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The National Intelligence Model: key lessons from early research

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The National Intelligence Model: key lessons from early research

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This document summarises the results of an evaluation of the early implementation of the National Intelligence Model (NIM) in three police forces chosen as pilot areas. It also provides a brief outline of the Model itself.

The research was based primarily upon fieldwork carried out in 2002 in the three force areas. It also drew on information from the National Implementation Team about progress across England and Wales up to Spring, 2003. It should be noted that, with an obligation on all forces to be 'NIM-compliant' by April 2004, change has been rapid in this field of activity with much progress being made on many of the issues raised - the recommendations should therefore be viewed in that context. The findings provide only an indication of the kinds of issues that police forces have faced in implementing the Model, rather than a definitive evaluation of progress either nationally or in the three forces examined.

The full report (John and Maguire, 2004) is published online by Cardiff University at: <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/publications/workingpapers/index.html> .

Main elements of the Model

The National Intelligence Model (NIM) represents an effort to promote effective intelligence led-policing on a national basis and to standardise intelligence-related structures, processes and practices across all police services in England and Wales. It is essentially the design for a comprehensive 'business process' to rationalise and systematise the ways in which the police service handles information and makes key decisions about the deployment of resources.

Products

The NIM is built around the production and use of four broad categories of 'product'.

- analytical products;
- intelligence products;
- knowledge products; and,
- system products.

These may be briefly described as follows:

Analytical products

Primarily brief reports drawn up by specialist intelligence units on the basis of analysis of information and intelligence from a variety of sources (within and outside the police). They vary in form and content according to the techniques employed and the sources of data from which they are drawn. For example, the requirements for, and outputs from, "demographic analysis" will differ markedly from those for "network" or "risk" analyses. The full range of these products is as follows: results analysis, crime pattern analysis, market profile, demographic analysis, criminal business profile, network analysis, risk analysis, target profile analysis, operational intelligence assessment. Essentially the majority of these products represent a key stage in the translation of information into intelligence.

Intelligence products

Some of the analytical products listed above are combined or developed into intelligence products, which may be broadly subdivided into strategic assessments; tactical assessments; target profiles; and problem profiles (hotspots or crime series). These are used to inform decisions on the prioritisation of problems and targets, to allocate ownership of problems to particular staff or units, and as the basis for planning of operational responses.

Knowledge products

These are products that will inform future development of the Model itself and maintain quality within it. Examples include the creation of protocols at each level covering access to data (e.g. for research or for inter-agency access); Data Protection Act guidelines; intelligence training; and ECHR compliant codes of practice for policing activities.

System products

These are designed to ensure that appropriate technical and computer equipment is available to the Model for its effective operation and to minimise inefficient practices such as the use of multiple IS platforms that act as a barrier to the sharing of information. They are also used to ensure that access is secured across the levels (see next section) and to other UK agencies and international law enforcement bodies.

Tasking and co-ordinating groups

The key users (and in some cases, producers) of these four types of product are the core bodies which drive the whole process, tasking and co-ordinating groups (TCGs). These groups, of which the core members are representatives of intelligence units and senior officers with operational responsibilities, meet regularly to undertake informed assessments and prioritisation of problems (including crime, criminals, disorder, and the opportunities for crime) and to plan, co-ordinate and manage police responses. In doing so, they use and request the further development of intelligence products, the contents and conclusions of which should underpin both prioritisation and operational decisions. This process takes place at three defined levels.

- Level 1 covering local issues (primarily at Basic Command Unit level);
- Level 2 covering cross-border issues (at force and inter-force level) and,
- Level 3 covering serious and organised crime, on a national or international scale.

The Model adopts a holistic view of the resources (including human resources) available to the intelligence unit to develop actionable products or to create new information and intelligence on subjects that have been prioritised. Its inclusive approach to intelligence responsibilities, whereby specific tasks are given, for example, to patrol officers as well as designated proactive staff, is potentially an important factor in creating a general 'intelligence culture' and resolving some of the difficulties associated with the use of intelligence in the police service (see, for example, Maguire and John, 1995; Ratcliffe, 2002; Cope 2004).

