

Mandated Police Training: The Epitome of Dissatisfaction and De-Motivation?

Abstract

This article reports on a piece of survey research completed by 809 police officers of a Federated Rank in England and Wales. The survey examined the attitudes of the officers with regards to the provision of ongoing training within the police service and their motivation to undertake it, with a particular emphasis on training delivered by e-learning on the NCALT platform. The results are discussed through the theoretical framework of andragogy (adult education theory) and self-determination theory with recommendations for improvement made based on these results.

Introduction

This article discusses a study, conducted by the author, consisting of a survey of 809 serving police officers within England and Wales. This examines the provision of ongoing training and the effect on officer's motivation to undertake such training once it is made mandatory. It will also go on to focus on the e-learning officers are often required to undertake as provided by the National Centre for Police Learning Technologies (NCALT).

As Nikolou-Walker & Meaklim (2007) state, the police service must ensure that its officers and staff are skilled to undertake an ever more complex role within society. This requires an amount of ongoing training, also referred to as professional development, which is essential for organisational effectiveness (Birzer, 2003; Donavant, 2009a). Within the police, as is the case with other professions, this training is often mandatory (Brockett, 1992; LeGrand, 1992; Etter Sr & Griffin, 2011; Hoyle, 2010; Jewson et al., 2014; Noe et al., 2014; Van Loo & Rocco, 2006; Webster-Wright, 2009; De Vere & Azzopardi, 2019).

Etter Sr & Griffin (2011) state that the reasons police officers requiring ongoing professional development are varied. These reasons include: changes in the law, changes to police procedures,

improvements in equipment, and the demographics of the population change. Others such as Jones & Lister (2019), Hunter *et al.* (2019) or Huey *et al.* (2019) cite the increasingly complex nature of policing landscape as to why continuous development and education is required. Not only that, some skills and knowledge acquired by officers are described as 'perishable' if not regularly used or practiced, such as emergency life support or self-defence tactics (see also Booth 2007; Webster-Wright, 2009; Lysaght & Altschuld, 2000; Schulte, 2003).

Chief Officers are acutely aware of their legal duty to provide adequate and relevant training to their employees. Failure to do so may lead to failed investigations or, the most extreme cases, loss of life. This in turn has led to an increase in legal action taken out against them under *vicarious liability*, something which chief officers understandably wish to minimise (More & Miller, 2011; Etter Sr & Griffin, 2011; Leal, 2008; Lepatski, 2010; McCoy, 2006; Armstrong & Clarke, 2013; Spies, 2019; Dickinson *et al.*, 2019).

It is particularly important in the UK at the moment with the introduction of the Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF). Whilst this presently only involves initial education, which will need to be delivered in partnership with higher education institutions (HEIs) as it will involve degree-level education (College of Policing 2014). It will eventually involve further professional development and post-promotion education (College of Policing, 2016). Because of this, consideration needs to be given towards the delivery methods used by both HEIs and the Forces to deliver high-volume and high-quality education.

Finally, there has been no published review of the satisfaction of end users, police officers and staff, who must undertake this training until this study. The views of the officers and staff should be a consideration to Chief Officers and policy makers who routinely mandate that their staff should undertake such training, along with clear considerations of budgetary restraint and wide reach which e-learning can provide. Therefore, whilst Chief Officers may be aware of the issues that arise in this article, it can assist further with informing those who commission, design, and mandate this training

as to its effectiveness for those undertaking policing duties, or to enact policy changes with regards to such training. This is because if something is not effective, it cannot be efficient, and therefore cannot value for money (Fleming & Wingrove, 2017).

Andragogy, Self-Determination and the 'Mandatory Trap'

Nikolou-Walker & Meaklim (2007) state that like many professions, the police service must ensure that its officers and staff are skilled to undertake an ever more complex role in society. As result the service must provide ongoing training, often referred to as continual professional development (CPD) to ensure that these skills are maintained (Donavant, 2009a) and often this training is mandated by police leaders (Birzer, 2003).

