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Exploring organisation commitment in the police
Implications for human resource strategy

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Abstract *Throughout the 1980s and 1990s organisation and management consultants have researched the concept of organisational commitment and report that highly committed employees are likely to be more effective, and be concerned with contributing to organisational improvement. Given the number of police reforms in the UK that are encouraging forces to be more innovative, it is surprising that there have been few studies that have explored commitment amongst police officers. Using survey data (total uniform population 2,898, response rate 43 per cent) the paper analyses the extent to which organisation commitment is shaped by: employees' experiences of behaviour that encourages teamwork, participation, and personal development, provides feedback on role and performance, and avoids a defensive work climate. The results show that these factors strongly influence commitment in all ranks. Significantly the level of commitment varies according to position in the hierarchy, with the majority of constables demonstrating lower commitment, and senior officers (chief inspectors and above) showing higher commitment. Differences in commitment across police divisions are also explored. The paper discusses the limitations in management style and personnel procedures and suggests that strategic human resource management approaches should be adopted in order to increase organisation attachment. A major implication of the findings is that ForceCo needs to develop a long-term strategy of culture change.*

Introduction

The factors that influence commitment are crucial to our understanding of the complexities of police work, since policing represents a unique public service that rests on high levels of employee dedication. It is therefore surprising given recent police reforms in the UK, that there is very little work that has addressed commitment amongst police officers (Beck and Wilson, 1997, 2000). What we mean by commitment and how to nurture it is a central tenet of strategic human resource management (HRM) (Guest, 1987, 1992, 1997, 1998; Purcell, 1995; Storey, 1995; Goss, 1994). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, both academics and management consultants alike have suggested that employee commitment will result in improved human resource performance (Benkhoff, 1997b; Legge, 1995; Guest, 1987, 1992, 1997, 1998). This has spearheaded the move by organisations to invest in employee participation and involvement schemes, and develop HRM strategies that help develop commitment to

organisation goals and performance improvement (Sparrow and Marchington, 1998). Within the policing context the significance of employee commitment is supported by the move towards new police management (NPM) (Cope *et al.*, 1997; Leishman *et al.*, 1995) which emphasises the increased importance of police accountability and the introduction of management procedures to both assess, and improve, police effectiveness. The Posen (HMSO, 1996) and Sheehy (HMSO, 1993) reports in particular have influenced and/or changed police roles and accountabilities and encouraged more innovative and cost reduction crime strategies, both in terms of operational deployment, and also human resource management techniques. Given the changing police context in the UK, the topic of employee commitment is therefore a topical and important issue for police managers.

The literature suggests that committed individuals are less likely to be absent, and are more likely to be concerned with improving both individual and organisational performance (Meyer and Allen, 1997; Mowday, 1998). Following from this it would seem that policy developments should consider what shapes commitment and ensure that these factors are addressed in human resource management systems and procedures. Thus, there is a need as O'Reilly (1991, p. 247) suggests to:

> ... understand what commitment is and how it is developed. By understanding the underlying psychology of commitment we can think about how to design systems to develop such an attachment among employees.

This present study seeks to address the deficiencies in police commitment literature by exploring the determinants of commitment and consider the implications this has for human resource policy development. Our approach is an explorative one and is sensitive of the need to re-examine the concept of commitment in light of NPM strategies (Cope *et al.*, 1997; Leishman *et al.*, 1995), and also broader business and economic changes (Baruch, 1998; Mowday, 1998; Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999). We draw on "live" human resource and management issues to help formulate our commitment model and subsequent analysis. Unlike other studies our case data is taken from the total police population and thus enables us to analyse differences across ranks and specialist police divisions.

The paper first reviews the links between HRM and NPM, which reveals the significance of HRM strategic approaches being applied to the policing context. The discussion then examines the theoretical background to organisation commitment and considers its relevance to police organisation and management. Our analysis of police commitment is based on survey data gleaned from the total uniform population of a large police force in England – ForceCo (see ForceCo, 1998). Our findings at ForceCo suggest that organisational commitment is strongly linked to the amount of management and organisation support and performance feedback experienced. It was found that this applied across all ranks and all operational and police headquarter divisions.

HRM strategy and new public management
The police force is a unique public service that relies on employee dedication in what is a turbulent, ambiguous and demanding role (Reiner, 1992; Leishman *et al.*, 1996; Brodeur, 1998). The image and substance of policing also emphasises the importance of pride in the service, ethical work practices and a strong community orientation; thus the commitment of force employees is critical to strategic and operational resource deployment. However, the role and responsibilities of the police are constantly being reviewed. Police forces are having to adapt and be receptive to changing economic and social developments (Bayley, 1994; Leishman *et al.*, 1995, 1996; Cope *et al.*, 1997; Bryett, 1999), and meet these changes by developing more innovative policing techniques (Goldstein, 1990; Brodeur, 1998). These developments are underpinned by NPM ideology. The components of NPM includes an emphasis on more decentralised structures, hands-on professional management, explicit standards of performance and the introduction of market-based economics (Leishman *et al.*, 1995). The literature acknowledges that this will impact on police operations strategy, and change accountabilities and police force structures (see Loveday (1999) in particular for examples), but research has not explored sufficiently how NPM marks a turning point for not only the way police tasks are executed, but also the way that police personnel are managed. The move towards NPM in police services, combined with increasing pressures to develop more cost-effective and proactive policing methods, calls for the greater involvement of employment specialists in the development and implementation of human resource strategies and policies if this is to be achieved.

