

IS SECURITY MANAGEMENT A PROFESSION?

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Introduction

In this article I intend to show that Security Management in the New Zealand private security sector is not a profession, at least not yet. Before embarking on the arguments it is necessary to define what is meant by the terms security and management in this context.

The definition of security will vary according to the nature of the working environment. In the private sector, security is generally related to the prevention of loss through theft. In the public sector, for example, in prisons, the primary thrust is the prevention of escapes from custody. The physical approaches taken to achieve the objective will no doubt vary considerably as will the definition of security itself. However there is one definition that appears to cover not only this discussion, but also the public and private sectors:

Security provides those means, active and passive, which serve to protect and preserve an environment that allows for the conduct of activities within the organisation or society without disruption.

(Post and Kingsbury, 1991: 10)

In this discussion, security management is held to be the management of those means that security provides. They consist of people, structures, systems and procedures. This is consistent with the definition of management by Henry Fayol:

to manage is to forecast and plan, to organise, to command, to co-ordinate, and to control.

(Fayol, H. as quoted by Cole, 1993: 3)

Professions are generally accepted to be a limited number of occupations that require special learning and carry with them a certain degree of prestige. This view is expanded by Simonsen (1996) and Manunta (1996) who argue that before an occupation can be described as a profession it must satisfy certain criteria such as those normally expected of the medical and legal professions.

For example, in his argument in favour of conferring professional status upon security management, Simonsen's criteria consisted of:

- *Specific standards and a code of ethics and conduct that governs the actions of the members of that profession.*
- *A body of knowledge, professional journals, and an historical perspective that acts as a guide for new members of the profession.*
- *A recognised association that provides a forum for the continuing discussion and development of the profession.*
- *A certification programme that ensures that the members of the profession are competent to practice in the field.*
- *An educational discipline that prepares students in the specific functions and philosophies of that profession.*

(Simonsen, 1996: 229)

I will use the same criteria to show the opposite is the case.

Consideration of the Criteria

Standards of conduct and a code of ethics imply that there must be a governing body that will control the actions of members of the profession. Simonsen, although looking at the situation in the United States, comments:

Therefore, it seems possible that the individual groups of security practitioners are moving towards meeting this test of professional status.

(Simonsen, 1996: 230)

When there is occupational malpractice by a doctor, the offender may be disciplined by the Medical Council of New Zealand, which is the recognised governing body for the medical profession. Serious offences may result in removal of a doctor's name from the Medical Register. When this happens, it is illegal for the doctor to practice medicine. As far as the security industry is concerned, there is nothing similar to the MCNZ, nor is there a list of 'registered' security managers. The New Zealand Security Association may, for example, terminate the membership of any member convicted of an offence punishable by imprisonment or who is in breach of its Code of Ethical Conduct (NZSA, 2001: 5). Given that membership of the NZSA is not a prerequisite to working in the security industry, it will often be entirely a matter for the individual employer to pursue disciplinary action if there is occupational malpractice by a security manager. I contend, therefore, that the first criterion is not met.

In comparison with other professions, such as medical and legal, the body of knowledge relating to the study of security management is extremely small. This may be due to its relative youth and the scarcity of academic study on the subject. Only a small number of quality magazines on security management exist, but they do not satisfy the need for a journal. Gill sums up the situation rather well:

I find it unbelievable that the security profession and the industry serving it has so little real information on the practices of its enemies. Or how effective or ineffective its chosen countermeasures really are. Such things as Home Office statistics only scratch the surface. There are virtually no in-depth studies publicly available of interest and use to security managers.

(Gill, M as quoted by Tyler, 1995: 13)

He goes on to say:

The security world needs a journal, in the scholarly sense of the word. Magazines like Security Management Today, with which I work closely, do a good job of reporting the latest trends in the security world, discussing current affairs and keeping us up to date on technology. But they do not have the space to publish detailed research papers or doctrines on security management subjects. They may well report on the existence of such papers, but cannot reproduce them in full. That is not their role and they are not structured for it. The security profession has no equivalent of, say, the British Medical Journal. So we are going to publish one.

(Ibid. 17)

The result is that the International Journal of Risk, Security and Crime Prevention is now in its seventh year of publication. Textbooks on the study of security management are still noticeable by their absence from library bookshelves and major

bookstores, although a few can be obtained with a modicum of difficulty. To say that a body of knowledge exists, in the accepted sense, is stretching the truth just a little. I would argue that the second criterion is only partially met.