Andragogy is defined by Knowles (1980, pg. 43) as "the art and science of helping adults learn, in contrast to pedagogy as the art and science of teaching children". Knowles (1980), along with Vodde (2009), states that adults enter educational activities with a completely different frame of reference to children. This is because as adults they will have had a greater number of experiences and these experiences are also of a different quality having been shaped by age.

To examine how this is relevant to police officers, as adults, we have to understand the dynamics of such ongoing training and, as Baldwin-Evans (2004) suggests, develop and insight into what drives an officer to undertake training in the first place. Andragogy states that adults primarily see themselves as 'doers' and are far more real-world task oriented (Knowles, 1980), which according to Reiner (2010) and Nikolou-Walker & Meaklim (2007) is certainly true of police officers. This would see the officers approach the learning environment seeking an obvious application of the training to their adult roles which should translate into greater self-directedness and motivation to undertake the learning (Knowles, 1980).

Deci & Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory states that when learners are intrinsically motivated, they engage in the behaviour (in this case the training) for its own sake which leads to the pleasure and satisfaction from the improvement in their own performance (see also Bauer *et al.*, 2016). Deci

(1975) states that to be intrinsically motivated one of the conditions that needs to be in effect is that the learner feels that they are self-determining, which means that they are acting autonomously. Conversely if the need for autonomy is not fulfilled then this leads to a lack of satisfaction and lack of motivation (Deci *et al.*, 1991; Bauer *et al.*, 2016).

This is where the clash between the andragogical principle of self-motivation and the imposition of mandatory training occurs. A large proportion of ongoing training courses in the police are made mandatory by the organisation and are delivered online (Honest, 2016). As a result, trainees are often no longer intrinsically motivated to complete it as no longer engaged in purely for their own intrinsic benefit (Deci *et al.*, 1991; Bauer *et al.*, 2016). Learning becomes a function of the external mandate to complete the course rather than that of the interest of the subject matter or practical utility of it (Bauer *et al.*, 2016). Hoyle (2010) describes this situation as the *Mandatory Trap*, in which by simply making the training mandatory and failing to explain the benefits from the learners' perspective, the learner effectively loses their intrinsic motivation.

According to Brockett (1992, cited by Donavant, 2009b) making such training mandatory violates the central principle of adult education and that these participation mandates undermine the effectiveness of such training by creating a punitive attitude towards the endeavour (see also Deci *et al.*, 1991; Heslop, 2006). Donavant (2009b) also goes on to state that in his US studies, making such training mandatory often results in anger, lack of motivation and a feeling of disenfranchisement. He also goes on to state that such mandates create a situation where the negative attitude that it fosters in the learners is potentially more detrimental to the organisation than the provision of no training at all (Donavant, 2009b). Vodde (2009; 2011) also found in his US studies that andragogical approaches to police training produced better learning outcomes and police officers who were more engaged with effective problem-solving skills, however these studies were more focussed (as were Donavant's) on initial training rather than ongoing development.

NCALT and e-Learning

The National Centre for Applied Learning Technologies was set up to assist the 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales to deliver training via alternative technologies (NCALT, 2014) and on behalf of the College of Policing they now design and develop all e-learning courses for officers and staff (College of Policing, 2014). The NCALT system is one which primary consists of *programmed instruction*. This is where training is delivered as a one-off course via an electronic device (e.g. a computer) without the presence of an instructor (Ostrowski Martin *et al.*, 2014; Paterson, 2011). This method has the advantage of being flexible, allowing for repeated practice and standardisation of programme delivery (Ostrowski Martin *et al.*, 2014). It is of particular importance if there is a change in the law or police procedure that takes place and many officers require a standardised input into them.