The nature of HRM has been studied extensively by both American and English academics and all draw on the strategic aspects of resource planning to support business development (Guest, 1987, 1992, 1997, 1998; Storey, 1992, 1995; Purcell, 1995). A key component of strategic HRM is the requirement to nurture employee commitment to the organisation's value systems and corporate goals, since it is believed this will result in enhanced employee performance and productivity (Guest, 1987, 1992). This is achieved by an array of structural and job design techniques:

(1) *Structure dimensions*:
- flatter organisation structure;
- co-ordination via shared goals; and
- communication horizontally and vertically.

(2) *Job design*:
- greater involvement in decision making;
- emphasis on work teams (adapted from Goss, 1994, p. 102)

We can link the above to the changing police environment spearheaded by NPM ideology. As part of the developments to measure the effectiveness of

police services there is now much more emphasis on the linkage between individual, departmental and force policing plans and targets (Reiner, 1998; Brodeur, 1998). This is facilitated by more advanced communication systems horizontally and vertically. Initiatives such as problem oriented policing (POP) and community policing require greater control and autonomy over operational tasks by individual police officers who usually work in community teams (Goldstein, 1990; Reiner, 1992; Rosenbaum, 1998; Brodeur, 1998). There is less evidence of flatter organisation structures in police forces though in the force we worked with there were attempts to eliminate the "rank mentality" (ForceCo Chief Constable) and encourage open and free communication between all personnel.

Whereas there is evidence that some forces are re-evaluating their human resource function (Pickhard, 1995; Rana, 1999; Loveday, 1999) it is fair to say that across the UK the Human Resource Management department is conceptualised in terms of a personnel administration function that manages pay and benefits, resource deployment, grievances and discipline, training and performance assessment documentation and employee relations with the different unions and police representative bodies. There is rarely a co-ordinated strategic approach taken; rather procedures and standards are informed by operational police requirements. The head of human resources is usually a time-served ex-commanding officer with little or no education in human resource management, and supported by very few personnel and employment specialists. If we are to fully understand the relational dynamics of police commitment there is thus a requirement to consider how human resource systems can foster or weaken employee attachment to the organisation.

Organisation commitment: theoretical background
Commitment has been extensively researched over the last 20 years. Studies suggest that committed workers contribute to the organisation in more positive ways than less committed employees (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Porter *et al.* (1974) proposed that commitment was mainly concerned with the "relative strength of individuals identification with, and involvement in, a particular organisation". Porter *et al.* (1974, p. 604) argue this is shaped by three factors:

(1) a strong belief and commitment to organisational goals and values;

(2) a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organisation; and

(3) a strong desire to retain membership of the organisation.

These three dimensions referred to as identification, involvement and loyalty comprise the well accepted organisational commitment questionnaire (OCQ). However, this theoretical framework views commitment as one-dimensional and ignores the fact that police personnel and other professionals may have multiple commitments including, *inter alia*, professional associations, for example the Police Federation or the Black Police Officers Association.

Although recent theoretical developments in the commitment literature have highlighted the importance of employees' "multiple commitments" (Meyer and Allen, 1997; Mowday, 1998; Baruch, 1998; Johnson, 1999), the most consistent relationships found in the research have been between affective organisational commitment and various performance indices. Affective commitment relates to the way individuals view their employment relationship, and how far their "mind sets" are congruent with the goals and values of the organisation (see Mowday, 1998; Meyer and Allen, 1997; Beck and Wilson, 2000, pp. 115-16). Affective commitment thus expresses a more holistic approach to conceptualising about the nature of the employee relationship as it rests on the individuals "psychological bond" and "loyalty to the organisation" (O'Reilly, 1991, p. 247). Consequently managers have been principally concerned with identifying how and why affective commitment develops, thereby enabling them to optimise the commitment levels of their employees.

Our analysis thus focuses on affective commitment since this underpins HRM strategic approaches to employee management and development. As Guest (1998, p. 42) highlights:

> The concept of organisation commitment lies at the heart of any analysis of HRM. Indeed the whole rationale for introducing HRM policies is to increase levels of commitment so that positive outcomes can ensue.

In the following section we review police commitment literature and outline commitment studies that helped us shape our own measurement of the factors that affect police commitment. We group them under two broad headings, demographic factors and managerial factors.

