OUR CRIME JOURNEY: THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

In 2009, Polis Diraja Malaysia (PDRM), an agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs, embarked on the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) under the NKRA (National Key Result Area) to reduce crime in the country. Within four years, it has achieved remarkable success in reducing crime index by 30%. However, about 90% of the public in a survey carried out perceives that crime is increasing or levelling. This picture is consistent with the findings in many other countries where public perception is out of sync with decreasing crime. The fear of crime is not correlated to actual crime but it is real and affects the citizens' quality of life. Going forward, PDRM is embarking on a programme to address this fear. In addition, PDRM will accelerate its modernising policing programme as the environment is getting more complex and sophisticated. This will involve the use of present technology to tackle its complexities, new management systems to empower the front liners and process improvements for efficiency. To be aligned with the citizens' expectations, the programme will prioritise its service delivery through the Balai (police station). There will be added focus on crime prevention involving more community collaboration, thereby building confidence and trust between the police and the citizens. This then is our journey in tackling crime in making people safe and at the same time ensure they feel safe.

Keywords: *crime, prevention, modern policing, perception and community collaboration*

Introduction

In 2009, the Government identified crime reduction a National Key Result Area (NKRA) (Sundramoorthy, 2014). This was a response to the rakyat's (citizens of Malaysia) growing concern towards rising crime rates. Based on various surveys conducted, crime emerged to be one of the top two issues of concern (PEMANDU, 2011).

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Crime also has a substantial economic cost. In Malaysia, the estimated total cost of crime in 2004 was RM15 billion (Goh, 2006). In the United Kingdom, the Home Office estimated the cost of crime to be in excess of £60 billion per annum, over 5% of the country's GDP (Brand & Pierce, 2000).

The crime index remains the key measure of the achievement of the NKRA crime reducing objective. The crime index comprises of two components: violent crime and property theft (Table 1). Violent crimes are crimes committed against a person whereas property thefts are those that have no direct threat or harm to a person. Property theft accounts for about 80% of the total crime (PEMANDU, 2011). The crime index is created as a uniform crime-monitoring platform for measuring the effectiveness of the police force and for benchmarking with other countries.

Table 1: Crime Index Composition

Violent Crime	Property Crime
Murder	Theft
Rape	Car theft
Assault	Motorcycle theft
Gang robbery with firearms	Commercial vehicle theft
Gang robbery without firearms	Snatch theft
Armed robbery	Break-ins (day, night)
Robbery	

Source: Royal Malaysia Police or PDRM, 2014

By 2013, four years after the NKRA of crime reducing initiatives started, the total crime index has improved by 30% (Figure 1).
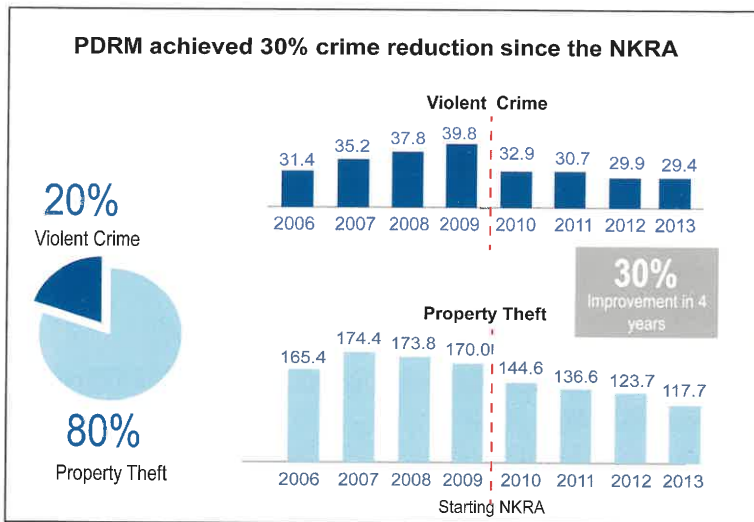
Figure 1: PDRM's achievement on the crime index

Source: PEMANDU, 2011

From January to October 2014, the crime index has further improved by 12.3% year on year, and for the first time since 2009, car theft has reduced by 21.1% (PEMANDU, 2011).

