

Policing the Drumcree Demonstrations in Northern Ireland: Testing Leadership Theory In Practice

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This is a case study of radical change in the leadership strategy for the policing of the annual Drumcree Sunday demonstrations in Northern Ireland between 2002 and 2004. It is co-authored by an academic and a practitioner who were both involved in different ways in the development and implementation of the alternative strategy. John Benington researches and teaches public leadership and public value on the Warwick MPA degree, a public sector MBA. Irwin Turbitt was at the time a chief superintendent in the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and Warwick MPA student from 2000 to 2003.

In 2000 Turbitt was the head of the Performance Development Unit at National Police Training based in Hampshire England. While in this post he began the Warwick MPA course. Turbitt had long been interested in leadership theory and practice and had been drawn to the course as a result of a conversation with John Benington at an open day at Warwick University in May 2000. Turbitt was pleased to find an academic interested in strengthening the relationship between theory and practice. Both agreed that the purpose of theory was to improve practice, and that improved practice should help develop better theory.

In December 2001 Turbitt was appointed commander of the Craigavon District Command Unit (DCU) outside Belfast. Craigavon is one of the busiest DCUs in Northern Ireland. It was designed as a new town in the late 1960s to subsume the two existing towns of Lurgan and Portadown. It is an interesting area to police, with a range of difficult challenges such as drugs, race crime, burglary and alcohol-related crime, as well as specific Northern Ireland issues such as paramilitary activity and, of course, the 'Drumcree' demonstrations which take place in the district each July between Protestant unionists and Catholic republicans. However, this would not be Turbitt's first experience policing Drumcree – He had worked there over a number of July weekends regularly since 1986. Now however he had an opportunity to try a new strategy to ease the hostilities and to transform the conflict. It had been extremely violent for at least 20 years with the police feeling permanently caught in the middle.

In early 2002, Turbitt began to think about how to introduce a new approach to the policing of 'Drumcree'. The previous year, at another difficult Orange Order parade in Portadown, 68 police officers had been injured and it was made clear to him by his new assistant chief constable boss that a repeat would not be acceptable. It was also clear to the force that the previous approach had not been successful. A change was not only expected but hoped for, and this gave him the chance to try something new.

Turbitt decided to test an approach based on Mark Moore's ideas about public value, and Ronald Heifetz' ideas about adaptive leadership, to which he had been introduced by Benington on the Warwick MPA. He also invited Benington to shadow him, the police and the army during the annual Drumcree Sunday demonstrations in July 2002, July 2003 and July 2004. Benington attended various

parts of the preparation and debriefing for the July events, and was given free access to discussions with police and army officials. He was also able to spend time with senior figures in the Protestant Orange Order and the mainly Republican Garvaghy Road Residents Coalition, even visiting some in their homes for confidential discussions.

Turbitt wrote up his experience as a case study of adaptive leadership for his Warwick MPA. He was later promoted to assistant chief constable and seconded to the role of deputy director of the Home Office Police Standards Unit. He has now left from the police and works independently as a teacher, mentor and supporter of leaders who are interested in practicing adaptive leadership. He is also an associate fellow at Warwick Business School, teaching MPA students sitting in the same classroom he sat in when he himself was a student.

This leadership case study draws on Turbitt's first-hand experience as police silver commander for the whole operation, his critical reflection upon theory in the light of this practice, and his subsequent teaching. It combines this with Benington's participant observation and field notes taken at Drumcree each July over three years.

This gives the case study both strengths and weaknesses. First, one of the key actors in the case study, Irwin Turbitt, is contributing to the account and to the discussion from first hand experience, which adds greatly to its texture and immediacy. But inevitably this privileges his particular perspective on events and overshadows alternative perspectives. We have tried to balance this by including other voices, both from the theory and from participant interviews.

Second, the case study is ongoing rather than complete. The Drumcree demonstrations continue the first weekend each July, and new developments take place every year. This contrasts with many other leadership case studies based upon past events and dead leaders.

Third, Turbitt is consciously applying, testing, and adapting particular academic theories. This provides an unusually clear and compelling interpretation of the case, but may inhibit readers from making their own original interpretation. It will be important for readers to pay close attention to the complexities and the paradoxes of the leadership challenge, and of the decision-making situation, rather than generalizing too quickly from theory.

Fourth, Benington is by no means an independent or neutral commentator. He developed the Warwick MPA and leads the module on leadership, strategy and value, and draws heavily on the work of Heifetz and Moore, both of whom are personal friends as well as academic colleagues. Benington was also one of the supervisors for Turbitt's MPA dissertation on Drumcree.