Police and commitment
Demographic factors and commitment
There is limited research knowledge on police commitment. However what research exists focuses on the individuals' socialisation within the police service and relates to variables such as tenure and age. The pioneering work by Van Maneen (1975) provided early data on the nature of organisational commitment amongst police recruits. He surveyed a group of police trainees at their entry into the profession and continued to assess their commitment throughout certain stages in their police career and found that their commitment decreased with time and experience. He attributed this to the unique and powerful cultural values that shape police behaviour and action. Beck and Wilson's (1997) study of 739 officers in the New South Wales service also saw the inverse correlation between organisational commitment and length of service. However, their study highlighted the significance of the socialisation processes operating within police culture whereby new recruits were often posted into positions where there were older, experienced and more "cynical" officers whose views had a long-lasting "destructive" effect on new intakes. A further study of 479 police officers by Beck and Wilson (2000) (using

Porter *et al.*'s (1974) OCQ measure) analysed the development trend of affective commitment and also found that commitment decreased with tenure.

Managerial factors and commitment
Research has revealed a variety of indices which shape commitment. They include: the level of organisation support an employee feels; their involvement in decision making, and the amount of feedback received about job role and performance (Porter *et al.*, 1974; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Beck and Wilson's (1997) study of the New South Wales police specifically highlighted these themes. In their study senior managers were criticised for failing to support lower level officers, as well as limiting employee participation in decision making. In addition their analysis revealed that feedback was largely inadequate since it tended to be verbally expressed and often negative. In their follow up study Beck and Wilson (2000, p. 132) concluded that police agencies may have unique organisation and managerial characteristics that flag a lack of "support, justice and value" as they build on an "inventory of bad experiences".

The importance of management in shaping commitment is also illustrated by Benkhoff (1997a) who reported that employees who regard their superior as competent, who like their management style, and trust their superior, more often than not share the values of the organisation and feel proud to be members.

Overall the literature suggests that commitment is shaped by the way an individual is managed. What we do not know due to the paucity of police commitment literature is whether these managerial factors apply to police contexts, or whether there are other factors specific to being a police officer that will affect their organisation commitment.

If police employees are to take on board the challenge posed by NPM and restructuring processes police managers will need to ensure that police employees are committed to organisation and task role changes. There is thus a need to explore the dynamics of police officer and manager relationships to see if these influence commitment, as well as consider how developments in HRM systems can foster employee attachment to the organisation. This present study attempts to address these issues through an analysis of managerial behaviours affecting commitment. The following sections explore in more detail our research methodology.

Research approach
The purpose of this study is to examine the levels of organisation commitment and its determinants in a large UK police force. The analysis will focus on differences in commitment between ranks and specialist police divisions. One of the authors is engaged in a longitudinal study exploring the relationship between HRM strategies and organisation performance. To help formulate the questionnaire design semi-structured interviews were held with a cross sample of operational and executive staff and this assisted in the unravelling of

managerial and organisational themes. The questionnaire sought to identify performance improvement behaviours, and consider how management encouraged or discouraged these behaviours. In addition a key aim was to uncover the extent to which employees were aware of policing strategies. Our commitment measure thus emerged from police managers' conceptualisations of commitment (highlighted by Metcalfe, 1999). The "unique characteristics" and "unsupportive" behaviours identified in previous police studies (Van Maneen, 1975; Beck and Wilson, 1997, 2000) we felt needed more detailed explanation specifically in relation to management and employee relations. The following propositions guided the construction of our research instrument.

P1. Organisation commitment will reduce with length of service.

P2. Organisation commitment will increase with rank seniority.

P3. Managerial factors will have a greater influence on commitment than demographic factors.

Research methodology
The survey population
ForceCo is one of the largest UK police agencies servicing sparsely populated rural districts as well as heavily populated industrialised regions. The structure of the force is based on a centralised headquarters which comprises personnel and crime support services (e.g. IT and crime statistics), as well as specialised police services including crime reduction, traffic and tactical operations. Ten district divisions are located throughout the county. The questionnaire was administered to the total police population of 2,898 police officers. A 43 percent return rate was obtained. An analysis of the profile of the returns shows that it closely matches the whole population's rank profile with the exception of special constables (part-time police officers). Appendix 1 gives full details of the population, questionnaire returns, and demographic data. The large number of questionnaires returned allows us to include a comparison that includes senior ranks and different divisions, that previous studies, because of their smaller sample size, have had insufficient power to do (Cohen, 1988).

Commitment measure
Identification with organisation values, strategic priorities and commitment
Our measure of commitment reflects recent theoretical developments that question traditional organisation commitment measurements (for critique of this, see Benkhoff, 1997a, 1997b; Siegal and Sisaye, 1997; Baruch, 1999; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000). Our commitment definition highlights the significance of an individual's identification and commitment to an organisation's values. This definition relates to some extent to Meyer and Allen's (1997, p. 118) affective commitment scale, but in our measure we make explicit reference to policing priorities and goals, since these formed the basis on which police managers evaluated the commitment of police employees. In addition our

measure considers the extent to which individuals will engage in and contribute to improving performance (see also Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000).