Snatch theft, however, has increased by 19.8% for the period January to October 2014 compared to the same period last year. This form of crime remains a concern especially in Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Almost 50% of those arrested for snatch theft were hard-core drug addicts (PEMANDU, 2010).

Programmes on Reducing Crime

A basket of programmes has been implemented to reduce crime. These programmes focused on several key areas including motorcycle theft, car theft and house break-ins that collectively accounted for about 70% of all property theft. The following is a brief summary of the programmes:-

Prevention of motorcycle theft, through:

- Better lighting of hot spot parking areas

- Promotion of use of anti-theft U-locks – this has been very successful in Japan

- Motorcycle theft stake-outs using decoys – a tactic successfully used in UK

According to PEMANDU (2010), UK and Japan has implemented the use of anti-theft U-locks and decoys in stake-outs which has successfully reduced the theft of motorcycles.

Prevention of car thefts, through:

- Identification of hot spots (Car Park League Table is used to rank car parks according to the theft rate and is monitored and reviewed every three months)

- Increasing the availability and usage of Mobile Computerised Access Devices (MCADs)

- Collaborative enforcement with Immigration and local authorities to clamp down on illegal car workshops

- Installation of container scanners in collaboration with Customs at ports to combat illegal import and export of stolen vehicles

- Working with General Insurance Association of Malaysia (PIAM) to offer lower insurance premiums given to car owners who invest in improved security features for the vehicles such as advanced electronic mobilisers.

Prevention of house break-ins, through:

- Identifying common targeted areas

- Conducting joint patrols through smart partnerships with RELA, non-government organisations and others

- Promulgating crime awareness programmes in identified areas and zone

- Adopting the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPED) concept in the planning and building of residential communities to "design out" opportunities for crime

Reducing street crimes through the Safe City Programme in collaboration with local councils, National Anti-Drug Agency and Welfare Department to remove opportunities for criminals to prey on civilians, through:

- Installing lights and safety mirrors, and CCTVs in hot spots

- Installing railings and bollards along roads and pedestrian walkways

Executing black spot initiative in collaboration with local councils, Rukun Tetangga, and residents' associations. Black spots or high crime areas are identified through:

- Unkempt and dirty surroundings, vacant houses, areas lacking in maintenance or lacking proper access road for police patrolling

- Concentration of illegal immigrants, drug addicts, gangsters, "*mat rempit*" and so on

- High presence of "victimless" crimes such as prostitution, gambling, and other crimes

Addressing black spots is premised on the Broken Windows theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). The theory states that maintaining and monitoring urban environments in good condition may stop further vandalism and escalation into more serious crime. Broken windows send the message that the people in that community are unable and unwilling to defend themselves. It sends a signal that one can engage in criminal behaviour with little risk of detection. It has been successfully implemented in many places, notably New York City and Chicago. In New York City, for instance, violent crime dropped 51% and continued to drop for the following ten years after adopting initiatives designed in tandem with the Broken Windows theory (Corman & Mocan, 2002).

In tandem with the efforts to reduce crime, the criminal justice system must ensure that justice is served timely and recidivism is kept to a minimum. The initial step was to clear the backlog of violent crime cases and to raise the ratio of charges.