The Drumcree Conflict

The Drumcree conflict is part of a wider history of deep-seated sectarian conflicts within Ireland between Unionists and Nationalists, Loyalists and Republicans, Protestants and Catholics. Some historians believe the crucial divisions date from the Reformation in the 16th century and the plantation and religious wars of the 17th century. The conflict which surfaces at Drumcree thus has very deep roots in history and culture, as well as in politics and religion. These divisions are experienced in the here and now of Northern Ireland as split communities, segregated schools, and sectarian biases within many workplaces in both the public and private sectors.

This case study covers 2002-2004, a period overshadowed by the signing of the historic Good Friday peace agreement in 1998. That agreement was based upon a power-sharing arrangement which gave representatives of each community a veto over the other in a devolved assembly. The British secretary of state was to remain responsible for non-devolved matters – significantly, law and order – and to represent Northern Ireland in the UK.

The peace agreement was signed in April 1998, and endorsed by the public in a referendum in May 1998. But only very limited progress had been made beyond this point by 2002. Republicans were determined not to be seen as the defeated army, so they refused to decommission their weapons unilaterally. Unionists were unhappy with plans for the early release of political prisoners. They also disliked plans for the termination of the largely Protestant Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and its non-sectarian re-branding as the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Elections to the new Northern Ireland Assembly were held in June 1998. But establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive was delayed by arguments over whether the Irish Republican Army should be required to decommission its weapons before its political wing, Sinn Fein, was allowed to take seats on the Executive. Power was eventually devolved to the assembly in November 1999 on the understanding that decommissioning would begin once the assembly was fully functional. However, by February 2000, the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Mandelson, had suspended the assembly on the grounds that insufficient decommissioning had taken place. The assembly was restored in May 2000 when the IRA pledged to put its weapons 'beyond use' and to open some of its weapons dumps to inspection by international monitors. In November 2000, the first minister of the assembly, David Trimble, banned Sinn Fein ministers from participation in the north-south bodies in order to force progress on IRA decommissioning. However, failure to achieve that progress led to his resignation in July 2001.

In the UK general election shortly afterwards, the Northern Ireland parties polarized even further. Parliamentary seats were gained by the Democratic Unionist Party led by Ian Paisley at the expense of David Trimble's more moderate Ulster Unionist Party. Seats were also gained by Gerry Adam's Sinn Fein at the expense of John Hume's more moderate Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). According to some commentators, by the summer of 2001 the gulf between the two communities was deeper and wider than for 30 years.

Drumcree 1807-1986

The 'Drumcree Sunday' parade was associated with incidents of disorder, terrorism and even murder long before the most recent troubles. The events that lie at the heart of this situation are from one perspective rather simple. A group of citizens, Orangemen from Loyal Orange Lodge (LOL) No 1, march from their meeting hall in Portadown to Drumcree Parish Church, usually on the first Sunday in July each year, for a religious service. This service commemorates those who lost their lives in the First World War battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916. Afterwards, the Orangemen march back to their starting point in Portadown. Their preferred return route includes the Garvaghy Road where another group of citizens – the nationalist residents represented by the Garvaghy Road Residents Committee (GRRRC) – reside.

But this annual march, which has been taking place since 1807, has a history that confounds the simple factual description above. Portadown has great importance as the town closest to where the Orange Order was formed in 1795, and Portadown District was the first district in the Orange Order. 'Drumcree' is often seen as a marching problem but marching is simply the visible symptom of a much more fundamental issue. As Seamus Mallon, the SDLP deputy leader, said in 1996: "The marches have not to do with who marched that road, but whose writ runs in Northern Ireland."

The Orange Order

People often ask if the Orange Order is a religious or a political organization. Arnold Hatch, Mayor of Craigavon, was quoted in the Portadown Times in 1985 as saying: 'The Orange Order is a Christian non-political organisation'. This seems to be confirmed by the membership criteria as quoted by Susan McKay:

an Orangeman should 'cultivate truth and justice . . . obedience to the laws; his deportment must be gentle and compassionate . . . he should honour and diligently study the holy scriptures . . . abstain from all cursing and profane language'. He should, above all, be a Protestant 'never in any way connected with the Church of Rome' whose 'fatal errors' he should 'strenuously oppose', while 'abstaining from all uncharitable words, actions or sentiments' towards Catholics.

Historically, there has been a close link between Drumcree and Portadown and the wider political scene in Northern Ireland. The Orange Order was pivotally involved in the campaign that persuaded the British government to partition Ireland in 1922 and to create a Northern Ireland remaining within the United Kingdom, while the rest of Ireland gained independence as a Republic.