Guest (1992) and Siegal and Sisaye (1997) state that organisation identification can be a prime motivator since individuals who closely identify themselves with their employer are more likely to take on a diverse range of challenging work activities, and are more adaptive to prescribed managerial and organisational changes. This reflects the aims of strategic HRM and NPM ideology which suggests that committed employees will demonstrate achievement and innovative orientated behaviours (see Guest (1992; 1998) for HRM, and Cope *et al*. (1997) and Leishman *et al*. (1995) for NPM). Thus the value of our measure is that it represents managerial and organisation constructions of commitment and reflects the "real life" concerns of trying to manage commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1997, pp. 66-87). Consequently, to measure organisational commitment we pose questions designed to assess pride in the force, commitment to, and understanding of strategic direction, and employee attitudes and contributions to service and quality improvements To improve internal reliability, the organisational commitment measure is a composite of 18 questions that were placed on a five-point Likert scale.

Management support, organisation support, feedback and commitment
In order to evaluate the "unique characteristics" of police culture and their significance for police commitment, we drew on previous studies that had highlighted management style and employer/employee relationships factors, including: management and organisation support, employee involvement and performance feedback (see Porter *et al*., 1974; Mathieu and Zajak, 1990; Beck and Wilson, 1997, 2000). Eighteen questions were posed for the potential variables on a Likert five-point scale.

Results and discussion
The questionnaire was factor analysed using a principal component analysis with a Varimax rotation that produced a six-factor model. Overall, 59 per cent of the variance can be explained by the six factors. Three of the factors loaded predominantly on questions from the pool of 18 organisational commitment items so these factors are readily identified as components of organisational commitment, while the remaining three factors loaded on 18 items associated with supportive line management, organisational support and performance appraisal. Full details of the factor analysis of questionnaire items loading on variables that are components of organisational commitment can be found in Appendix 2. Details of the factor analysis of questionnaire items relating to the independent variables management support and organisation support can be found in Appendix 3.

The factor we describe as "management support" is heavily influenced by the management approach of the respondent's supervisor or line manager. It includes encouraging teamwork, participation, and personal development as well as providing feedback on role and performance. The factor we describe as

"organisational support" is strongly influenced by whether there is a blame or supportive organisational culture and the degree of openness and trust between ranks. The themes that emerge in this organisational support factor have similarities with Jones and James's (1979) dimensions of organisational climate, in particular their leadership facilitation and support, and mutual trust dimensions. The final factor named "performance appraisal" reflects the respondents' feeling on the value and fairness of the performance review system. Reliability testing of the internal consistency of the components of these additive scales using Cronbach's Alpha results in coefficients exceeding 0.7 which are regarded as indicating a robust measure (Nunnaly, 1978).

Organisational commitment and time served
Before looking at the causal variables and their effects we need to judge the significance of time served as a variable that affects organisational commitment. The findings in Table I reveal a shallow U-shaped curve that shows that organisational commitment declines with length of service but then hits a floor after nine years of service before rising again. The F-test significance of $p < 0.001$ shows that the difference between groups is statistically significant while the correlation ratio of 0.057 shows the very small overall effect of time served on commitment levels. The finding for the first 14 years is consistent with previous research (Van Maneen, 1975; Beck and Wilson, 1997). The rise in later years is also consistent with Van Maneen's (1975) observation of a higher level of commitment in a sample of "veteran" officers, since we have found that constables with more than 20 years service demonstrate higher levels of organisational commitment than those with 6-19 years of service. Overall our findings support Beck and Wilson's (2000) argument that the weak positive relationship found in most studies between affective organisation commitment and tenure may actually hide the decrease over the earlier years. A possible explanation for this increase in commitment in later years is that the leaving rate due to early retirement will be higher in those with low organisation commitment, so leaving a pool of long-serving constables with higher commitment.

Overall, the level of organisational commitment for constables is close to the midpoint on the scale indicating scope for improvement. The standard

Years served	Number of cases	Mean	SD
Up to 2	104	52.56	4.98
2 to 5	140	50.09	5.41
6 to 9	152	48.07	6.43
10 to 14	140	47.84	6.97
15 to 19	118	48.49	7.83
20 and above	140	50.86	7.44
Average	794	49.53	6.79

Table I.
Organisation
commitment and time
served constables

Notes: Organisation commitment scale mid-point = 45; F-test between groups = 9.541, $p < 0.001$; correlation ratio (eta squared) = 0.057

deviation of the means clearly indicates that there is a substantial variation in the degree of organisational commitment that time served cannot explain. The results prove that *P1* is true but the effect is not a linear one. Organisational commitment declines for the first ten years to 14 years; after this the decline is reversed.

Organisational commitment and rank
The results in Table II show very small differences in the organisation commitment mean between cadets, special constables and constables.

However, as we move up the hierarchy, progressively higher levels of commitment are found, with the increase being greater as we move up each hierarchical level. It is also notable that the standard deviation of the means decrease as we move up the hierarchy suggesting that there might be fewer variations in the factors that influence commitment for those in senior ranks. Overall the statistics show that there is a small but statistically significant correlation between organisational commitment and rank seniority (correlation ratio 0.150, *F*-test significance of $p < 0.001$). Since it is likely that some of the commitment increases seen with rank seniority can be attributed to longer tenure, we will examine these variables along with the managerial and demographic variables through multiple regression.