Today, recidivism may be as high as 50%. Another set of programmes needs to be formulated to address the issue. They may include transforming in-prison rehabilitation and post release resettlement programmes. The effort to reduce crime thus involves many partners (Figure 2). Although it is the core function of the police, there are many partners who have a role as well as responsibility.
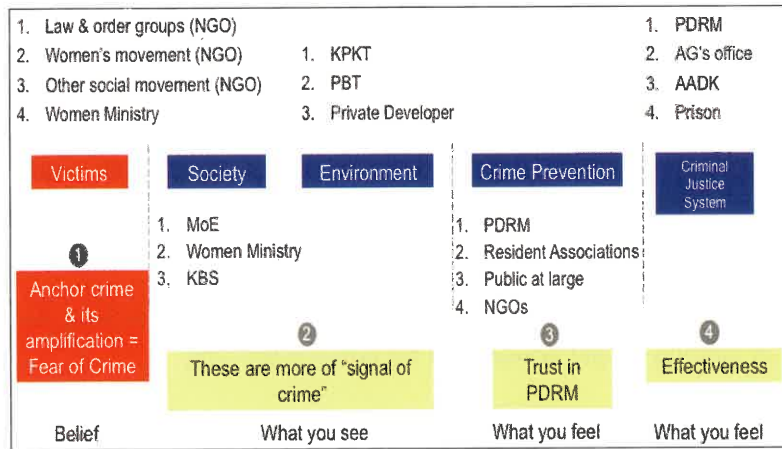
Figure 2: A Holistic View in Reducing Crime

Adapted: PEMANDU, 2011

Note:

KPKT   – Kementerian Perumahan dan Kerajaan Tempatan (Ministry of Housing and Local Government

PBT   – Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan (Local Council)

AG   – Attorney General

AADK – Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan (National Anti-drugs Agency)

The fight against crime is a relentless effort. The effectiveness of crime fighting will be very much reduced if the police is left to do the task alone. Only collaborative efforts, drawing on the partnership with the local councils, other government and non-government agencies and the community, will bring about the best results.

Fear of Crime

The lower crime index is a direct result of reduction in crime rates. It would therefore appear that when the crime index goes down, the public would feel safe. However, a lot of scepticism still remains as to whether crime has actually been reduced. Whilst the crime index has reduced by 30%, more than 50% of the public surveyed believed that crime would increase in the next 3 years (Figure 3). In 2011, 52.8% of the people surveyed did not feel safe, and the figure has remained about constant until today (PEMANDU, 2012).
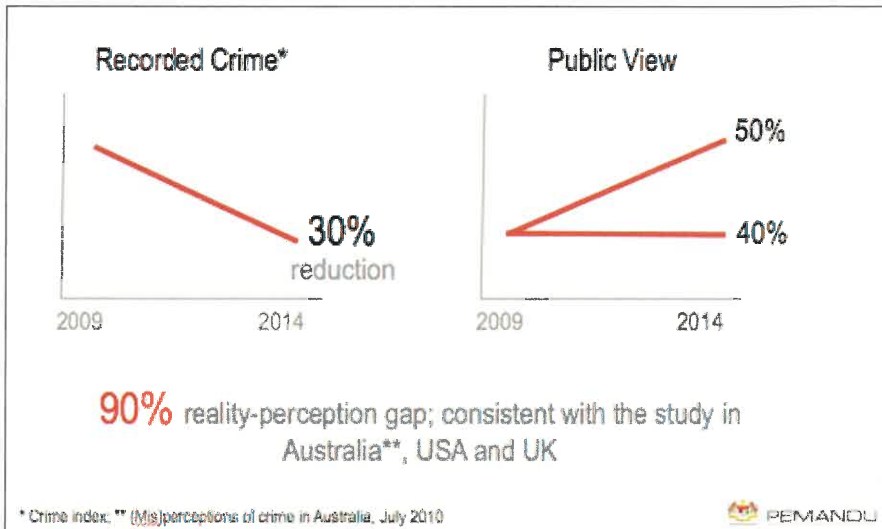
Figure 3: Comparison of Crime Perception in Malaysia and Australia

Source: PEMANDU, 2011

The same is observed in many other countries. In USA, UK, Australia and other countries, criminologists contend that public perception of crime remains out of synchronization with reality (Figure 4). In Australia, more than 90% of the people surveyed believed that crime had increased, contrary to the actual situation (Davis & Dossetor, 2010).