However, as Ostrowski Martin *et al.* (2014) also point out, there are notable disadvantages to programmed instruction too. Technical problems can disrupt learning, but moreover it requires a great deal of self-discipline on the part of the learner to complete as envisioned (rather than as Honess (2016) discovered, just clicking through the course to finish it without taking in any of the information). Not only this, the lack of a trainer to provider learner support is a major issue (CIPD, 2013; Knowles *et al.*, 2012). Even Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC, 2014, pg. 9) stated that, "HMIC sees little, if any value in e-learning as an effective training method as it limits the opportunity for discussion, reflection and checking understanding". Given this, it would seem that the effectiveness of e-learning by NCALT also requires examination.

The Survey Method

There appears to be a link between the mandating of ongoing training and a negative effect (such as dissatisfaction, refusing to complete properly, and thereby not gaining useable knowledge or skills) it has on staff undertaking it (Hoyle, 2010). However, there is sparse literature within the context of ongoing training and professional development of police officers in England and Wales addressing

this topic. Therefore, in order to engage end users of police ongoing training a staff survey was designed to determine the attitude of serving police officers of a federated rank (PC to Chief Inspector). The survey measured the satisfaction of the officers towards general training and e-learning (both general and mandatory) over the previous three years and to establish what factors motivated and de-motivated them to undertake it.

The sections measuring the attitudes of officers utilised a 7-point Likert Scale to measure their agreement or disagreement with the training that they had received, and whether it had met their learning needs, was necessary to be mandatory and if the training had been implemented within their day-to-day duties. The motivating factor questions were simple lists of factors which increased or decreased their motivation to undertake the training and participants asked to select all that applied.ⁱ

The survey was conducted via an online survey platform and the link was sent out via bulletins by the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) to all members, with periodic reminders from them and via various social media platforms. The survey was open for a four-week period during June 2015 and a total of 809 completed surveys were returned.

Results

From the 809 completed surveys we could firstly determine the ubiquity of the NCALT e-learning system for ongoing training with nearly all (98.4%) of respondents stated that they had undertaken an e-learning course in past three years. Just over half (53.9%) of respondents took the second most used method, classroom based practical exercises, and only 36.7% had undertaken training in a large lecture group (with question and answer discussions). None of the other methods scored above a third of participants.

In terms of the attitude towards their ongoing training the results of the Likert style questions can be found in Table 1.

When we statistically compare the dissatisfaction between general training and e-learning using a χ^2 test, the difference in attitude towards the e-learning system compared to the general training was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 7.59$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.0001$). This demonstrates that respondents were dissatisfied at a greater rate with the e-learning provision. When the statements about usability were examined. 67.7% of respondents stated that they disagreed that they had been able to implement the content of the e-learning and again, when compared to general training it was statistically significantly worse ($\chi^2 = 386.00$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.0001$). This shows that respondents were less able to operationalise the content of e-learning provision compared to general training.

The statement about motivation to take e-learning courses yielded similar results with 82.1% disagreeing to some extent and 45.3% strongly disagreeing that they were motivated to take the courses. Again, when conducting a comparison with general training a statistically significant result ($\chi^2 = 228.88$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.0001$) showed motivation to undertake e-learning is indeed lower than general training. These results all suggest that andragogical principles are not being applied, especially in relation to e-learning, and this is despite Knowles *et al.*, (2012) demonstrating it is possible to do so.

When looking at the list of factors that increase or decrease motivation to undertake training the significant responses (50%+ of respondents) for each question can be found in Table 2.

Table 1 – Results of Attitude Statements regarding ongoing training.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>With regards to my role within the Police Service in the past 3 years I am satisfied that the ongoing training arrangement met my learning needs</i>	185 (22.9%)	211 (26.1%)	179 (22.2%)	68 (8.4%)	99 (12.3%)	63 (7.8%)	3 (0.4%)
<i>Looking back at my ongoing training within the Police Service in the past 3 years it was, in my opinion, necessary for this training to be mandatory.</i>	42 (5.2%)	83 (10.3%)	112 (13.9%)	110 (13.7%)	222 (27.6%)	211 (26.2%)	25 (3.1%)
<i>Looking back at my mandatory ongoing training within the Police Service in the last</i>	74 (9.2%)	128 (15.9%)	143 (17.7%)	131 (16.2%)	188 (23.3%)	133 (16.5%)	10 (1.2%)

