

ANATOMY OF A FAILED TRANSFORMATION: VICTORIA POLICE LINK SYSTEM

The Collapse

Victoria Police set out to replace its ageing LEAP database with a modern policing platform called LINK. It was meant to give officers fast, accurate, real-time access to operational information. The program cost almost \$60 million before it was abandoned.

The Victorian Auditor-General found LINK couldn't reliably support policing operations and was never fit for purpose.

Officers were left switching between old and new systems, data quality deteriorated, and operational risk increased rather than reduced. A system designed to improve frontline capability ended up creating more work and less clarity.

This wasn't a technology failure. **It was an operational readiness failure driven by decisions made long before go-live.**

The Fatal Flaw: Design Without Field Reality

1. Operational needs were never defined clearly

The system was built before policing workflows, data requirements and real operational scenarios were documented with frontline staff. As a result, LINK didn't reflect how policing actually works.

2. Governance approved progress without evidence

Assurance gates were passed despite major defects and incomplete testing. Decision makers accepted optimistic reporting instead of demanding proof the system could support frontline operations safely.

3. Go-live was prioritised over operational safety

Officers were expected to use a system that couldn't reliably search, record or retrieve critical information. Known defects were treated as acceptable risks. A system intended to support policing ended up undermining it.

Structural and Cultural Breakdowns

Governance:

Oversight shifted to an endorsement model instead of scrutiny. Accountability was fragmented, decision rights unclear, and escalation pathways weak.

Process:

Business requirements weren't validated in real policing conditions. Testing didn't reflect operational complexity. Readiness criteria were lowered to meet timelines.

People and Culture:

Frontline users raised concerns early, but these weren't acted on. Engagement became a formality instead of a source of truth.

Technology and Testing:

The platform couldn't reliably handle core tasks such as data entry, search accuracy or cross-system integration. Known defects remained unresolved at release.

The Leader's Mandate: Operational Readiness First

- Build systems with the people who rely on them
- Technology must follow operational reality, not the other way around. Frontline users define success. Their concerns must shape design from day one.
- Demand evidence before approving progress
- Assurance isn't ceremony. Leaders must require proof that systems work in real conditions before allowing programs to proceed.
- Protect safety and integrity over deadlines
- Mission-critical environments don't allow for optimism bias. Leaders must choose readiness over convenience, every time.

Strategic Conclusion

LINK failed because the program moved ahead without understanding how policing actually works. When leaders separate design from operational truth, systems intended to improve capability end up weakening it.

At Telos Program Partners, I help leaders build transformation programs where operational reality guides every decision. If you're delivering technology into frontline, mission-critical or high-risk environments, I can help ensure your governance protects both capability and integrity.

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Sources: Victorian Auditor-General's Report on the LINK Project; Victorian Ombudsman Findings.