

COMMUNITY POLICE AND POLITICAL POSTURING: PLAYING THE GAME

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COMMUNITY POLICING AND POLITICAL POSTURING: PLAYING THE GAME

Abstract

The movement in law enforcement toward community-based policing has prompted debate about such things as broadening the police mission, empowering officers, the effects of community policing on the police role as a government department, and the difficulty of organizational change. While inferred by the literature, community policing as a political dynamic has had limited discussion. Specifically, this paper discusses a range of variables which relate to managing change in light of politics as related to community policing.

Discussions of politics and the police frequently produce assumptions of unprofessional behavior, unethical relationships, or a taint on the impartiality of police processes. What must be recognized is that political relationships are not inherently “good” or “bad”. Rather, they pragmatically reflect processes which are normal in the course of doing business, whether that business is manufacturing, sales, or public service. Political maneuvering and negotiation are as natural as the ebb and flow of the sea. They are processes which, to the experienced navigator, can be used to achieve organizational goals or, to the novice, can be a frustrating impediment undermining well-intentioned programming.

Increasingly, police executives are more open about the political nature of their roles. Some have become quite skillful at the process while others struggle to “learn the ropes”. Clearly, managing the politics of police administration is an experiential endeavor. That is, one has to explore communication and negotiation strategies which work both within the environment and with the people involved. Similarly, one must be adept at sensing changes on the political terrain which can alter alliances, arguments, and positions. Despite the nebulous nature of these factors, there are some important constants which exist in political relationships that serve as useful guideposts for effective police management.

Community policing provides a new challenge for police executives in the political arena. The police are exploring re-defined organizational configurations and processes—akin to the “reengineering corporations” movement now found in the private sector (Hammer and Champy, 1993)—which involves a new emphasis on teamwork, leadership, service, organizing work around “processes”, job enlargement of patrol officers, empowering the community, and solving problems. Not only does this require radical surgery to traditional police practices (administrative and operational alike), it places the police in a new dimension of political gamesmanship. This dimension, while ultimately providing more influence, certainly has its pitfalls, particularly during the transition.

The purpose of this essay is to explore political issues associated with community policing. In particular, characteristics of political processes will be discussed as will various tools which may be used to guide political transactions toward desired ends. Ultimately, the essay is directed toward a discussion of how these diverse factors may be used to engineer effective organizational change without burning one’s political bridges.

COMMUNITY POLICING AND CRIME AS POLITICAL COMMODITIES

As a foundation, community policing is defined as...

...a new philosophy of policing, based on the concept that police officers and private citizens working together in creative ways can help solve contemporary community problems related to crime, fear of crime, social and physical disorder, and neighborhood decay. The philosophy is predicated on the belief that achieving these goals requires that police departments develop a new relationship with the law-abiding people in the community, allowing them a greater voice in setting local priorities, and involving them in efforts to improve the overall quality of life in their neighborhoods. It shifts the focus of police work from handling random calls to solving problems. (Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux, 1990:5).

Police involvement with the community in a new, proactive, positive relationship is a key element of the emerging political role. The administrative changes necessary to facilitate this “reengineering” are fundamental to internal political problems which must be resolved. This is not occurring in a vacuum, but is representative of a broader “community movement” signified by recent elections and more vocal grass roots concerns voiced by citizens from our communities. These changes are coupled with contemporary movements in the private sector targeted toward quality management, most prominently emerging in the United States during the mid-1980s vis-a-vis Total Quality Management (TQM) (Deming, 1986) followed more recently by the “value-added service” and “benchmark management” concepts found in various contemporary management books. Such philosophical changes in management practices directed toward customers—or a constituency in political terms—coupled with a new vision of policing which offers hope to effectively deal with crime, clearly whets political appetites.

Crime—and the need to prevent it—has consistently received substantial attention from politicians simply because it is of major concern to citizens. Several explicit reasons come to mind when considering why crime is a political factor.

First, crime is an emotional issue which conjures up feelings of safety and security for oneself and family. The political process feeds on emotion as evidenced by political advertisements both for and against the “Brady Bill” handgun purchase waiting period. A tug on the heartstrings has far more political clout than the weight of empirical evidence. Second, crime will touch most people, either directly or indirectly, at some point in their lifetime. Nearly every American will be a victim or know a victim, consequently crime is something the public can relate to with near unanimity. This comprehensive experience gives the politician a good frame of reference for communicating with his/her constituency.