Figure 4: The Reality-Perception Gap in Other Countries

Source: Office of National Statistics (2015), gallup.com (2009)

The correlation between the actual crime situation and the fear of crime may be low (Figure 5), as the fear can occur even in situations where the crime rate is low. Research has provided little evidence to suggest that there is a link between the fear of crime and the actual likelihood of victimization (Wyne, 2008).
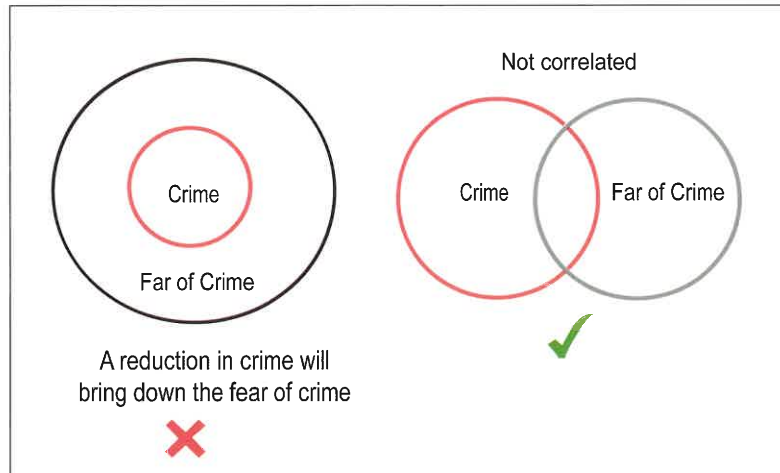

Figure 5: Correlation Between Crime and Fear of Crime

Source: Internet Journal of Criminology, 2008

The fear of crime is an emotional reaction to a sense of anxiety produced by a threat of physical harm. Such threat can be actual or perceived. Fear may not be caused by actual victimisation. It can be a fear of being a victim as opposed to the actual probability of being a victim of crime (Hale, 1996).

However, fear in itself is real – it affects behaviour, politics, economics and social life. Fear of crime affects far more people than crime itself. As pointed out by the UK government's strategy paper on crime titled '*Cutting Crime - A New Partnership*' (The Home Office, 2007), "if crime falls but people do not see and feel that fall, their quality of life is affected and the benefits of reduced crime is not being realised". Hence, it is important to address the fear of crime – crime and the fear of crime should be treated as two distinct social problems to be addressed.

Research also shows some interesting findings contrary to common assumptions about the fear of crime and actual crime prevalence. Fear is not determined simply by the seriousness of offense (Warr, 2000). To generate strong fear, an offence must be perceived as both serious and likely to occur. Residential burglary is the most feared crime in the United States because it is viewed as both relatively serious and rather likely. Murder on the other hand is perceived to be very serious but less likely to occur.

According to John Howard Society of Alberta (1999), certain groups such as women and the elderly who are less at risk according to crime statistics have higher fear of crime than their male and younger counterparts. Similarly, a study by Duffy, Wake, Burrows, & Bremner (2008) found that people seem to overestimate the prevalence of crime, often believing that crime in the city or across the country is much higher than in their local neighbourhood.

To first understand what constitutes the fear of crime, a survey was carried out by PEMANDU (Performance Management and Delivery Unit) in collaboration with Frost and Sullivan to ascertain what is on the top of mind and what is most feared. The issues on the top of mind may not necessarily be the most feared (PEMANDU, 2012).
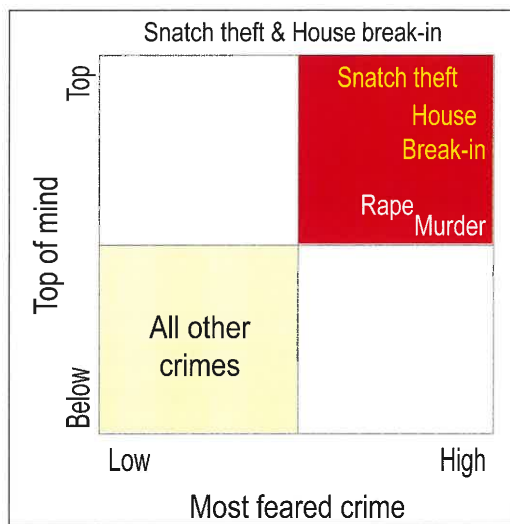

Figure 6: Anchor Crimes

Source: PEMANDU, 2012

A combination of these two dimensions represented by the events in the upper right hand quadrant in Figure 6 forms the anchor crime. It was found that snatch theft and house break-in were key anchor crimes.