The first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland was James Craig, a leading Orangeman, and later honoured as Lord Craigavon of Stormont. In 1932 he said 'I am an Orangeman first and a politician and member of this parliament afterwards'.

The march to Drumcree Church was a flashpoint as far back as 1873. The route included Obins Street, which was accessed through nationalist area The Tunnel, and it is reported that 100 Police with fixed bayonets confronted an Orange mob at The Tunnel, injuring several people and killing one.

In 1905 Catholic Patrick Falloon was watching an Orange Parade pass through Obins Street when he was confronted by Protestant Thomas Corder, who produced a revolver and shot him dead.

Prolonged conflict then began between the police and several hundred Orangemen. That evening, the police blocked the mouth of Obins Street to prevent another Orange Parade going through The Tunnel area.

Fast forward to 1972. Hundreds of members of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), clad in masks and paramilitary uniforms, escorted the Orangemen through The Tunnel into Obins Street to ensure their march was not impeded. Then in 1975 bombs were planted in derelict houses in Obins Street and set to detonate whilst the parade was passing. Following a warning, security forces searched the entire route and defused the bombs, thus enabling the parade to proceed.

Successive chief constables from as early as 1970 highlighted the costs of policing parades. Chief constable Sir Graham Shillington wrote in his 1970 annual report:

Many of these events carried enormous danger potentially in a city where experience has shown that even minor incidents can generate widespread and vicious rioting. While parades do not represent the sole danger to peace and order, it would nevertheless be a single contribution if the organisers of such efforts, wherever they may be, were to co-operate more fully with the Police in a selection of routes which avoided flashpoints as far as possible.

In his 1975 annual report, Sir Kenneth Newman, who had come from Scotland Yard to help rebuild and reorganise the RUC after the trauma of 1969 and the start of The Troubles, wrote:

No serious incident took place but the fact that some 14,860 Police Officers had to be transported to events throughout the Province gave some indication of the heavy demands made on the overstretched resources of the Force.

Jack Hermon, a local officer who replaced Newman, wrote in his first Annual Report, in 1980:

It is worth mentioning that all too often large numbers of Police personnel have to be deployed to deal with politically inspired parades and demonstrations, many of which pose a serious threat to public order. It is unfortunate after the experience of more than a decade of violence and civil disturbance, that such activities have not been abandoned in favour of less inflammatory forms of political expression.

Some five years later, having tried all other means, Hermon decided it was time to make more use of the state force available to him to regulate parades. He chose Portadown as one of four locations on which to focus. On Sunday 6 July, the RUC announced that the Church Parade would be allowed through The Tunnel the next day, but that parades on 12 and 13 July would not. Some Orangemen wanted to accept the change and go on with their celebrations. Others wanted to 'converge' in Portadown as a protest. A minority of hotheads wanted to storm the police barricades and march through. Serious rioting ensued and tensions between loyalists and the RUC in Portadown ran very high for a number of years. Dozens of RUC officers were intimidated or burnt out of their homes and many loyalists felt betrayed by 'their' police force.

There was much discussion between the Portadown District, unionist politicians and the RUC over the following months. An agreement was eventually reached, but it was the first of many negotiated in haste in times of great stress, and afterwards understood very differently by each the parties involved. In this case the Orangemen believed they had agreed to give up marching along Obins Street in exchange for a permanent guarantee they could march along the Garvaghy Road. The police claim there was no such commitment. There is no written record of the agreement.

Drumcree 1986-2001

Since 1986, the parade has marched to Drumcree Parish Church via Corcraun Road, Charles Street and Dungannon Road, although LOL No 1 continues to this day to include Obins Street in its notified route. For some years, the return route included Garvaghy Road. Although some Garvaghy Road residents opposed the parade, and large numbers of police and soldiers were required, the number of incidents was minimal until 1995.

Orangemen claimed that opposition to the parades down the Garvaghy Road had been whipped up by the IRA. However, it was SDLP leader John Hume who in 1986 objected to diverting the parades from Obins Street and the Tunnel while still permitting them to march down the Garvaghy Road since it, too, was predominantly Catholic. He claimed that the authorities were giving in to Orange bullying.

In 1995, after continuous campaigning by Garvaghy Road residents and surrounding nationalists, the RUC rerouted the March away from Garvaghy Road – the first time in 188 years. More than 1000 police officers were sent to Drumcree in an attempt to ward off any trouble. The situation changed dramatically and the current series of ‘Drumcree Sunday’ parades and associated policing operations began.

The Orangemen were thrown into immediate disarray. Orange Order members and others rioted, attempting to break through the police barricades. The police fired 24 plastic bullets. Meanwhile, thousands more loyalists continued to arrive in Portadown, and the Orange Order leaders and senior police officers began talks in an attempt to resolve the crisis.