<i>3-years I have been able to implement the content of this training within my day-to-day job.</i>							
<i>I felt motivated to take the mandatory ongoing training within the Police Service over the past 3 years</i>	196 (24.3%)	187 (23.1%)	115 (14.2%)	134 (16.6%)	89 (11.0%)	76 (9.4%)	11 (1.4%)
<i>With regards to the e-learning courses I have undertaken in the Police Service within the past 3 years I am satisfied that the courses met my training needs.</i>	319 (39.4%)	211 (26.1%)	119 (14.7%)	72 (8.9%)	60 (7.4%)	28 (3.5%)	0 (0.0%)
<i>Looking back at my mandatory e-learning in the Police Service within the past 3-years I have been able to implement the content of this training within my day-to-day job.</i>	184 (22.7%)	214 (26.5%)	150 (18.5%)	131 (16.2%)	98 (12.1%)	32 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<i>With regards to the e-learning courses I have undertaken in the Police Service within the past 3 years I was personally motivated to complete them.</i>	366 (45.3%)	192 (23.8%)	105 (13.0%)	62 (7.7%)	52 (6.4%)	28 (3.5%)	3 (0.4%)

Table 2 – Survey Responses to Motivation/De-Motivation Factors.

Question	Factor	Response
<i>With regards to your mandatory ongoing training you have undertaken in the Police Service in the past 3 years, which factors (if any) would have increased your personal motivation to take it?</i>	The knowledge was necessary for my job role.	75%
	Knowing that I would be able to use the content in my job role.	71%
	Interesting course content	71%
	The method of training delivered	56%
	The training increasing my confidence in my job role	55%
<i>With regards to your mandatory ongoing training undertaken in the Police Service in the past 3 years, which factors (if any) would have decreased your personal motivation to undertake it?</i>	Uninteresting course content.	68%
	The method of training delivery	65%
	The knowledge that the training content was unnecessary for my job role	50%
<i>With regards to the e-learning courses you have undertaken in the Police Service within the past 3 years, what factors (if any) would have increased your personal motivation to complete them?</i>	Interesting course content	56%
	Knowing that I would be able to use the content in my job role	51%
	The knowledge that the training content was necessary for my job role	50%
	Uninteresting course content	58%

With regards to the e-learning courses you have undertaken in the Police Service in the past 3 years, what factors (if any) would have decreased your personal motivation to complete them?

The method of training delivery	53%
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Discussion

Officers' Attitudes

The survey suggests that there are issues regarding the ongoing training of police officers. When asking about general arrangements for ongoing training and aggregating the Agree/Disagree scores it can be seen that a majority of officers are dissatisfied to some extent that the current arrangements meet their learning needs (in other words they don't meet their needs). Also, a majority felt that they were not personally motivated to undertake such training. Measuring Level 1 (Reaction) of Kirkpatrick's (1996) taxonomic scale of training evaluation, we can see that this reaction is profoundly negative and suggests that the training arrangements are not at all effective, as Bellinger (2007) suggests, the negative perceptions of adults to training affects their satisfaction. However, those that responded to the statement that they were able to implement the content of the training in their day-to-day job were much more evenly split between those respondents agreeing and disagreeing that they were able to do so. This statement, measuring Levels 2 and 3 of the Kirkpatrick scale (learning and behaviour) suggests that the training may be more effective than the reaction measurement as suggested by Bellinger (2007). However, as it was still a minority, stating that they were able to implement their training it can be argued that training is ineffective from the point of view of serving officers. From an andragogical point of view it also confirms that motivation and effectiveness are directly linked to usability, which we must conclude from this survey is lacking (see Baldwin-Evans, 2004; Knowles *et al.*, 2012; Donavant, 2009a; Vodde, 2011; Dickinson *et al.*, 2019).

