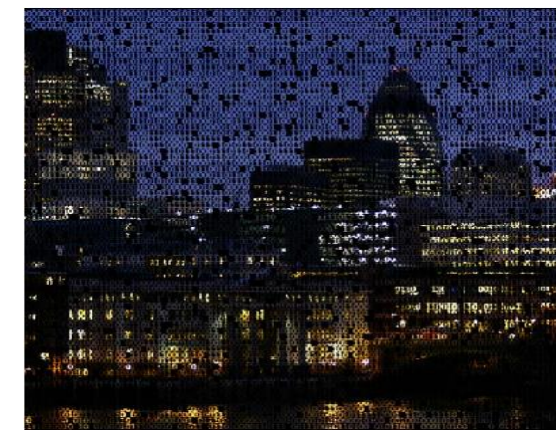


How managerialism and the use of targets have, and continue to, impact the efficacy UK police force.

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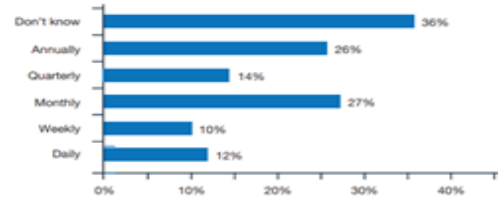


Managerialism is the reliance on the use of a target based approach in any industry in which there are often positive consequences for hitting said targets but also, sometimes, negative consequences for failing to do so.

Lincoln at the moment is facing these problems in their attempt to acquire more vehicles with ANPR technology. Part of the requirement for more is that certain targets are met with the use of the current ones.

Knowledge of targets used in 2017

This bar chart below is from a survey performed in 2017 which asked over 6,000 police officers how often they thought that they were having their records looked at and compared against targets for their local area.



As we can see, over a third were unaware that their records were being checked, a fact which should be worrying not only to those in charge of collating the targets but also to those who should be informing their officers that numbers are being checked.

Can targets lead to dysfunctional behaviour in order to hit targets?

Deliberate gaming is one of the most widely recognised and reported issues associated with targets. Numerical targets can create perverse incentives, which can lead to unintended behavioural consequences.

Examples of dysfunctional behaviour in policing attributed to target chasing have been well publicised. This includes reports that crime recording had been distorted or diluted by the desire to meet crime level targets through not recording crimes or through the miss-recording (for example 'downgrading' a burglary to a theft). Other examples include pressure on officers to "trawl the margins" for detections, and encouraging criminals to admit to other crimes they had not committed. There have also been instances where the emphasis shifted to solving minor (or easier "volume crime") crimes to improve figures instead of more high harm or complex crime.

Concerns have also been raised regarding the over-interpretation of data used for target setting/checking (e.g. monthly swings in crime rates) and the knee-jerk reaction of some forces to fluctuations which may be within normal confidence intervals. If setting targets in the form of rates (such as conviction rates), these rates can be 'gamed' by reducing the denominator rather than increasing the numerator (and the metric of both the numerator and denominator should be consistent); likewise using rankings as targets can be meaningless as one force's rank position can improve simply by others worsening. The use of league tables has also seen some forces chasing an improvement in ranking where there is no statistically significant difference between successive rank positions.

Are targets too crude for the complexity of the system?

The central argument here is that public services, like the police, are complex 'human activity' systems, which cannot be measured in a simplistic numerical snapshot approach i.e. they rely on human behaviour, which is subject to influence, and not a standardised or autonomous output. When tackling crime, the needs of the police to meet simplistic hard targets can end up competing with the needs of the public.

What impact does the use of targets have on the officer's opinions of their work?

The pie chart to the left shows the huge disparity between the amount of officers who think that targets help and those that think that they do not. There were a few issues which came up a multitude of times, the main being that targets can lead to a distortion of priorities where individuals have to focus too much time on the wrong (or less important) things and teams/forces put resources in the wrong places. Another interesting thought was that targets can impede the delivery of a quality service, in particular on putting the interests of victims first, suggesting that sometimes officers would be tempted to focus on fulfilling targets rather than providing their essential services.

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The impact targets will have on Cybercrime

The UK has already acknowledged it's tardiness in reacting to the epidemic of internet crime and target focussed policing may exacerbate the issue with resources being focussed in the wrong areas in order to fulfil demanding quotas.

Conclusion

The use of binary comparisons can never equate to the real life situations that officers face on a day to day basis and are therefore unfit to be used to ascertain the efficacy of a police force.

The findings of this review show that what appears to work most effectively is where leaders focus on the right mix of performance measures to understand the complex and changing nature of demands on policing; and where they set a culture that creates an environment where officers and staff are empowered to use their professional discretion to do what they believe is right for victims;

