

Suggested Guidelines for Interviewing Police Leaders

General Remarks

The general goal of the interviews is to present the views and interpretations of policing developments and current issues **by experienced practitioners**. What do they see happening in policing in their countries and internationally, and how do they evaluate or interpret developments. We have many analyses and interpretations of policing by scholars and policy makers from outside the police organization. What we would like to have are views and interpretations from within the organization. What do police leaders who do the work see happening in policing: what are the issues they consider important? what changes do they see as successes or failures? what are likely lasting futures or passing fads?

The basic goal of the interviews is to capture the views of police officials. Your role should not be to be too critical or interpret what the officials meant to say, but to write as accurately as possible what the officials told you. It is their views, based on their experience and thinking, that we are interested in. We know what scholars think about policing; but we know less what the people who do policing think about and how they evaluate trends, developments and issues in policing. That is the important goal.

The basic reason for doing the interviews in the first place is our firm belief that police officials know a lot; that practitioners can make significant contributions to our understanding of the prospects and problems of policing today. It is that knowledge and their judgments of policing that we are after. But that knowledge is not easily captured.

The practical reason for the interviews is that police leaders do not have the time to write and reflect on their experiences, views, opinions and perspectives. We think interviews are one means to capture that knowledge and that is why we are requesting researchers like yourselves to record their views.

We want to re-emphasize one major point. We **do not want the official rhetoric (or the official success stories)** that high level people sometimes fall back on during interviews; we want their **personal views and thinking**. If you have the sense that you are getting the formal language and official views of policing and reforms, see if you can get the officials to go beyond that and push them for their own views. The interviewer should seek to get the person interviewed to move beyond simple answers, and get them to analyze and reflect on their experiences and knowledge. That takes skill on the part of the interviewer - but that is why you were asked to do an interview.

Topic areas which should be covered:

These are the basic areas we would like to cover. In some cases there may be other areas of importance in 'your' country or community and you should ask about those areas as well. For example, questions of police leaders in transitional countries will likely deal more with changes in policing philosophies and organizations than question for leaders in stable democracies. We know, when asking you do conduct an interview, that you are quite familiar with the policing situations in 'your' country and that you will tailor your questions toward the dominant local issues which have had to be dealt with by the leaders. Be creative but not overly so.

We have listed a number of topics that should be covered in the interview. Please try to cover the topics mentioned below as the conduct and flow of the interview dictates. And add, elaborate, follow up as you see fit and necessary to clarify points, expand on ideas, or pursue an insight offered.

All the topical areas should be asked, but the specific questions listed below for each topic area are suggestions. Interviews have their own dynamics. Follow them down their most fruitful avenues. Since each of you will be interviewing officials within different organizations the list and sequence of questions will have to be adjusted in any case.

The wording of questions is, of course your own. In follow-up questions, try to get specific examples or details of generalizations made. (Examples are probable among the most useful pieces of information to readers.)

Career: Tell us a little bit about your career: length, organizations worked in, movements, specializations, etc. Basically standard stuff.

Other questions:

What motivated you to enter police work?

What about how your career developed surprised you.?

Did your work prove as interesting or rewarding as you thought it would?

Changes experienced: What do you see as the most important changes which have happened in policing over the course of your career (philosophies, organizational arrangements, specializations, policies and programs, equipments, personnel, diversity etc.)?

What changes in external conditions (support from communities, legal powers, judicial relations, relations with minority communities, resource provision, political influence, etc) have had a significant impact on policing?

Overall, has the quality of policing improved or declined (street work, specialized units, managerial capacity, self-evaluation, interagency cooperation, etc.)?

In general, is it more or less difficult to be a police officer (street, manager) now than in the past.

Personal policing philosophy. What do you think should be the role of the police in society?

What should be their job, functions and roles? What should be left to other people or organizations?

What organizational arrangements work and which do not?

What policies on relations with the community, with political groups, with other criminal justice organizations work well? What hampers cooperation with other agencies and groups?

How should policing be performed? What should be the preferred priorities and strategies; hard edged crime control, prevention, services, order work, what mix for

which types of problems; proactive-reactive; community policing-law enforcement, etc.?

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Problems and successes experienced: In your experience what policies or programs have worked well and which have not? And can you speculate for what reasons?

What would you consider to be the greatest problem facing the police at this time?

What problems in policing do you find is the most difficult to deal with? What would be easy to change? Internal problems (culture of the organization, managerial deficiencies, allegations of corruption or gender related problems, etc) or externally generated problems (resources, community support, etc.)?

Is anything about policing easy?

Theory and Practice: What should be the relationship between theory and practice. What can practitioners learn from theory, and what theory builders from practitioners?

What is the relationship right now.? Does it exist? Does it work? What holds collaboration or interactions back?

What kind of research, in what form, on what questions would you find most useful for practice? If not very useful, what could or should theory builders do to make their products more useful to you?

Where do you find theory based information? Where do you look: journals, professional magazines, books, publications, reports?

Does the organization do research on its own? On what types of issues or questions?

Transnational relations: Have you been affected by, and how, in the work of your organization by developments outside the country (human rights demands, universal codes of ethics, practical interactions with police from other countries, personal experiences outside the country, new crime threats, etc.)?

Have those interactions been beneficial or harmful? What kind of external international influences are beneficial and which ones less so?

How have developments post September 11 affected your work?

Democratic Policing (there has been much discussion of what that phrase means and how it can be achieved):

How would you define democratic policing? What practices would bring democratic policing to life? Can democratic policing be achieved in your country, or not, and what obstacles stand in the way? Should democratic policing be the goal of reforms?

General assessments: Are you basically satisfied or dissatisfied with developments in policing? What are the most likely developments you see happening and which would you like to see happening. What is most needed now to improve policing?

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What to do before and after the interview.

Before:

Get a sense of how much time you are likely to have and what questions you can get to during that time. In no interview will you be able to ask all the questions you want. And, when you write up the interview, you will have space for about 6-8,000 words (on the average). Choose your priorities. The top priorities for us are the reflections by the officials interviewed on changes experienced during their careers, how they evaluate those changes, and the interrelations of theory and practice. These are high priorities for the interviews.

After the interview:

1. Please write a short introduction to the actual interview. The introduction should:
 - a. Briefly describe the basic structure of policing in your country. You have to be the judge of how much an informed reader is likely to know about the country and how much should be explained.
 - b. Describe, briefly, the interview itself. Where and when it was conducted; how long it took, or multiple sittings; how honest and open you feel the discussion was.
2. You should, if at all possible, taperecord the interview. For publication, edit the interview to bring out the most important discussion and answers. Chances are you will have much more information than we will have space for your interview in the proposed book.
3. Write a short conclusion on your impression of the interview. What the major themes were, how well the views expressed accord with the known literature, but do not be overly critical on this point, please. Again briefly.
4. Write a glossary of terms or events mentioned in the interview a reader might not be familiar with. E.g., if interview a German official and *Bundeskriminalamt* is mentioned describe very briefly what that is; or if interviewing a South African official SAARPCO is mentioned, describe that. Just select the most likely items non-experienced readers might not know.
5. We have had two basic styles in writing up interviews. Both are acceptable, but we prefer the second style. One style is to simply transcribe the interviews - questions asked, answers given.

The second style, which requires more work, is to write short statements about the topic of a question and then insert long excerpts from the interviews. The main point is to have the voice and views of the leaders being interviewed, not your own.

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4. Send the completed interviews to Bruce Baker, bruce@bakerbrum.co.uk and Dilip Das, dilipkd@aol.com .

The total interview, with intro, conclusion and glossary should be about 6-8,000 words.