Interestingly, a majority of officers in the survey agreed to some extent that it was necessary for some ongoing training to be mandatory, although this was slim at 56.9%. This suggests that officers do recognise a need for training, keeping professional knowledge and skills up to date and that it is necessary to ensure that all officers do so. Policing may therefore be one of the minority of professions whom Lysaught & Altshuld (2000) referred to as the exception to the assertion that there is little or no evidence to support the mandating of training. However, officers' response stating that training should be mandatory does not seem to affect satisfaction which is low. From this it appears that respondents have fallen into Hoyle's (2010) 'mandatory trap' which leads to a negative feedback loop where people don't learn (or don't want to learn) because they are forced to do so, so they have to be forced to attend training to try and get them to learn what they did not do so before and it spirals on. This is additional confirmation of the andragogical principle stating that mandatory training negatively impacts on motivation and effectiveness (Deci *et al.*, 1991; Hoyle, 2010; Brockett, 1992).

When we look at the officer's attitudes towards the e-learning system by NCALT the satisfaction rates are lower than for general training. Most respondents disagreed to some extent that the e-learning courses met their training needs. It must also be noted that the most common response to that statement was Strongly Disagree.

The statement about motivation to take e-learning courses yielded similar results with most officers disagreeing to some extent and 45.3% strongly disagreeing that they were motivated to take the courses, and when compared to the result for general training, the motivation to take the e-learning course was significantly lower.

Whilst there was a breakdown of the data by rank and length of service, primarily for representative demographics, the scores did not vary according to rank or length of service, which suggests this is a service-wide opinion.

Motivating Factors

Examining the factors which motivated and de-motivated people to undertake general ongoing training (Table 2), we see results which are predicted by andragogical theory. The top three factors, knowing the training was necessary for their role, knowing it could be used in their role, and interesting course content, are all key intrinsic motivation factors (Deci, 1975; Deci *et al.*, 1991; Bauer *et al.* 2015). When asking what would motivate officers to undertake e-learning by NCALT there were similar results in terms of what factors would do so. Interesting course content, usability and necessity were the top, although it was interesting to observe that the percentage dropped from the within the 70s to the 50% range. This suggests that it would be harder to motivate respondents to undertake e-learning as fewer respondents considered factors that motivated them.

As for de-motivating factors for general training, uninteresting course content, the method of delivery and unnecessary content for job role were the only factors garnering more than 50% of respondents. When taken with the results that officers are not currently motivated it would suggest that course content is indeed uninteresting, unnecessary or delivered in a manner not conducive to learning. The top de-motivating factors for e-learning were uninteresting course content and method of training delivery. This is suggestive because if the de-motivating factor was the method of delivery itself and this question specifically referred to that method, we can conclude that the delivery of training by e-learning is and of itself a problem and may need a radical re-examination.

It is also interesting to note that the mandatory requirement to undertake the training did not feature highly in the responses from participants as either a motivating or de-motivating factor, especially as motivation was a key element of study from the literature.

How can mandatory training be improved?

From this survey we can conclude that officers in England and Wales are not satisfied with the current arrangements of undertaking ongoing training. A majority do not believe current training meets their training needs nor are they motivated to undertake such training. Significantly less than

half of officers believe that they are able to implement their training in their day-to-day job which calls into question the validity of the training and the time it takes to conduct. However, a slim majority believe training should be mandatory. Respondents stated that to be motivated course content must be interesting, relevant and useful; it must also be delivered by an appropriate method. The fact that it is mandatory is not a motivating factor and, literature suggests, it may be counterproductive. The Police Service of England and Wales, either through developments by the College of Policing or individual training providers need to ensure that they are familiar with andragogical principles and actively incorporate them into the design of every training programme.