In New Zealand, few security associations exist. Examples include the New Zealand Security Association and ASIS International. Although there are close links between them and among various special interest groups, there is no single association that represents security managers. Indeed, there is no requirement for security managers to be members of any professional association. NZSA has "five classes of membership, namely Corporate members, Associate members, Affiliate members, Honorary members and Life members", (NZSA, 2001: 4). Membership, in one form or another, is open to individuals as well as business entities. ASIS membership, on the other hand, is open to individual security practitioners who satisfy certain criteria to become members, associate members or student members (ASIS, 2003), however it is not open to business entities.

Unlike the UK, where a plethora of organisations exists, the NZSA is recognised by government as the body that is able to speak on behalf of the security industry generally. Furthermore, in recent months it is noticeable that some invitations to tender, particularly those emanating from government, expressly state that membership of NZSA is required or preferred. Even though these signs are encouraging, the absence of a requirement for membership of a professional association does not tend to persuade that the third criterion is met.

The fourth criterion concerns a certification programme. Simonsen (1996: 231) lists a number of associations and states that most of them have certification programmes. Only one of the associations he mentions features regularly in other references. This is ASIS International. It has a security management programme known as the Certified Protection Professional (CPP) and has developed additional programmes such as the Physical Security Professional (PSP) and Professional Certified Investigator (PCI). Manunta (1996: 235) agrees that ASIS is a widely respected organisation, however, its certification programme is optional. He goes on to say:

Though necessary and a step in the right direction this cannot be considered sufficient. Neither the membership nor a certificate conferred by a private association can fill the gap that prevent(s) private security from being recognised as a profession. Moreover, there are doubts whether the existing ASIS certification programme (which is not compulsory but discretionary) really tests the right level of theoretical and technical knowledge necessary to a profession.*

(Manunta, G. 1996: 235)

*my amendment

The evidence does not necessarily show that current certification programmes are capable of proving the competence of existing security managers. Where such programmes do exist, they can only be applied to members of the association concerned. Even then, certification programmes are not readily available nor are they compulsory. It is interesting to note, however, that the government is considering possession of an entry-level qualification as a prerequisite for issue of a Certificate of Approval in its review of the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act.

The final criterion is that of an educational discipline. A range of training courses is offered within the security industry. Several of these are related areas such as CCTV, intruder alarm installation and security staff services. Several are accredited by the ElectroTechnology Industry Training Organisation (ETITO), which is recognised by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority as the Standard Setting Body for the security industry. However, these are all training courses and do not provide the academic foundation which is required for an educational discipline. Much good work has been done on a new National Diploma in Security that is currently being added to the NZQA framework, however it is still a skills-based qualification. To meet the criterion, degree courses must be available.

In this case, specific degree courses in security management do exist, however they are still comparatively rare. Commenting on this subject Manunta (1996) identified only three courses in the UK:

According to my evidence, presently only the UK has courses for a Master's degree. Two of them are actually running (Leicester and Loughborough Universities), and one more will start on September 1996 (Cranfield University at RMCS Shrivenham).

(Manunta, G. 1996: 234)

The fact that these courses, as well as those offered in other countries such as Australia and the United States, are available is tangible proof that an educational discipline does exist, although it might be argued that due to the small number of degree courses available, the criterion is only just met.

Conclusion

I set out to show that security management in New Zealand is not yet a profession in the accepted sense. The criteria used were those employed by Simonsen (1996) in his attempt to prove the opposite case. Of the five criteria, three have not been met, although it is possible that they may be at some stage in the future. Of the other two, one is partially met and the other is just about met in full. Even Simonsen appeared to accept that security management is not yet a profession:

It seems that the 'professionalisation' of security is not yet quite a fait accompli, but all the pieces are now in place.

(Simonsen, 1996: 232)

His comments still apply today. The debate on this subject continues to occupy the minds of many throughout the security industry. It is evident that security managers, generally, wish to be thought of as professionals in their chosen field. However it is now becoming clear that to be considered as a 'professional' in the same way as doctors or lawyers, more than several years 'relevant experience' is required. Whilst it is the desire of many to achieve truly professional status for security management, it appears that there is still quite a long way to go.

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