

Book Review

***Developing and Maintaining Police–
Researcher Partnerships to Facilitate Research
Use: A Comparative Analysis***

by Jeff Rojek, Peter Martin, and Geoffrey P. Alpert

Springer, New York

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Reviewed by Alan Beckley



This short book, which calls itself a monograph, contains some useful thoughts and practical solutions to the age-old problem of fusing practical policing with the rigours of science and research to achieve evidence-based policing. The authors admit that the contents of their analyses are limited to their experiences in only two nations: the United States and Australia, but these are large countries with vastly disparate policing systems; therefore useful lessons can be learned. Perhaps there would have been more value in including material from other countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom (UK) in greater depth to explore different perspectives, as these are mentioned only in passing. However, there is a significant amount of information contained in the book to offer advice and support to practitioners and researchers who are seeking to work together to evaluate, research or assess policing operations, policies, practices, or procedures.

The book compares and contrasts the police research environment in each of the two countries and finds that there is a different climate in each. While many of the thousands of police departments in America are prepared to respect and welcome work with higher education institutes, this is not the situation in Australia where misunderstandings and mistrust exist between police practitioners and university researchers. Although there is a long history of police research in the United States, which dates back to the early-1900s, the book reports difficulty in establishing permission to research in Australia and can find few examples of successful police/university relationships. One of the authors is a senior police

officer in Queensland Police Service and there is an example of successful collaboration there and a suggestion that the way forward for Australia is through the Centre for Excellence in Policing and Security (CEPS) based at Griffith University (Queensland, Australia) although that organisation is suffering lack of research funding.

The main value in the book is where the authors carefully analyse the challenges of police/researcher partnerships: it is this area that both parties; police agencies and universities, should learn and understand more about each other's needs and requirements. The book lists the fundamental concerns from police organisations as:

- What would be the investment from the police organisation?
- In particular, what vital information would the researcher require?
- What control would the organisation have over the purpose to which this information was applied? and
- Importantly, how could this really improve policing when police officers where [sic] best placed to know about policing? (p.65)

The book contains very helpful sections on identifying the constituents of successful police–researcher partnership arrangements; it also explains thoroughly fundamental questions to each of the parties, examining the situation from each of the perspectives. Clearly, there are different perspectives and each of the parties to the partnership has objectives of its own to fulfil, which might not always be compatible with the others. To successfully form a positive partnership with a police force, researchers are recommended to have the following attributes:

- (1) Exude interest in the police context;
- (2) Possess excellent interpersonal communications skills;
- (3) Unselfish in their approaches—willing to give as well as take;
- (4) Open, honest, and transparent;
- (5) Outcomes focused (motivated to deliver on their commitments within a reasonable time frame);
- (6) Flexible in the way they negotiate their position and in the outcomes they desire; and

- (7) Respectful and understanding of the chain of command and culture of the police organisation. (p.54)

That is quite a long list of desirable traits which will be difficult, but not impossible, to achieve in total. These are issues to explore at the inception of the relationship; as the book points out that discovery at a later stage of a hidden agenda has led to mistrust and misunderstandings in the past.

On the positive side, the book cites evidence that recently a higher percentage of police officers have studied to under-graduate, post-graduate and PhD level. This has resulted in more understanding of the value of rigorous and robust evaluation and assessment of the results and outcomes of new policing techniques or testing the actual effectiveness of old tools and techniques. This finding bodes well for the future of evidence-based policing when police and researchers have a clearer understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities.

It is books such as this that can build greater trust within the police service to engender confidence to commission and use validated research and evaluation of police services to ensure that public money is spent wisely, in the way that society intended while demonstrating the best possible value.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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