Unheard Voices Within The Police: The Case for Q Methodology

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1. Background

- Q Methodology has been used since 1935, primarily as a way of measuring attitudes (Brown, 1980).
- Q Methods are designed to group individuals by their opinions, not by their rank or experience
- Groups of individuals such as Police Officers working on the same project often develop unique opinions and experience the same events in different ways (Stock and Thelen, 1958)
- The methods give a voice to those who usually cannot speak out. The range of opinions within Police Forces are often unjustly unheard. These beliefs deserve to be heard

2. COVID-19 Impact

- In light of COVID-19, face to face research has been restricted and workers including Police Officers have been asked to work from home where possible
- A variety of online Q Methodology software such as FlashQ are available meaning research studies can continue online with little impact
- Police Officers are currently under increased pressure and there are concerns that opinions towards career aspects are likely to have been impacted.
- The use of Q Methods could provide an engaging process of gathering information on Police Officer attitudes towards a variety of topics including their mental wellbeing

3. Methodology

Concourse/Q Set
- Concourse created consisting of up to 150 statements or images
- Concourse refined into Q set of around 40 items

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Pre-Sort/Q Sort
- Participants sort Q set into three categories; Agree, Disagree and Neutral
- Each pile is then sorted into the Q grid with Agree and Disagree statements at the extremes (Figure 1)

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Interviews/Comments
- Participants comment on their sorting choices
- This provides opportunity to understand viewpoints and provide context

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Analysis
- A factor analysis is conducted on the Q Sort data
- Upon rotation, Q sorts grouped together have similar viewpoints

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Interpretation
- The results of the analysis are considered along with the interview or comments to understand the full spectrum of views on a topic among this particular group of participants

4. Positives

- Q Methodology can give a voice to Police Officers who believe they have valuable inputs but are often unheard.
- Officers are provided an opportunity to invoke change and stand up for their beliefs
- The methods are easily transferrable to online situations
- The mixed method approach of Q allows for Police Officers to provide subjective opinions, providing context to the Q sort
- The sorting process engages individuals due to the novel structured approach and can be utilised universally

5. Criticisms and Rebuttals

- Can analysis from Q Methodology studies be generalised to a wider population?

✓ No it cannot however Q methods do not aim to generalise but rather to inform on the spread of individual views on a topic at a certain point in time.

- Is the use of a forced response grid restrictive to expression of opinions?

✓ Using a grid as below (Figure 1) to sort 40 statements provides more choices than there are people in the world (Watts and Stenner, 2012)

4	3	2	1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4

Figure 1: Q Sorting Grid

References
- Brown, S.R., 1980. *Political subjectivity: Applications of Q methodology in political science*. Yale University Press.
- Stock, D. and Thelen, H.A., 1958. Emotional dynamics and group culture: Experimental studies of individual and group behavior.
- Watts, S. and Stenner, P., 2012. *Doing Q methodological research: Theory, method & interpretation*. Sage.