

Police need to embrace improved technology to tackle crime, study finds

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A study published by PwC—‘Policing in a networked world’—has suggested that law enforcement agencies around the world need to embrace technological advancements and the partnership of public and private sector organisations in order to tackle the unprecedented challenges presented by increasingly globalised criminal activity. Paul McDermott, partner at Trowers & Hamlins, warns of the legal responsibilities that come with newfound technological powers and Jenny Wiltshire, head of general crime at Hickman and Rose, argues that it is not just the police who need to embrace improved technology.

The study claims that a ‘complex interplay of demographic and societal changes’, allied with technological innovations—particularly in digitisation—have contributed to new and varied types of criminal networks, which operate in an ‘increasingly borderless fashion’. For example, the study reveals that incidences of so-called ‘complex crime’ has risen by over 25% on average across Australia, the Netherlands, Sweden, England and Wales in the period 2010-15. This included crimes such as sexual offences, fraud and drug offences (both trafficking and possession).

At the same time, traditional crime—theft, burglary, robbery and serious assault—has fallen over the same period by an average of 10% across all six countries.

The study also suggests that crime’s increasing sophistication presents a double-edged problem for police forces, as there is not only a risk of a gap forming ‘between police capabilities and the crimes they must tackle, but also between the police and the public, as people see that this new era of crime is not being adequately addressed’.

Jenny Wiltshire concurs with this idea that ‘police are struggling to stay ahead of crime’ and claims that ‘many victims of fraud are turning their back on the criminal process and looking to the civil courts to recover their losses’.

The study claims that criminal communities have moved online, which poses a ‘fresh challenge’ for police, undermining the ‘traditional model of frontline policing’. The proliferation of data also poses the twin challenges of how to analyse and exploit it to unearth crime.

It suggests that law enforcement agencies need to embrace the use of big data and data analytics to keep up with increasingly sophisticated crime. It cites some examples of successful police initiatives across the world embracing improved technology to tackle crime:

- in Canada, police are combining civilian expertise at universities with computer algorithms to create ‘predictive policing’ models that can anticipate where certain crimes are likely to take place
- in Norway, police are streamlining digitised processes by having all strands of the force working in parallel on a case rather than sequentially, conducting case analysis in real time as frontline officers continue their work
- in the UK police are recruiting through an innovative scheme called Police Now, in an effort to attract university graduates with leadership potential to begin a career in the police

However, Paul McDermott warns that the police must handle data sensitively, otherwise they risk alienating the public that they are trying to protect: ‘The negative public reaction to “big brother’s” use of our online data by Facebook (and other private organisations) is likely to be magnified when the state (including the police) are harvesting that data’.

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Although, McDermott notes that the study ‘acknowledges the importance of the police being bound to uphold their legal responsibilities not to misuse their powers, including when data harvesting’.

The study concludes that law enforcement should consider applying six responses to improve policing:

- aligning strategy and funding
- creating agile operating models
- balancing local, national and international capability
- exploiting technology and data
- building the future workforce
- embedding legal and societal responsibility

Wiltshire argues that it is not just the police who need to embrace improved technology, claiming that ‘if artificial intelligence is to help tackle widespread disclosure failures, both the Crown Prosecution Service and the defence need access to predictive coding software to sift through data and find relevant evidence’.

Ultimately, Wiltshire warns that improved technology is not the panacea the study claims: ‘It cannot cure the endemic problems caused by chronic underfunding across the criminal justice system. Investment is needed in the CPS, the courts and legal aid as well as the police’.

Source: [Study: Policing in a networked world](#)