A verbal agreement was reached that the Parade could proceed along the Garvaghy Road but without any bands. Nationalist protesters had been sitting on the road, but now they moved quietly aside and watched around 500 Orangemen walk silently past, led by Unionist MPs David Trimble and Ian Paisley. When the parade reached the centre of Portadown, Paisley and Trimble raised their arms up in the air in what appeared to be a gesture of triumph. This led to ill-feeling among the residents of the Garvaghy Road who believed that both the RUC and the Orange Order had broken their word.

This new volatile phase began as the peace process was moving towards the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Residents groups in nationalist areas were becoming more prominent, and the number one item on their agenda was parades. Parades were also top of the unionist political agenda. The Orange Order portrayed the issue as a false one, stirred up by Sinn Fein to attack Protestant culture. This ignores the long history associated with parades in Portadown, but there is no doubt that Sinn Fein used the issue to great effect politically. The high profile of the issue was recognised by ministers and officials at Stormont Castle and by the RUC.

On ‘Drumcree Sunday’ 1996, RUC chief constable Hugh Annesley decided to prevent the return parade from using the Garvaghy Road, and it was again stopped at Drumcree Bridge just down the hill from the church. A standoff commenced immediately. There was a steady increase in violence throughout Northern Ireland, with major routes being blocked by Orangemen and loyalist supporters. At Drumcree, demonstrators attempted to break through the barbed wire barricades erected by the police and army, and threw stones and bottles. The police reacted, firing plastic

bullets which injured three loyalist supporters.

Over the next four days the conflict escalated. Michael McGoldrick, a Catholic taxi driver in Lurgan was murdered, over 100 incidents of intimidation took place, there were 758 attacks on the police, 50 RUC officer were injured, and the police fired 662 plastic baton rounds.

The public order situation was getting worse. Northern Ireland was fast approaching anarchy and with 12 July 1996 looming, the Orange Order threatened to bring 100,000 Orangemen to Drumcree. On the morning of 11 July, the Chief Constable reversed his original decision to re-route the parade. Approximately 1200 Portadown Orangemen were allowed to march down the Garvaghy Road. The RUC moved quickly onto Garvaghy Road, supported by large numbers of the military, and cleared the nationalist residents from the road, pushing them back into the estates on either side to allow the Orange Order parade to pass. Rioting erupted immediately in the road, and nationalist areas in north and west Belfast, Derry and Armagh. The decision sparked off major discussions about who governs Northern Ireland, the role of policing and the impartiality of the police force. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Ireland, Cardinal Daly said:

I don't think there is any way in which the decision could have been favourably received but the way in which it was executed made it still more unfavourably received. It had a devastating effect on the relationship between the RUC and the Catholic community. I have no doubt about that.

The mishandling of Drumcree in 1996 left a terrible legacy. It exacerbated the long-standing problem of policing a divided society without full consent and co-operation, and, at a single stroke, destroyed 25 years of painful but tangible progress in transforming the relationship between the RUC and the Catholic minority community. It cost over £40 million. The RUC appeared either unprepared, or unable, to stand up to intimidation from the Orange Order.

Sir Patrick Mayhew, the Northern Ireland secretary of state, set up an independent review of parades and marches in Northern Ireland. The review recommended the creation of a Parades Commission which would take over decision-making from the police. The police made decisions on a single narrow criterion, the public order impact. However, the Parades Commission would consider other factors such as community impact.

The Parades Commission was not fully functional in time for the 1997 marching season, and as 'Drumcree Sunday' approached there was no accommodation between LOL No 1 and the GRRC. Shortly before the march, the Loyalist Volunteer Force issued a death threat against Catholics if the parade was not allowed to proceed.

On Sunday 6th July 1997 at 3.55am, without prior warning, 1500 RUC officers and supporting British soldiers moved onto the Garvaghy Road and sealed off the area. Rioting broke out and plastic bullets were fired. At around 1.15pm, the Orange Order parade was allowed to proceed down the Garvaghy Road. Later that day, the RUC Chief Constable, Ronnie Flanagan, said he had decided to allow the parade to pass down the Garvaghy Road because of the threats to Catholics from loyalist paramilitaries. Rioting spread during the rest of the day to other nationalist areas.