From this survey we also identify that e-learning by NCALT is indeed the predominant method of training delivery practiced by the Police Service, and that it is considered by officers to be significantly worse when compared to general training methods. It appears from the survey that the e-learning system is not highly thought of and officers are less likely to be motivated or to use the learning content. Whilst there is evidence from literature that when conducted well e-learning can be effective, this is not currently the case for the police, and an overhaul of how e-learning is designed, perhaps to move away from the *programmed instruction* style of e-learning towards a more blended method is something that needs to be considered, even when taking into consideration the need to quickly disseminate in as cheap and wide ranging way as possible.ⁱⁱ

Therefore the College of Policing should review their e-learning provision in light of the literature which suggests e-learning can be effective. The College should also review when and how e-learning can be blended with other more traditional forms of training delivery or other forms of more interactive and social forms of electronic provision such as live chat rooms or discussion groups with subject matter experts.

The issue of relevance is a vital consideration. If the training is not relevant to the officer's role then it is highly likely that they would not be interested in it. Much training is sent out after a management decision is made that everyone should do it and it is so mandated. A result of these

management decisions is that for some officers who see the training as irrelevant to their role would fail to engage with the material. However, where officers could see the relevance and usefulness of the training, they would be far more likely to want to do it in order to get it right, what Harackiewicz & Elliot (1993) describe as *mastery goals*. Indeed, even subject matter that may not be as interesting or intellectually stimulating may still be learned if learners see the necessity and relevance (Hones, 2018). However, training is sent out in a blanket fashion that irrelevant material may be making its way to officers. What police leaders could do is, by examining course content and officers' role profiles, make decisions as to which officers require such training on a programme by programme basis. This would eliminate the need for some officers to undertake training that they would never use and regard as irrelevant.

There is also an argument to be made to promote more experiential learning and making officer's learning experiences more concrete (Copley, 2011). As Braga (2016) suggests, these are learning experiences that police officers particularly value, and that they are more engaging than abstract training displayed on a computer screen (see also Pappas, 2014).

These principles have also been picked up by some forces for their initial education of officers under the PEQF, for example Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire Police, working with their HEI partners in designing the new Police Degree Apprenticeship Programme (PDAC, 2019). They will be utilising a fully blended solution using e-learning which will be followed up by face-to-face workshops, masterclasses, and practical sessions additionally supported by work-based tutors, all of which is designed to be operationalised on the street to produce operationally competent police officers (PDAC, 2019).

There is evidence that the College of Policing (2017) is acknowledging andragogy in their CPD Framework, but this clearly more needs to be done for its principles to be fully embedded into training practice and delivery. This will aid them in ensuring that their provision is professionally credible and sensitive to wider considerations than just cost. Also, the reform of the Professional

Development Review process would also encourage officers to consider their own personal and professional development; training could then be encouraged rather than required by supervisors. This will help prevent organisation from falling into the mandatory trap and prevent police ongoing training from being the epitome of dissatisfaction and de-motivation that it currently appears to be.

Study Limitations

This study was conducted via an online survey that was sent to all federated ranked police officers in England and Wales. A return of 809 responses was considered a fair sample size for a survey of this type and gives us a Confidence Interval of up to $\pm 3.43\%$ with a 95% Confidence Level. However, it is still a survey which gives us only self-reported data which therefore may not be entirely representative of the entire workforce, which consisted of a total population of 125,460 at the time of the study (Woods, 2015). However, data was consistent across various demographics including race, gender, rank and length of service which suggests that opinion is consistent across these factors.

Our discussions largely rest on the literature on andragogical and self-determination theory. A follow-up qualitative study should be conducted to explore these issues in full.

Funding Declaration

The study upon which this article is based was commissioned and funded by the Metropolitan Police Federation as part of the Paul McKeever Scholarship to inform their policy on training. The author confirms that nothing in this article constitutes a conflict of interest.

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ⁱ For a full outline of the questions and lists of motivating/de-motivating factors contact the author.

ⁱⁱ The full thesis upon which this article is based has been provided to the Metropolitan Police Federation, Police Federation of England and Wales and the College of Policing for consideration with regards to training policy and design.