Research aims and methods

The full report (John and Maguire, 2004) describes the results of an evaluation of the early implementation of the NIM. The research produced a good deal of information about the experiences of three different forces trying to put the NIM into practice, as well as about broader developments across the country. Due to the implementation of the Model being in its infancy, evidence relating to outcomes of the Model is tentative at this stage. Nevertheless, all forces were required to become NIM compliant by April 2004, and it is hoped that this report will allow other forces to draw on these experiences in developing and furthering their own implementation strategies.

The research was focused mainly on three forces that were originally chosen as development sites to act, under close guidance from a national implementation team, as pilots for a general roll-out of the Model. In each development site, the evaluators adopted a variety of research methods, depending to some extent on the force's approach to implementing the Model. These included:

- collection of documents relating to the implementation scheme and process;
- interviews with those responsible for force roll-out;
- interviews (in 25 BCUs) with those responsible for implementation at BCU level;

- analysis of NIM related documentation, particularly intelligence products (strategic and tactical assessments, target and problem profiles) and a variety of analytical products;
- observation of tasking and co-ordination groups and other NIM related meetings and processes;
- semi-structured interviews with 31 intelligence analysts in the three pilot forces; and
- seventy-five returns from a self-completion questionnaire distributed to delegates at a national Analysts Conference in Summer 2002.

The research team also visited the National Intelligence Model Implementation Project (NIMIP) team offices at intervals to interview members of the team and to collect relevant data, including information from the gap analysis and baseline assessments covering all forces.

Implementation of the National Intelligence Model

The national picture

This section summarises progress with the implementation in all police forces in England and Wales between Spring 2001 and Spring 2003. It is based on comparison of an initial gap analysis undertaken by the NIMIP team and two baseline assessments carried out one year and two years later. These assessments adopted a simple 'traffic lights' system, whereby specific aspects of each force's progress with NIM development were categorised as 'red', 'amber' or 'green' (corresponding roughly to unsatisfactory, moderate and good). They examined progress at both divisional and force levels (Levels One and Two). The main findings were that, over the two years:

- there was a clear increase in senior management commitment to the NIM;
- the total number of analysts increased significantly;
- by 2003, over three-quarters of forces were adjudged 'green' in terms of the structure of their Intelligence Units;
- there was a strong improvement in the quality of strategic assessments at both Level One and Level Two, only a handful of forces remaining 'red' in 2003;
- the setting of control strategies by strategic TCGs improved from a very low base to 40 per cent of forces being adjudged 'green' in 2003. However, over a third remained 'red';
- there was a steady improvement in the quality of tactical assessments, although these remained in the 'red' zone at Level Two in 30 per cent of forces;
- one of the greatest improvements was in the proportion of forces categorised as 'green' in terms of the appropriate staff attending tasking and coordinating groups (TCGs): from a quarter in 2001 to over 80 per cent in 2003; and
- similarly, by 2003 the great majority of TCGs were being chaired by officers of appropriate rank.

The three 'pilot' forces

Where the three forces (Surrey, Lancashire and the West Midlands) studied in depth are concerned, after a slow start major progress was made in the last six months of the study. (There was a partial exception in Surrey, where a considerable proportion of analytical resources was abstracted to major inquiries – although this was to some extent mitigated by strong and effective project management in the initial set up period that established many of

the NIM structures). However, a number of issues continued to cause difficulties in one or more of the areas.

Leadership and commitment

Presence of these qualities was found to be essential to successful implementation, and lack of committed leadership could hold it back significantly. This was true not just at ACPO level, but among Chairs of TCGs, both in and outside meetings. All three forces saw marked increases in commitment to the NIM during the research period.