Antecedents of organisation commitment
To investigate if there are differences between ranks in how the variables affect organisational commitment, we undertook separate regression analyses for constables and senior ranks (sergeants, inspectors, chief inspectors and above). In these regressions, we have included gender to ensure that any gender-related effects on organisational commitment are separated. Checks for assumption of linearity and homogeneity of the regression equation were satisfactory and the overall test for goodness of fit for the regression equations is highly significant for all groups (*F*-test significance of $p = 0.000$) indicating that the regression equation is most unlikely to have occurred by chance.

The analysis shows that the regression equation accounts for over 49 per cent of the variance in organisation commitment in both groups (R^2 for all officers = 0.49; for constables = 0.42; and for senior ranks = 0.50). Overall, these

Grade-rank	Number of cases	Commitment mean	SD
Police cadet	5	49.40	6.54
Special constables	72	50.74	6.61
Constables	798	49.52	6.79
Sergeants and inspectors	285	54.15	6.16
CI and above	44	61.20	5.16
Total	1,204	51.15	7.13

Notes: Organisation commitment scale mid-point = 45; *F*-test between groups = 52.92, $p < 0.001$; correlation ration (eta squared) = 0.150

Table II.
Organisation
commitment by rank

are very strong findings given that only 59 per cent of the data (i.e. residing in the six factors) was incorporated into the regression equation.

The findings in Table III show the beta weights in different columns for all officers, constables and senior staff. The beta weights signify the relative contribution of each of the factors to the overall change in organisational commitment found in these police officers. We can see that for both constables and senior staff the dominant factors affecting organisational commitment are organisational support (beta for constables = 0.362; senior staff = 0.302) followed by management support (beta for constables = 0.295; beta for senior staff 0.287). The performance appraisal factor has a less substantial effect on organisational commitment with beta weights of 0.144 for constables and 0.162 for senior ranks. The beta weights indicate that organisational support is moderately more important to constables than to senior ranks, while performance appraisal has a slightly greater effect on senior ranks than constables. This suggests that for managerial ranks, a lack of regular feedback on their performance can have an even greater effect on their organisational commitment than on lower ranks.

The regression shows that these combined managerial factors have a powerful effect on organisational commitment. Together the managerial factors beta weights for constables are 0.801 indicating that a change of nearly one standard deviation in organisational commitment is predicted for each similar increase in the managerial factors. Although the balance in the importance of each managerial factor varies between constables and senior ranks overall their effect is similar (beta for constables = 0.801; beta for senior ranks = 0.751), demonstrating that these managerial factors are important antecedents of organisational commitment regardless of hierarchical position. This is a significant finding, because it demonstrates that organisational commitment for all grades is influenced by the same managerial factors.

We note that rank seniority has a moderate bearing on organisational commitment for police officers (beta for all officers = 0.207; beta for senior staff = 0.158). We see here confirmation of our earlier finding that time served does

Independent variable		Beta weight	
	All officers	Constables	Senior ranks
Organisation support	0.357**	0.362**	0.302**
Management support	0.260**	0.295**	0.287**
Performance appraisal	0.149**	0.144**	0.162**
Rank seniority	0.207**		0.158**
Time served	0.076**	0.062*	0.093*
Gender	0.001ns	− 0.002ns	− 0.221ns
Percent of organisational commitment explained	49	42	50

Notes: *t-tests are significant at the < 0.05 level; **t-tests are significant at < 0.005 level; ns, t-tests are not significant at the 0.05 level

Table III.
Regression analysis: factors linked to organisation commitment for constables and more senior ranks

have a small effect on organisational commitment for constables (beta = 0.062). It can now be seen that organisational commitment of senior ranks is shaped by both rank (beta = 0.158) and time served (beta = 0.093), though rank has a much stronger influence. This confirms our earlier findings that seniority of rank is an important factor in organisational commitment in its own right. The regression proves that the proposition (*P2*) that organisational commitment will increase with rank/grade seniority is true.

Finally, we see that gender has only a very weak effect on organisational commitment for constables but it is not statistically significant (beta = – 0.002), despite the very large sample. Senior ranks show a stronger influence (beta = – 0.221) but the result is not statistically significant. However, there are only a small number of senior female officers so the result could be due to the test's lack of power.

Divisional variations in levels of organisation commitment
The organisational commitment scores that were reported in Table II were not much above the midpoint of the scale indicating that the majority of constables experience unsatisfactory levels of managerial support and organisational support. However, the standard deviations of the organisational commitment for constables indicate that there are significant differences in the means of organisation support and managerial support experienced by constables. This implies that poor overall human resource management is the norm but that islands of good HRM practice exist where higher levels of organisational commitment are found. To test this proposition we looked for clusters of high organisational commitment coinciding within specialist work divisions.

The analysis of organisation commitment by division is shown in Table IV. This reveals only minor organisational commitment variations across the divisions but substantial differences in the proportion of constables with high commitment levels (high commitment starts with an organisation commitment score of 56.0 which is a score one standard deviation above the average). We find that there are substantially more constables with high commitment scores in headquarters jobs and in the crime division (HQ, 38 per cent; crime, 31 per cent) compared to the traffic and tactical divisions (traffic, 17 per cent; tactical, 16 per cent). It is notable that all the high commitment constables, regardless of type of work of the division, experience similar levels of organisational support and management support suggesting that these managerial factors have a substantial impact on commitment regardless of job type.