Work has already been commenced by PEMANDU to further understand the fear of crime in collaboration with the academia, non-government organizations and private sector. The plan is to use innovative approaches such as crowd sourcing and solutioning.

Mitigation on Fear of Crime

There are four key strategies to mitigate the fear of crime (Figure 7).
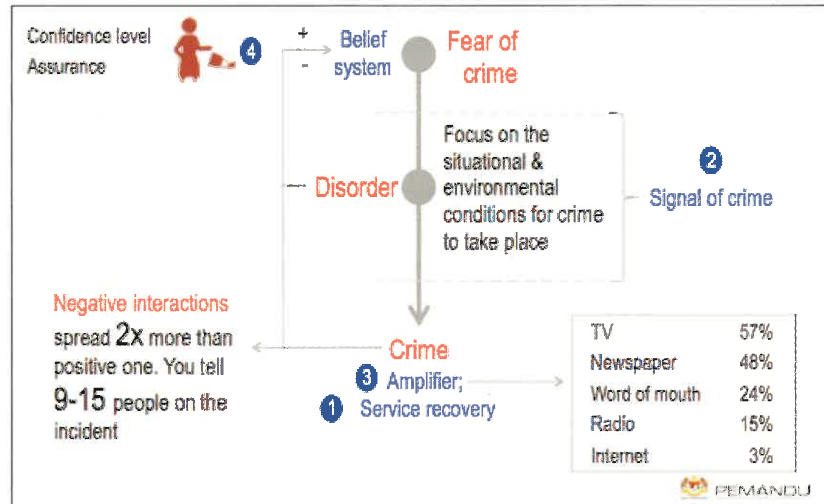

Figure 7: Four Key Strategies To Mitigate The Fear of Crime

Source: PEMANDU, 2012

The first strategy to mitigate the fear of crime is to ensure the provision of good service by the police force at all touch points with the citizens. Touch points refer to all contact ranging from reporting a crime, anti-social or suspicious activity, being a victim, and seeking information from the police. According to a research conducted in England and Wales, 30% of the respondents who have had contact with the police were dissatisfied. Most of the dissatisfaction stems from frustration about the poor access to the police and the unhelpful attitude, making the people feel their concerns are of a low priority (Hopkins, 2010).

- 75% of the respondents want to be treated with dignity and respect

- 73% want to be listened to

- 57% want the police to get things right the first time so they don't need to complain in the first place

In providing good service, the police must demonstrate responsiveness and empathy. They must also convey reliability (the ability to perform the job) and provide assurance.

Good service builds trust and confidence. These elements of good service are not only reassuring but they also generate positive word of mouth. One person who has a positive

experience may speak to six others although conversely, they will engage in twice as much "word of mouth" about negative experiences (Hart, Heskett & Sasser, 1990).

The second strategy to mitigate the fear of crime is to address the signals of crime. The signals of crime refer to those situational and environmental conditions conducive to crime and tend to amplify the fear of crime. Some of the tools in removing the signals of crime are through personalised policing, community engagement, and environmental design to reduce or even eliminate signals of crime (Cordner, 2010). Complementing these initiatives with the adoption of the Broken Windows theory is a powerful approach to reassurance of the public and mitigating the fear of crime.