Tasking and co-ordinating groups

The main problems found with the work of both strategic and tactical TCGs were:

- limited input from partners and over-reliance on police generated information;
- over-domination of concerns about performance indicators; and
- conflicts between competing priorities (especially national and local priorities).

Where tactical TCGs in particular are concerned, further problems were identified in the variable frequency of meetings, the seniority of Chairs (which in turn could affect attendance) and in some cases the conduct of meetings (which could sometimes ignore analytical evidence and/or come to resemble 'resource bidding' sessions).

Intelligence products

The main problems around intelligence products were the variety in quality (and availability) of strategic assessments, and the lack of standardisation (and again variation in quality) of tactical assessments. Clear training needs were apparent here. However, there were also strong signs that quality improved rapidly with 'practice', providing that analysts received encouragement and constructive feedback from TCG members. Without this, there could be dangers of a 'vicious circle' developing, whereby TCGs lose respect for products and those providing them lose the incentive to put energy into improving their quality.

Standardisation

It is felt that the NIMIP team missed an opportunity to encourage standardisation of practices and products at an early stage, and that considerable variation has developed which will be difficult to change, as forces and BCUs have already become accustomed to their own ways of doing things. This is a problem which needs attention, as standard products are important to the links across and between levels.

Analysts

The main problem found concerning analysts (apart from those mentioned above) was that of retention of good staff: this was made difficult mainly because of low pay, the lack of a well-developed career and promotion structure (though this is changing slowly) and strong competition for good analysts (both within the police force and with other agencies).

'Ownership' and understanding of the Model

There were large 'knowledge gaps' about the NIM among all ranks of officers interviewed, as well as some resistance to it, based both on ignorance about the nature and purposes of the Model and on dislike of its 'academic' structure and language. As its effectiveness depends upon all staff contributing appropriately, this suggests urgent training needs, as well as a need for creative efforts to 'win hearts and minds'.

Outcomes

As the Model was not fully implemented in any of the three forces, it was impossible to carry out a proper evaluation of its 'effectiveness'. Moreover, there are many questions to ask about the appropriate criteria by which its effectiveness should be assessed. However, some tentative attempts were made to seek any indications of possible impact.

First, a comparison was made between the four Operational Command Units (OCUs) in West Midlands assessed by experienced managers as the 'most advanced' in terms of implementing the NIM, and the seven OCUs assessed as 'least advanced'. No significant differences were found in terms of crime reduction between 2001 and 2002. Moreover, the 'least advanced' OCUs had improved their detection rates more than the 'most advanced'. The latter finding may not be surprising, given that the NIM requires a strong focus on certain crime problems, meaning that detections and arrests may fall in other areas of offending.

Second, two 'case studies', one a cross-level, force-wide initiative against drug-related crime, and the other an anti-burglary initiative in one town, offered excellent examples of good practice, as well as some possible indications of effectiveness. For example, the former seems to have contributed substantially to a 46 per cent increase in force arrests for supplying drugs, and there is evidence (through test purchasing exercises) of effective disruption of open drugs markets. There is also some survey evidence of increased public confidence in police actions against drugs. Where the anti-burglary initiative is concerned, there was evidence of an increase in intelligence logs, and around half of the targeted burglars had been arrested.

Recommendations

Taken together, the findings suggest that future attention (and research) should be directed at the following areas, which appear to be among the most problematic in terms of developing the potential of the National Intelligence Model.

- leadership and committed management both in the implementation process and in key operational areas (especially the work of TCGs);
- widening and deepening understanding of the NIM itself;
- communication and 'ownership' issues;
- training of key players and officers generally;
- placing the TCG at the core of policing business and activities;
- when deciding upon priorities and plans, managing conflicts between the demands of performance indicators and messages from local analysis of problems;
- standardisation of products and practices;
- analytical resources and career structures of analysts;
- measurement of impact and effectiveness; and,
- maturing of the Model – symbiotic relationship between intelligence products produced across the three levels.

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