Third, crime is one issue on which nearly all people can agree to some extent regardless of political position, race, ethnicity, age, gender or lifestyle—people do not want crime. Democrat or Republican, black or white, Hispanic or Anglo, young or old, man or woman, gay or straight; all agree that crime and violence must be controlled. Consequently, it is politically safe to oppose crime and offer *reasonable* initiatives to control it.

Fourth, citizens are willing to make some sacrifices for protection against criminals. Fear of crime is pervasive, fueled by media reports, gossip, and assumptions. To abate this fear many people are willing to make some sacrifices, including taxes. For example, the citizens of Flint,

Michigan voted by a two-thirds majority to increase their tax mills to support community policing (Kelling and Moore, 1988). In Texas, citizens voted to spend over \$2 billion to build prisons even though the state's financial status was lean. The point to note is that increased expenditures for crime control are relatively easier to justify than other government initiatives because crime control efforts are not generally seen as a "pork barrel". Not to be lost is the fact that spending money on issues of popular concern can be an important way to gain "political chips", as will be discussed later.

Finally, crime is visible and piques a morbid curiosity among people. News reports about murder and mayhem, television programs depicting "real crime", and non-fiction books on "true crime" are all evidence of this. As another illustration, people still go to rural Waco, Texas where the Branch Davidian compound stood, just to see the sight of that calamity (and buy T-shirts). These factors clearly illustrate that incidents of crime draw public fascination, particularly when the crime is senseless or an atrocity. As such, crime makes great fodder for politicians to decry, examine, comment about, and take action upon.

Particularly in recent years as crime has become increasingly violent, invading rural communities, the public schools, and touching white, middle America, the politics of crime have not only become a readily accessible issue for politicians to safely attack, the public is mandating political action. This emotional firestorm is emerging as yet another reason why crime is an important political factor.

While there is a common ground surrounding the concern for crime and the need to control it, there are also notable disagreements on the proper responses to the problems. For example, opinions vary widely on such issues as:

- Should police authority be increased to deal with crime?
- Should some legal rights be temporarily "suspended" in order to deal more effectively with criminals, notably drug dealers?
- What is the best way to prevent crime—educational programs, physical crime security, more police officers, stiffer prison sentences, youth diversion programs, the death penalty? All of the above? Some of the above? None of the above?
- Will crime be more effectively prevented (and will justice be more effectively served) if convicted criminals are punished or rehabilitated?
- Is punishment versus rehabilitation a legal issue, professional issue, or political issue?
- Should drugs be legalized in order to cut down on drug-related crime?
- Is crime a racial problem? A youth problem? An urban problem? A poverty problem? A media problem? A parental problem? A—you fill in the blank—problem?

These questions present a number of issues which stir controversy. Importantly, these questions—and the way they are answered—reflect political perspectives and beliefs far more than substantive knowledge and research. Several examples come to mind. Because violent crime has become a pervasive issue for the public, Congress and state legislatures have attempted to respond with a number of "get tough" measures to deal with the problem.

The label of "get tough" is important from a political perspective. Citizens are both tired and fearful of crime, consequently holding elected officials accountable for doing "something" (particularly as reflected by the November 1993 elections). With political sentiment being this explicit, politicians recognize that some action must be taken; and that action cannot be viewed as being "soft" on crime or criminals. Consequently, youth boot camps, providing federal support

for employing up to 100,000 more police officers, increasing the range of offenses for the death penalty, making mandatory life sentences for career criminals, increasing mandatory penalties for offenses where firearms are used, and building more prisons have been among the common responses. The political dynamic comes into play not because of our actual knowledge about the effectiveness of these measures but because they lessen the political heat from the public. Just as important as appearing to be “tough on crime” is the prospect that a new crime control strategy has been developed which holds great hope for preventing crime and making the streets safer. This is where community policing comes into play and where jeopardy for the concept lies.

Increasingly, community policing is being embraced by many politicians as the means to more effectively deal with crime while at the same time providing better service to the public, with special concern for increasing the quality of life within a community. In reality, there are probably few politicians which truly understand the philosophy. Despite this, they are providing their heartfelt support (in a political sense) for the concept because it addresses crime, links the police and community together in a stronger bond, and provides a demonstrable initiative which the politician can point to as an effort to show that community concerns are being addressed.