The third strategy to mitigate the fear of crime is to engage in strategic communications. Since battling fear of crime is largely a battle of the mind, strategic communication is important (Figure 8). The strategic communication must put emphasis on conveying the right and positive message in a regular manner to the public.
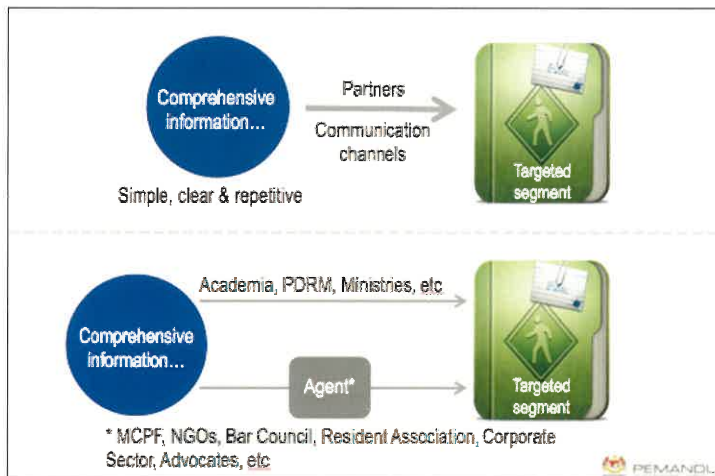

Figure 8: The Battle For The Mind of The Rakyat

Source: PEMANDU, 2012

The mass media is a powerful amplifying mechanism when it comes to crime. It has been found that crimes occur in inverse proportion to their seriousness – the more serious, the less likely it will occur (Erickson & Gibbs, 1979). In terms of news coverage (printed and social media), the emphasis is on news worthiness. Hence the mass media would be an important channel as well as a target segment. The messages from advocates would be clear, concise and reiterative. In moving forward, PDRM would become more sophisticated purveyors of reassurance as an antidote to the inevitable negative messages in the media.

The fourth strategy to mitigate the fear of crime is to build confidence and assurance, reconnecting the police and the citizens through a variety of measures. These include personalised policing which builds familiarity between the residents and the police officers and an omnipresence programme to increase the visibility of police on the streets. A study by Pate, Wycoff, Skogan & Sherman (1986) found that more proactive citizen contact at residences and businesses, taking down "problems" mentioned by the people and following up on those problems build confidence in the people as well. This was successfully carried out in Houston and Newark, USA where the initiatives were found to have reduced fear of personal victimization and perceived levels of social disorder, personal crime and property crime.

When citizens see, hear and feel that they have been attended to, their fear of crime will be mitigated. Clearly, the thrust in reducing the fear of crime is in instilling confidence and providing reassurance. The public must have confidence on the police force in the delivery of their duties, and visibility of their presence together with effectiveness provides reassurance.

Flanagan (2008) stated that to sustain the efforts in reducing the fear of crime, a systematic measurement of perceptions and confidence must be institutionalised in addition to the belief that which is measured will get focused on. As such, a crime perception indicator would be developed by the authority to gauge the citizens' view on the effectiveness of the strategies in reducing fear of crime.

Accelerating Modernising Policing

Policing has historically been a reactive enterprise, focused on responding to the public for its services and having a legalistic, command and control disposition. However the world is getting more complex and sophisticated. Accenture (2013) identified a few common challenges to why it is difficult to exercise policing in this era:

- Rising citizen expectations as regards to crime reporting, emergency response effectiveness, citizen care, public safety and engagement

- Increasing urbanisation at the rate of 2.4% per annum with 50% of the urban population under economic pressure

- Crime is becoming more mobile and sophisticated. Criminals move around easily within and across borders, use better equipment and technology and are increasingly better at covering their crimes. In short, criminals are not only moving with the times but are innovating to stay ahead.

- Despite rising citizen expectations and the increasing scope of criminality, police departments are constrained by budgets and austerity measures. By 2025, the funding gap between the demand for public services and the supply in Malaysia is about RM 48 billion.

