contrary contingent force of constant cost reduction along with the colonising propensities of the predominant (hierarchical) culture among the rest of the police service. In Perrow's (1970) terms, there is a wish to achieve the same targets (a major contingency force) with a different organisational form.

The complexities of identity for members of the CPU highlight the interplay of culture and contingency. In that old linguistic paradox: they were both *a part* of the police service and yet *apart* from many in the police service. Similarly, there are characteristics of identity which they share with the other agencies but clearly they are not part of them, a matter considered by Holdaway (1986). Thirdly, CPU members while sympathetic to their client group, know there is a boundary between them. Thus contingencies and cultures pull them in various directions. Boundaries are of differing strengths and degrees of 'porosity'. Again we see their precipice. The members have to negotiate a way through that leaves them with some level of

intactness. Identities, therefore, can be frail leading to increased concerns regarding dissolution of the CPU.

In organisational terms, the CPU, while working very effectively is resource intensive and therefore open to scrutiny when savings are sought. Being non-standard and dealing with difficult cases, we witness an uncomfortable, unstable relationship with the rest of the police service with which it exists dynamically but never quite securely. While in times of 'plenty' this has not been a problem, competing for resources makes cultural differences more visible. Further, as these cultures identify different risks (i.e. challenges to the cultural classification – see above), each becomes a risk to the other.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates the relationship between culture and contingencies for organisations in the real world. Cultural forms would appear to be driven partly by the contingencies they experience (this too is culturally mediated). Once the culture has developed, it becomes a contingency for other cultures. The different cultural form developed in the CPU, while ideal for its working, cannot survive in the face of a culture whose values of standardisation and rule-following become ascendant. As the colonising proclivities of the main police service culture find favour with the new contingencies, it would appear that the border between the CPU and the rest of the service is being reformulated. The array of complex interactions at these institutional, professional and individual borders determines the play of identity and difference within and between cultures, and calls for even greater attention.

Whether and how the co-existence of the unit and the rest of the police service will continue will depend, partly, on whether the CPU can continue to achieve its aims. Perhaps more interestingly, is the possibility that should the CPU be absorbed by another unit within the police service, the bureaucratic culture might be thwarted by the contingencies of child protection work. So unless for example, social pressures change and the victim-led philosophy becomes replaced by a prosecutory-driven one, the child protection officers might still have to operate as they did before - and continue to be considered with some suspicion by the rest of the force.

The study reminds us that managing risk is not a universal process. Different cultures identify, and therefore manage, different risks. The risks can be other cultures which can lead to their demise for no other reason than they do not fit. It is not only a professional precipice upon which CPU members stand but also an organisational one.

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