This is not intended to sound cynical or accusatory, rather it is pragmatic. Most politicians realize they have an ethical responsibility to address public concerns. The fact that one’s personal future is tied to this responsiveness is not inconsequential. It is, of course, the nature of the beast. Unfortunately, any new initiative—such as community policing—is also politically fragile because if no “successes” can be demonstrated, then support will dwindle.

POLITICAL AXIOMS

To build on these concepts, it is important to understand some fundamental principles of the political process. In this regard, there are several axioms which apply to the political game. Police administrators should recognize the presence of these “truths” and be prepared to deal with them when posturing with elected officials and employees alike.

AXIOM 1: The tendency is to react emotionally rather than act rationally to a new issue or controversy. It appears to be an artifact of human nature that when we are confronted with an issue, concept, or problem which is inconsistent with our life’s experiences we respond immediately with an intuitive conclusion. That conclusion, however, is largely based on what we *feel* rather than what we *think*. This can get us into political hot water if the reaction is publicized or made known to political adversaries. For example, when civil disorder erupted in Los Angeles following the state criminal trial verdicts of the officers charged in the Rodney King excessive force case, former Mayor Tom Bradley, obviously upset and frustrated, stated on television something to the effect that he did not blame rioters for responding to the trial’s injustice. This was a politically irresponsible statement for it essentially gave justification to the rioters. Had Mr. Bradley thought more about the situation, his statements would have likely been tempered.

In another illustration, often when police officials, regardless of rank, are first introduced to community policing, they respond with something to the effect of, “Community policing? It won’t work because we can’t handle the calls we receive now and we need more officers.” Their response is a reaction based upon their experience of traditional policing, not a true understanding of the community-based concept. Moreover, the effects of this axiom are aggravated because it is difficult for one to publicly admit an earlier mistake in judgment. Instead, there is a tendency to cling to one’s initial reaction.

AXIOM 2: Superficial suppositions about ideas, programs, and initiatives will have a greater influence than in-depth substantive knowledge. Frequently those in the political limelight will embrace an idea or concept because it sounds good, not because they truly understand the meaning of the concept or what it involves. For example, when the Rahway State Prison (New Jersey) Lifer’s Project—also known as “Scared Straight”—was first publicized, politicians widely endorsed it. It “made sense” that if incorrigible youth were exposed to a “dose of reality” in prison listening to the travails of a group of lifers, this experience would “scare” them into a life of lawful behavior; particularly when initial evaluations over the first few months supported these suppositions. Support reached the point that legislators began funding similar projects in other jurisdictions. However, project evaluators at Rahway were not as optimistic, understanding the precepts of learning theory with the needs of long-term socialization and reinforcement being necessary for behavioral change, it was felt the project’s effects would not last. The 12-month and 18-month evaluations showed this to be true. Legislation and program development in replicated projects were based on supposition, not substantive knowledge.

With respect to community policing, suppositions are plentiful. Many politicians hear the concept and want to jump on the bandwagon of popularity. They are surprised, however, when they learn about longer response times and the significant amount of change required of both the police organization and community to implement it. The mandate is to “do it now”, not recognizing the organizational and behavioral complexities involved. Nevertheless, it is embraced because it sounds good.

AXIOM 3: When it takes too long to explain an idea and if it requires thought to understand it, then the battle for acceptance will be difficult. Political handlers and media consultants have had a wide-ranging influence on politicians, the broadcast media, and the public alike when they began routinely providing the “sound bite” (not to mention the now-well-known “photo op”). Usually no more than 30 seconds in length, the sound bite is intended to address a specific issue or provide an answer to a problem while accomplishing these feats with memorable language. The sound bite is a neatly packaged presentation which fits well into the rapid-paced format of broadcast news. It has become so prevalent that not only politicians, but public officials, experts, and others who frequently provide commentary for broadcast news tend to encapsulate their ideas so that they virtually appear to speak in sound bites. Both the media and politicians have become so accustomed to this practice, it has become an expectation in interviews.

