"Stress and leadership development: How does distress, eustress and catastrophic stress impact the development of senior police leaders? "

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Background

Literature snapshot

Methodology and sample

Findings

Recommendations

Queensland Police Service (QPS)

- **Comprises one of eight police services in Australia**

- **2nd largest state (geographically)**
  - i. **7 x size Great Britain**
  - ii. **2.5 x size Texas**

- **Pop. approx. 5 million**
- **11,880 police (3rd largest)**

Research question

"**Stress and leadership development: How does distress, eustress and catastrophic stress impact the development of senior police leaders?** "

Queensland Police Service

Constable	Constable (5 years)	Senior Constable	Sergeant	Senior Sergeant	Inspector	Superintendent	Chief Superintendent	Assistant Commissioner	Deputy Commissioner	Commissioner

2.5% of sworn population

11,556 rank and file officers

306 Commissioned officers

15 Senior Executives

Literature snapshot: police leadership development and stress

•Policing differs markedly (from other organisational contexts) and impacts leaders role

• Little empirically validated evidence investigating link between stress and police leadership development (note: stress usually couched as 'challenge')

•Organisational factors (as opposed to job related factors) more likely to cause officer stress

•Officers' development: <u>feedback</u> (Campbell & Kodz, 2011 Schafer, 2009) and <u>support</u> (Jones, 2018; Muller, Maclean, & Biggs, 2009) <u>from superiors was critical</u>

Is stress good or bad in the workplace?

1908 **Yerkes-Dodson law**

Arousal-performance phenomenon =Yerkes-Dodson law.
a certain amount of anxiety can enhance performance
too much can impair it (ie; severe stage fright).
Stress Performance Connection

Karasek's (1979) Demand-Control Model

Methodology: semi-structured interviews

Sample

- Random stratified sampling (100% response)

- 20 commissioned officers

- Av. age: 51 yrs (42 yrs – 59 yrs)

- Av. length service: 31 yrs

- 17 males & 3 females

- 80% - detectives

- 75% degree qualified

- Most with remote/regional experience

Queensland Police Commissioned Officers' Union of Employees
'REGISTERED 1925'

Challenging (workplace) experiences

Challenging workplace experiences

- Commanding major disasters/incidents/events

- Typically short, sharp, intense periods

- Implementing change

- Difficult people (i.e. bosses and staff)

- Transition to manager (i.e. stepping up)

Findings

Eustress

- Sufficient challenge critical for learning

- Rapid advancements in learning (i.e. leadership/ confidence/communication skills)

- Preparation and skill levels adequate (some stretch necessary = max. learning)

- Sufficient resources & support (primarily superiors) - pivotal in facilitating net career benefit

"It's the challenge that gets you going…if you're not stretched as a leader every now and again, you're going backwards" (I:8)

Findings

- 'Thrown in deep-end" ("sink or swim")

- Feeling: ill-equipped/failure/pressured

- Differing expectations (officers & superiors)

- Lack of support (primarily from superiors)

- Increased workload/responsibility/scrutiny

- Cultural demands (i.e. "presenteeism")

- Conflicting demands (organisational versus community expectations)

Distress

"My operational currency was low, so I was quite nervous and scared … It was like turning up to a new school and not knowing anyone" (Is: 2)".

Findings

Catastrophic stress

- Macho culture: reluctance to reveal frailties

- Feeling over-whelmed/abandoned

- Confidence damaged (sometimes irreversibly)

- Toxic work environment

- Relationship breakdown (with superiors)

"It basically felt like it was out of control … I was overwhelmed and basically became non-operational … I was just standing there with limited capacity to understand what was going on around me" (I: 14).

Recommendations:
Mediating the adverse impacts of stress when developing police leaders

Long-term: Culture & Infrastructure

i. Grow supportive leadership culture

ii. Align culture & infrastructure (i.e. support systems/processes)

iii. Increase diversity within leadership ranks

Short-term: People Capability

i. Re-align promotion & selection criteria

ii. Train superiors in supportive behaviours

iii. Emphasize mentoring and role modelling

iv. Build support model for on-the-job development

v. Tailor support & training (one size doesn't fit all)

vi. Provide support early (in an officers' career)

QUESTIONS?

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