To meet these challenges, PDRM must accelerate its programme to modernise policing. The initiatives must be smart on crime, cost effective, aligned to the citizens' expectations and fit for the future. The path to modernising is shown in Figure 9.
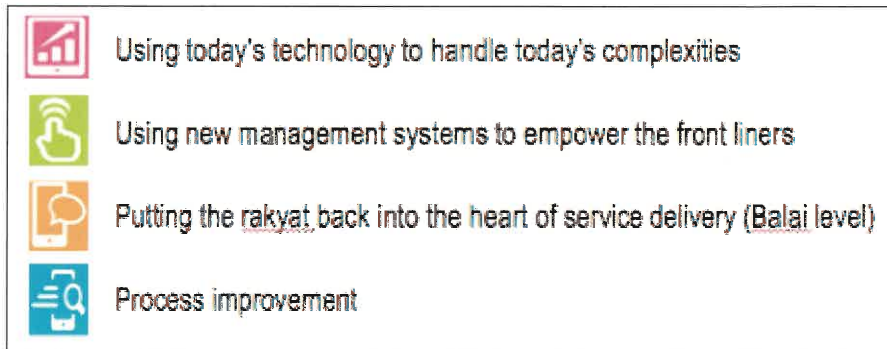

	Using today's technology to handle today's complexities
	Using new management systems to empower the front liners
	Putting the rakyat back into the heart of service delivery (Balai level)
	Process improvement

Figure 9: The Path To Modern Policing

Source: Accenture, 2013

Note: Rakyat – Citizen; Balai – Police Station

The first is using today's technology to handle today's complexities. This means equipping the police officers with the data and information to be able to predict and improve its services with analytics, geographical profiling and tracking of potential re-offenders. This is especially important in shifting the emphasis to focus policing on crime prevention. Peel (1829) stated that to always recognize that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder and not the physical evidence of police action in dealing with them is one of the tenets of modern policing.

From a survey done in Great Britain, USA and Canada, Boyd & Skelton (2012) found that the public believes that crime prevention should be the focus of the criminal justice system (Figure 10).
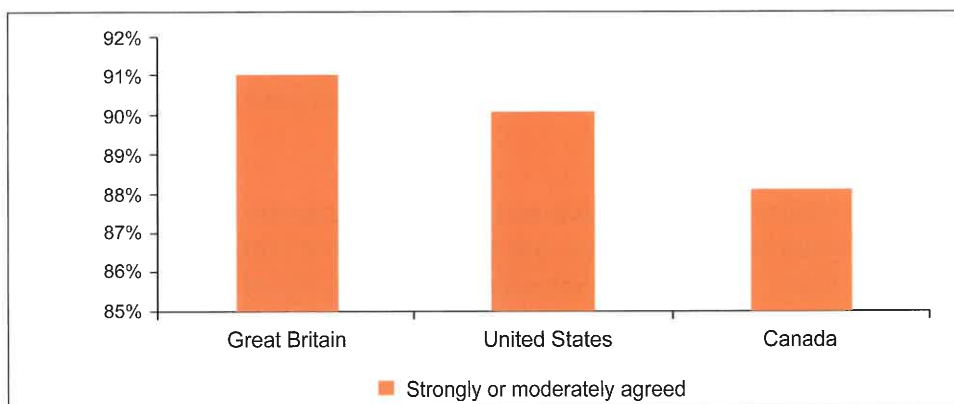
**Figure 10: Percentage of Respondents Who See Crime Prevention As Key Focus
of The Criminal Justice System**

Source: Boyd & Skelton, 2012

In order to focus on crime prevention, a Crime Prevention and Community Safety Department has been established within PDRM to work with the community. In addition, PDRM will also continue to work with non-government organizations to educate and train people on how to improve the neighbourhood and surrounding environment for crime prevention.

The second is to develop new management systems to empower the front-liners that are involved in fighting and preventing crime. Innovation hubs should be established to further the knowledge of the tactics and strategies that are successful in fighting and preventing crime. The Institute of Public Security of Malaysia (IPSOM)[2] could be such a hub to link the academia, technology experts and industry leaders to work together to transform, test and translate the approaches to crime prevention, alleviation of fear of crime and crime problem solving.