The problem with sound bites is that only a brief amount of substantive information can be passed on. Trying to deal with complex issues in a sound bite mentality means that the true impact, ideas, and subtleties simply will not get passed along. For example, the author has been asked to explain “in a couple of sentences” why police officers use excessive force. Similarly, the author has been asked to explain community policing in about 30 seconds—reporters cannot understand why a researcher is unable to do this when a politician can. To try and explain complex ideas within such rigid time constraints may be a greater disservice than ignoring the questions completely. Yet, in the real world, a balance must be drawn somewhere. Unfortunately, the sound bite phenomenon has expanded beyond the media and entered into the political realm. Politicians, executives, and the public expect a sound bite response. A way must be found to circumvent this mentality—perhaps through an incremental information exchange—in order for the true concepts of an idea to be presented.

AXIOM 4: A conceptual initiative needs a hook or gimmick that can be easily identified with in order to get a political foothold. Whether it is a product of laziness, shallowness, or simply a modern cultural trait in a fast-paced society, the presence of a readily identifiable icon of a broader, usually more complex, endeavor is a necessity to gain recognition and support. This can be seen

in popular music sales, movie previews, and advertising as well as politics. This explains why things such as “foot patrol”, “bike patrol”, and “Neighborhood Watch” are so closely identified with community policing even though they are a small part of the initiative. The insightful administrator will use this to his/her advantage, perhaps even creating the “hook” as a means to enlist political support.

AXIOM 5: Timing is everything; to gain maximum political support a new initiative must be proposed at the time it appears to respond to a current, emotional, high-profile public need. We are a generally compulsive, “it has to be done now” society. As evidence, look at the popular use and growth of facsimile machines and overnight package delivery services not to mention the Nike shoe advertisement which admonishes us to “Just Do It”. As a consequence, we tend to not look too far into the future, thus when problems occur we play “catch up” and grasp potential solutions even if they only hold a faint promise to be a successful remedy to the problem. Relying on this political wisdom, an administrator should package a new program or initiative as a response to a current high-profile problem, even though the initiative has broader applications. For example, at this time, community policing is more readily accepted when promoted to fight violence instead of a means to deal with homelessness. This is not inherently an ethical dilemma as long as the argument is not a pure subterfuge.

AXIOM 6: The probability for greater political support will increase if credit is given where it is not due. This is not to sound fatalistic, but as a realistic strategy to gain political support. If there is a political advocate showing some support for a new activity, maximize that support in any pronouncements by pointing to that individual’s leadership and commitment. For example, one may give credit to important, key political decision-makers for developing a new initiative and saying that police department personnel supported the idea, but “simply did the leg work”. A similar approach may be used with employees noting how they have provided leadership. Never underestimate the power of an ego.

AXIOM 7: If some measures of activity or success cannot be visibly shown in the short-term, political support for the initiative will be limited. Any new activity which requires reallocated resources and organizational change must realistically be promoted as a means to solve problems and attain goals both efficiently and effectively. Given this fact, an administrator must provide evidence, once the initiative is in place, that progress is being made. Moreover, it is reasonable that politicians and the public hold the department accountable to any promises which have been made. From a political perspective, the maxim to remember is, “no demonstrable success, no demonstrable support”.

AXIOM 8: There is a direct relationship between fickleness of the public and political maneuvering; as the public changes its mind, political support for an initiative will change at light speed. It is the nature of our republic that political support will follow the winds of public concern. Thus, public demands focus political action. Unfortunately, the public is somewhat fickle in their desire for institutional responses to problems. For example, members of a neighborhood may say they are concerned about traffic accidents and speeding cars, yet be hostile if they are personally stopped for speeding. As another illustration, in response to the public’s concern about homelessness, the police develop a cooperative plan with social services, private foundations and the ministerial alliance to open a large shelter and kitchen. Instead of “taking care of the problem”, the food and shelter may attract *more* homeless people to the jurisdiction thereby, from a political perspective, aggravating the problem in the public’s mind, not solving it. In yet another case, if the police department says that it is implementing community policing to respond to quality of life problems in the city, but members of the public do not see a change in that quality (even after a short period of time), then accolades for the police may quickly turn to criticism. (This is similar

to public reactions of *Operation Restore Hope* in Somalia.) In short, if no effects to an initiative can be shown *to the public's satisfaction*, then political support will be dropped like a hot potato.