All the district divisions were analysed and statistically significant differences in organisational commitment were found. Divisions within one city showed variations from 11 per cent to 25 per cent in the numbers of officers with higher commitment, while across large town divisions, even greater variations were found (8 per cent to 24 per cent). Small town based divisions also had substantial variations (14 per cent to 29 per cent). Overall, we find that

	OC mean[b]	SD	High organisation commitment group[a]		
			Percent high	Organisation support mean	Management support mean
Divisions					
HQ	51.15	8.60	38	19.60	37.10
Crime	49.94	8.05	31	21.26	37.93
Traffic	49.33	6.84	17	19.73	37.73
Tactical	47.94	7.69	16	20.25	38.63
District					
Best city	50.69	6.41	25	19.41	38.50
Worst city	47.50	6.81	11	21.17	40.16
Best large town	51.69	6.61	24	20.00	42.12
Worst large town	48.71	6.39	8	20.00	38.60
Best small town	49.53	6.78	29	21.22	39.00
Worst small town	49.21	6.30	14	18.80	36.40

Notes: [a]Percent organisation commitment greater than or equal to the constables mean plus one standard deviation ($49.5 + 6.8 = 56$); [b]F-test between groups $= 2.088$, $p < 0.02$

Table IV.
Divisional variations in levels of organisation commitment and managerial factors for high commitment constables

type of district and division size appears to have little influence on organisational commitment compared to managerial factors. The best and worst district division's levels of organisational support and management support for the high organisational commitment groups are illustrated in Table IV. In each of the best/worst divisions illustrated, the divisions have similar staff numbers. The district differences strongly suggest that islands of better human resource management do exist, where more participation, role and performance feedback as well as stronger organisation support is found. The findings clearly reveal that regardless of divisional work type, rural or city location, or size of division, all the more highly committed groups experience similar levels of organisational support and management support. This suggests that these managerial factors are universal in their impact on organisational commitment.

Therefore, it must be concluded that the final proposition (*P3*) is proved true by the findings. Consistent evidence that managerial factors have a greater effect on organisational commitment than demographic factors has been revealed in this police force.

Managing police commitment: implications for human resource management strategy

The objectives of this paper were to explore the determinants of police commitment and consider any implications the findings may have for policy HRM development. In addition to being one of the first *published* studies to capture the total police population, one of the major strengths of this study was the use of a methodology that was guided and supported by police managers themselves. Our commitment model represented the real life concerns of police

managers faced with trying to manage and improve commitment in turbulent and changing social and economic contexts. Senior officers' conceptualisations of commitment were rooted in how officers could identify with the goals of the organisation and how far they would contribute to performance improvement. This thinking resonates with NPM and HRM approaches that highlight the importance of nurturing commitment to the cultural values and strategic objectives of an organisation, since the commitment of employees is seen as a key lever in improving organisational effectiveness. We acknowledge that our approach was exploratory and is derived from the experience of only one police organisation. However, given the focus on real life management concerns we feel our analysis can help inform other studies of commitment, especially those in the police and public sectors.

Although we have found that time served does have a negative influence on the organisational commitment of constables in their earlier years, it is not a major factor compared to the influence of the other variables. The findings demonstrate that regardless of rank, police officers' organisational commitment is profoundly affected by their experience of the three variables that we have analysed. Having the opportunity to participate in decisions, feeling that you have the support of your superiors, and getting satisfactory levels of feedback on job performance and the needs of the role, all have a strong bearing on the degree of organisational commitment expressed in the survey.

While there were only small differences in what shaped commitment, there were significant differences in the levels of commitment between different ranks. Constables showed much lower organisation commitment levels, with senior ranks demonstrating the highest commitment. However, across the ranks those with higher organisational commitment were found to have experienced a consistent pattern of stronger management support and organisation support indicating the universal importance that they have at any level of the organisation. The lower level of organisational commitment of constables could be attributable to inappropriate selection and promotion procedures which lead to the perpetuation of managerial style and behaviour that has a negative effect on organisation commitment of subordinates. For example Loveday (1999) highlights the significance of command and control cultures.

The difference between police divisions also points to the significance of management factors that shape commitment. These variances reflect differing employee experiences of management and organisation support, and suggests that where management skills and behaviours are poor, there tend to be lower commitment levels. In contrast there is evidence that there are islands of good HRM practices. This suggests there is considerable scope for improved human resource management policies and systems at both a strategic and operational level.

In view of NPM and the moves to adopt strategic HRM there are several management areas that need to be developed. Acknowledging that committed employees are more likely to be concerned with improving their own and

organisation performance, a way forward for ForceCo would be to develop HRM strategic approaches and procedures that facilitate organisational attachment. The analysis of participation, management support and performance feedback and its significance for ForceCo is discussed below in relation to HRM strategy.