In June 1998, the Parades Commission issued its first determination on 'Drumcree Sunday'. It stated the parade would be re-routed so that it would not pass down the Garvaghy Road. An attempt was made with the wording to be optimistic and positive:

We would also want to stress that our decision relates to 1998 alone. There are many elements of the

Drumcree Church Parade which are not at odds with most of the factors in our guidelines. For example, it is a Church Parade, it has been demonstrated that it can take place in an orderly fashion, and the Garvaghy Road is an arterial route. However, we see the need to break the cycle in 1998. The opportunity to provide it by such a break should be seized by political, community and religious leaders to demonstrate greater responsibility and to make strident efforts to bridge the cession between both sides of the community so laying the foundations for a more tolerant atmosphere in future.

On Sunday 5th July 1998 at lunchtime, the stand-off commenced. Prominent national figures arrived later, including the grand master of the Orange Order and Ian Paisley. Overnight, there was rioting in a number of Protestant areas of Northern Ireland and people who sympathized with the Drumcree Orangemen blocked a number of roads across the province. As the week progressed, the situation deteriorated. LOL No 1 leader Harold Gracey appealed for unity amongst Protestants: 'We are all one family. The only way we'll win is by standing together.' He assured the brethren that he knew for a fact it was not the Portadown police who had decided there should be no one at the barrier to take a letter from the Order. The implication was that Portadown police were loyal - outsiders were to blame.

It was expected that the crisis would intensify over the 12 July weekend. Violence continued at Drumcree each night. At roughly 4.30am on the morning of Sunday 12 July 1998 three Catholic boys aged 8, 9 and 10-years old - Jason, Mark and Richard Quinn - were burned to death when their home was fire-bombed by loyalists. This happened almost 60 miles from Drumcree but in many people's minds the two locations and the events in each were joined.

Although spokesmen for the Orange Order argued there was no connection between this incident and Drumcree, or indeed all the other acts of violence, many supporters left in confusion and shame, and the numbers of protesters decreased considerably.

Nonetheless, during the 1998 parade and demonstration over 2,500 public order incidents were recorded. One hundred and forty four houses were damaged in attacks, 467 vehicles were damaged, 615 attacks were made on members of the security forces, including 24 shooting incidents and 45 blast bombs, 76 police officers were injured, 284 people arrested, 632 petrol bombs thrown, 2250 petrol bombs recovered by the RUC, and 837 plastic baton rounds fired by the RUC.

July 1998 was the first time the parade was successfully prevented from marching down the Garvaghy Road. Afterwards, there were scores of marches and parades in Portadown and elsewhere in Northern Ireland in support of LOL No 1's position. A token demonstration was maintained by the Orange Order at Drumcree from July 1998 to July 1999. The Orange Order also organized hundreds of demonstrations and marches in Portadown and across Northern Ireland in support of its demand to be allowed to parade down the Garvaghy Road. Between 1998 and 2001 a number of high-powered mediation efforts were made, to no avail. Most continued up until the last possible minute before each year's parade. The parade and the ensuing violence then followed an all too familiar historical pattern.

In 2002 the determination from the Parades Commission for 'Drumcree Sunday' again prohibited the return parade from the Garvaghy Road. The scene was set for another 'Drumcree Sunday'. But this year there were significant differences in the strategy adopted by the police and the army. The analysis of these differences, and the events of 2002 and 2003, are the subject of this case study.

We want to use this case as a way of deepening our understanding of the ideas of Grint (Tame, Wicked & Critical problems), Heifetz (Adaptive leadership) and Moore (Creating Public Value). You should have read about these ideas in the 'Good Crisis' article. We will clarify your questions about the theory during our time working together but we want to focus on the practical use of the ideas in practice.

To do that we want to use this case as a shared resource to work on in the session

We want to suggest that while it would be easy to label 'Drumcree' solely as a crisis there is more to be gained from thinking about it as fundamentally a wicked problem. Sure it has moments of real physical crisis and is frequently used and abused as a socially constructed crisis to support or oppose different aspirations. There is also a great deal of expert technical work to be done just to police it professionally but the creation of any significant amount of public value might be more likely when we try to think and work on it using Heifetz's ideas about leading adaptively.

In preparation for the session please consider the following questions:

1. What 'public value propositions' for this problem situation can you think of?
2. What 'authorising environment' might you need to develop and maintain in order to do the work necessary to achieve the public value proposition(s)?
3. What authority resources you could use (instead of money) to make progress on this problem?
4. What obligations are citizens, in the various factions associated with this problem situation, avoiding? - these are often adaptive challenges.
5. What operating (rather than organisational) capacity might be mobilised to work on the problem?
6. How might you give the work back to the people with the problem? – they are clearly unable or unwilling to do the necessary work.
7. How might you regulate the distress necessary for adaptive work?
8. How might you create a safe but challenging 'holding environment'?
9. How might you maintain disciplined attention to the adaptive work?
10. How might you protect the voices without authority – the voices of leadership from below?