The third is to put the citizens back into the heart of service delivery at the *Balai* (police station) level. This initiative will help to reconnect the police to the citizens using the *Balai* (police station) as the delivery mechanism. The Balai (police station) was designed as the delivery mechanism for local policing and responsible for:

- Providing effective response to emergencies and calls for service

- Combating local crime

- Investigating crimes to bring offenders to justice

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2   The Institute of Public Security of Malaysia (IPSOM) is under the Ministry of Home Affairs established on 31 June 2013.

However, over the years as the communities grew and the scope of the *Balai* (police station) expanded, there is a growing disconnect and separation of the *Balai* (police station) from the citizens. There is thus a need to reconnect the *Balai* (police station) and the citizens for crime reporting and feedback, case management and victim support. As community policing gain prominence, the *Balai* (police station) would be seen as a point of convergence to provide the required leadership and point of reference.

The fourth is process improvements to optimise ways of working that can help lower operating cost whilst delivering service with speed and efficiency. Developing an infrastructure to contain, collect and connect digitised information will enable police officers to operate from different locations (Figure 11) efficiently and effectively. This will assist not only the police but also relevant members of the criminal justice system.
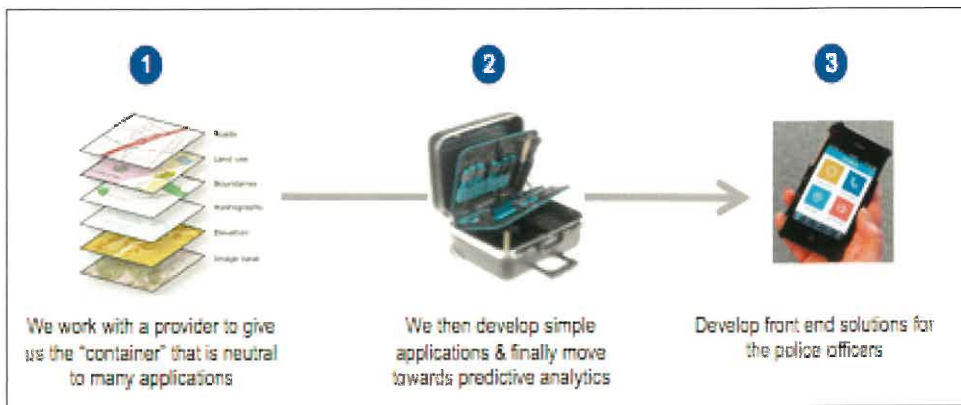

Figure 11: Optimising Ways of Working

Source: PEMANDU, 2012

The energy that fuels the transformation to a modern police force is provided by good leadership throughout the police organisation, and by the human capital. Those in the supervisory capacity must be able to inspire everyone in the organisation to meet strategic goals (embodied in enhanced key performance indicators). Operational police officers must have the imagination and ability to persuade those they come into contact with of the value of everyone working in concert to reduce crime as well as the fear of crime.

Conclusion

PDRM has achieved measurable successes in reducing crime by 30% within 4 years. The basket of programmes that it has initiated in reducing crime must continue. At the same time, efforts should be put in to strengthen areas of weaknesses, and new programmes to be designed to keep up with changes over time. Strict monitoring of the achievements must also be given emphasis in order to respond immediately if any deficiencies were to occur.

Reducing crime is only one part of the equation. The other is to address the fear of crime and to institutionalise a solution to the problem by developing a crime perception indicator to track and report on the effectiveness of efforts made. This recognises that the prevalence of crime and the fear of crime are not significantly correlated, and there must be two distinct work streams to address them.

Moving forward, PDRM must be proactive and stay not only relevant but ahead in the game of both crime fighting and crime prevention. To function even more effectively, efforts must be made to accelerate its programmes to modernise policing embodied in the use of technology, new management systems and process improvements.

To be aligned with the citizens' expectations, the system must put the citizens back into the heart of service delivery through the *Balai* (police station). This step will facilitate policing to be delivered more locally, instil confidence in public service delivery and provide assurance in reducing the fear of crime.

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