Management and organisation support
The majority of constables reported there were limited opportunities for them to contribute to decisions that affect their work. Constables also expressed the feeling that the organisation environment was generally unsupportive. Our observations confirmed this, as although the rhetoric of openness and honesty was encouraged, particularly by the chief constable, rarely did lower ranks contradict, or even offer alternative suggestions to officers above them. This "rank mentality" does little to foster openness and honesty, nor does it allow a team based approach to problem solving, an approach highlighted as part of NPM. These work experiences go against strategic HRM approaches which highlight that work systems and planning are best organised by the person (rank) who is actually responsible for the job (Storey, 1992; Legge, 1995; Sparrow and Marchington, 1998). This goes hand in hand with a working culture where employees feel able to freely express themselves, and where mistakes are treated as a learning opportunity.

To improve the involvement of lower level officers in decision making and thus commitment, would mean restructuring existing rank and power structures. This could be achieved by redesigning police decision making and accountability processes across the ranks so that lower level officers are responsible for a broader range of police decisions and activities.

However these changes require a major paradigm shift in management employee relations, since accountability and rank authority are strongly aligned within UK police agencies. Sharing power and encouraging more team based decision making, suggests that rank would lose some of its power status, since police tasks and solutions would be planned and executed in a collaborative way, as opposed to traditional command and control styles (see Loveday, 1999). The implementation of more team based working structures is congruent with HRM and NPM strategic approaches to job design which stress the importance of increased decision making and accountability. In addition team-based arrangements also encourage supportive and co-operative behaviours between ranks. To further encourage trust and participation ForceCo could also improve formal and informal communication mechanisms. These operational changes however would need to be supported by a force-wide management development programme at both senior and operational levels (see also Beck and Wilson, 1997).

Performance feedback
Central to both HRM and NPM ideology is performance feedback and evaluation (Goss, 1994; Storey, 1992, 1995; Brodeur, 1998) since it is only

through informal and formal assessments that improvements in work standards can be achieved, and this is true at all operational and senior ranks. The results suggest that commitment is shaped by the behaviour of line managers and this is reinforced by an unsupportive organisational work culture. This is significant because it suggests that the rank culture reinforces a management style that is distant and unsupportive. The recommendation for management training would also apply here, since the provision of interpersonal and management skills training would enable police managers to develop more supportive behaviours, as well as provide guidance to police managers on how to conduct effective performance feedback. The encouragement of regular feedback would also go some way in improving communications between, and within ranks, which is something Beck and Wilson (1997) highlighted in their study. Their police respondents overwhelmingly reported that commitment could be nurtured by fostering closer relationships between ranks. We would agree with this suggestion and argue that the encouragement of both informal and formal assessments of performance would go some way towards this.

Since positive and constructive feedback is aimed at trying to improve commitment, these processes could also be linked to formal assessments which would provide individual employees appropriate recognition and rewards. However, given the controversy in the UK surrounding pay for performance (see HMSO, 1993) recognition and rewards should focus on acknowledgement and praise for the achievement of specific police tasks, and the award of non-monetary benefits such as support for continuing education or enhanced holiday leave.

Conclusion: implications for future research and policy development

The results show that organisational commitment is significantly affected by the way ForceCo employees are managed, and this has ramifications for personnel and management systems. The weaknesses reported in terms of poor managerial skills are not surprising since forces across England have been criticised for their failure to develop appropriate management competencies to cope with changing police structures and accountabilities (Merrick, 1997). Loveday's (1999) review of the HMIC reports of Gwent, Gloucestershire, Kent and North Yorkshire constabularies found that many lower level staff felt disgruntled about the lack of "consultation" (Gwent, Kent) "not being listened to" (North Yorkshire) and raised concerns about "management style" and the "limitations" of human resource policies. Many forces are now beginning to recruit qualified human resource professionals, e.g. North Yorkshire (Merrick, 1997), Merseyside (Pickhard, 1995) and Lothian and Borders and Thames Valley (Rana, 1999), to develop strategic human resource plans to support tactical policing, and implement force-wide training programs that address management skills and behaviours. However, within ForceCo, and like many police agencies, the role of personnel is perceived as an administrative function rather than a strategic ally which can assist operational policing.

It is unfortunate that many critiques of human resource practices in the police cite in UK cite the case of the Stephen Lawrence[1] inquiry as a way of emphasising the inadequacies in police management procedures. Jack Straw (UK Home Secretary) criticised the police specifically in relation to equal opportunity issues and stated that the "service needs to roll up its sleeves" (cited in Rana, 1999, p. 18). The over-emphasis given to equal opportunity issues however has clouded the fact that what is really required are much broader changes in police organisation and management as our case study data reveals. Geoff Armstrong, director general of the Institute of Personnel and Development, argues there are many examples of good human resource practices in the police service and one should not assume it is in crisis, but he does feel there is a need for a more professional approach to how police organisations are managed (cited in Rana 1999, p. 19).

To conclude, our findings strongly support the proposition that having the opportunity to participate in decisions, feeling that you have the support of your superiors, and getting satisfactory levels of feedback on job performance and the needs of the role, all have a strong impact on organisational commitment, and do so at all levels of the police hierarchy. Our results reveal that although there are a range of commitment levels, there is only a small proportion of force employees who are highly committed. Our analysis highlights the importance of re-evaluating HR policies in order to improve commitment. Specifically we cite ways to encourage employee involvement and how management development training could help nurture commitment via encouraging employee participation, demonstrating supportive behaviours and providing regular feedback. However, we would argue that the implementation of interpersonal skills training is only a starting point since what is required are direct challenges to existing police cultures that have evolved to support the importance of command and control, and rank and authority (see Loveday, 1999).

In addition to the HRM polices we have highlighted above we feel there is a need to raise the profile of HR planning in policing strategies. In terms of research development there is clearly the need to pursue empirical investigations of HRM policies and management practices and their impact on employee commitment and police effectiveness. In relation to the case data we would suggest that ForceCo appoint a human resource professional at a strategic level who would ensure that "people" issues were considered as part of the operational policing plans and targets (see Rana, 1999; Loveday, 1999). HR efforts should then focus on a broad range of policies directed at breaking down barriers between ranks and encouraging a work culture that fosters open communication, shared decision making and a team centred approach to problem solving. Given that many operational policies still reflect traditional police management styles and practices, and particularly at senior levels within ForceCo, we would suggest that what is needed is a long-term process of cultural change that specifically addresses management skills development, but wonder whether this could be achieved with the existing management ethos (and the existing management skills) that prevails (Loveday, 1999).

Note

1. Stephen Lawrence, a black teenager, was murdered in a racialist attack in London, in 1993. In the UK the police were severely criticised for the way they managed the murder investigation. The public outcry led to the McPherson inquiry which concluded that the Metropolitan Police was guilty of "institutional racism", and recommended the development and implementation of equal opportunity training at a national level. At the time of writing no convictions have been secured for Stephen Lawrence's murder.

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Appendix

Rank	In service	Returns	Percent	Demographic data	Percent
Cadet	10	5	50	Gender	
Special constable	579	74	13	Female	20
Constable	1,771	816	46	Male	80
Sergeant/inspector	462	292	63		
Special supervision	16	10	63	Time served (years)	
Chief inspector or above	60	45	75	< 2	11
				2-5	15
Total	2,898	1,242	43	6-9	16
				10-14	17
				15-19	17
				> 20	24

Table AI.
Sample characteristics

Item	Factor loading
Pride factor (proportion of variance 10 percent: reliability = 0.80)	
I am proud to be working for ForceCo	0.76
I hold ForceCo in high regard	0.72
The quality of the work within my division/department is excellent	0.61
I'm not really interested in ForceCo its just a job[a]	0.60
My role is considered important within ForceCo	0.59
Generally my division/department is taking action to improve the quality of its work	0.55
Goals factor (proportion of variance 9 percent: reliability = 0.87)	
I understand the links between the police authority's annual plan and the priorities of "Forward together"	0.86
I am aware of the goals in "Forward together"	0.84
I understand the links between the police authority's annual plan and my division/ dept plan	0.78
I am aware of the priorities and strategic direction of ForceCo	0.78
Involvement factor (proportion of variance 8 percent: reliability = 0.73)	
Please indicate your level of involvement in improving your division/dept quality/ work standards	0.73
Please indicate your level of involvement in developing objectives for your division/dept	0.69
Please indicate your level of involvement in negotiating your own work objectives	0.67
I contribute to decisions that affect my work	0.58
I have considerable freedom in negotiating my work priorities	0.57

Table AII.
Factor analysis of questionnaire items loading on variables that are components of organisational commitment

Notes: Organisational commitment (combined items from pride, goals and involvement): reliability = 0.85; [a] reverse coded items

Item	Factor loading
Management support factor (proportion of variance 18 percent: reliability 0.92)	
My supervisor/manager does a good job of negotiating clear objectives	0.82
My supervisor/manager is good at encouraging teamwork	0.81
My supervisor/manager provides the right information for me to do my job properly	0.80
My supervisor/manager does an effective job in keeping me informed about matters affecting me	0.79
Personal development is encouraged by my supervisor/manager	0.75
My supervisor/manager holds back information on things I should know about[a]	0.71
My supervisor/manager is usually receptive to suggestions for change	0.70
I get regular feedback from my supervisor/manager regarding my performance	0.62
In my division/dept the supervisor/manager is very interested in listening to what I have to say	0.61
In my division/dept there is not enough opportunity to let supervisor/manager know how you feel about things that affect you[a]	0.50
Organisational support factor (proportion of variance 9 percent: reliability 0.79)	
I have confidence in the decisions made by the executive team of ForceCo	0.60
Most of the time you can say what you think without it being held against you	0.61
If I make a mistake it would be treated as a learning opportunity	0.66
There is openness and honesty between different grades	0.69
I regularly spend time on dealing with issues that have arisen due to inadequate communication[a]	0.43
How do you rate the management style you have experienced	0.47
Performance appraisal factor (proportion of variance 5 percent: reliability 0.72)	
The performance review system has improved my contribution to the performance of my division/department	0.79
The performance review system enables me to discuss fairly and openly my performance and training needs	0.73

Note: [a]Reverse coded items