A perspective. The lessons from these axioms are all too evident on the American political landscape. A quick review of elections, program initiatives which have succeeded and failed, as well as proposals offered to cure the nation's ills whether it is crime, violence, health care, or free trade will all show these truths at work to some degree.

As these axioms illustrate, our complex political interactions are based on simple assumptions. For example, the public is concerned about violence, thus simple and fast solutions are sought in the political arena—lock criminals up, create youth boot camps, legalize drugs, increase firearms control, and so forth. Yet, in reality, violence is a “socio-political-cultural-psycho-economic family dope problem”. The point of this tongue-in-cheek description is to emphasize that the progression of violence is a complex phenomenon requiring multiple programmatic, educational, and legislative actions over a long term. In order to deal with such long range, slow change, the prudent administrator will use these axioms as guideposts to help maneuver through the political terrain.

THE CHIP SYSTEM

Any transaction requires currency. In political transactions the currency is “chips”. To understand the use of “chips”, one must begin by recognizing that a fundamental political error is to assume that when one is “doing the right thing” this action alone will develop political support. Trolling for programmatic (and resource) allies on one's record alone will rarely develop a solid political foundation. Instead, leaders must aggressively seek support by showing both the substantive *and* political benefits of the action or issue one is pursuing. While there is a tendency for this to seem improper, it is a realistic—and legitimate—means of developing and implementing programs or initiatives. If a police leader can show political leaders the benefits the latter may gain—typically public support—from these initiatives, then the police leader will gain “chips” in the relationship.

“Chips” are reciprocal favors and support given in the negotiation of political processes. As a person's effectiveness builds on both goal-directed and political fronts, their power is enhanced. When an individual's influence reaches the level where others seek that person's imprimatur for support of other activities, then chips become golden. That is, a person's political influence becomes stronger when others seek their endorsement. In such cases, those who are politically influential gain more “chips”.

This exponential gain of chips by a politically powerful person can be de-valued with respect to their use in bartering or gaining favors as one's political strength erodes. Thus, the earning ratio and relative value of “chips” are not constants—a politician who attempts to treat them as such, particularly on a one-to-one ratio (i.e., one favor begets another) will quickly learn how fast chips can be expended.

Chips are used in bartering for resources, developing programmatic support, and influencing the status of current initiatives (i.e., continuing, modifying, or dropping them.) In the constant flux of organizational responses to public attitudes and political positioning, chips are among the most valuable of commodities. They can be used to develop alliances, define organizational direction, or secure resources, albeit frequently with the expenditure of chips.

While police administrators may have to expend some chips when developing community policing, there are certainly many chips which can be earned in return as the initiative becomes successful. More importantly, as the police department builds political support in the community, the value of the police executive's chips grows multifold. There is always an investment gamble, however.

If positive effects cannot be demonstrated, if the public is not satisfied with police services, if progress seems to be slow, if the police department does not appear to work as a comprehensive unit, or any number of complications arise, the police chief's chips will be devalued or expended until mid-course corrections can be made. If positive results are seen, then the chief's chips have been successfully reinvested.

The political lesson is that chips are exchanged and differentially valued just as stocks on the market. In much the same way a corporate CEO seeks to direct his/her corporation to maintain its stocks as a highly-valued commodity, so must the police chief by keeping the organization on track and productive.

“SECRET STUFF”: INFORMATION AS A POLITICAL BASE

The police, politicians, and the community each possess their own “secret stuff”, defined as role-specific information or knowledge which is unique to the entity and potentially politically powerful (or *perceived* to be). “Secret police stuff” includes such things as knowledge about actual dangerousness of a community (as opposed to general perceptions of danger), effectiveness of policing techniques, and information about real versus suspected wrongdoing of people (including public officials). “Secret political stuff” may include knowledge held by politicians related to behavioral motives of elected officials, power shifts, parliamentary or legal maneuvers, and budgeting/funding options.

The significance of “secret stuff” is that this knowledge gives information to the holder which can be used for political leveraging or posturing to influence outcomes of political positions or initiatives. Unfortunately, the political environment is one which thrives, first, on empire-building and, second, on coalition building (a facet closely related to both the bureaucratic structure and the typical budgeting processes of government). The question remaining is the coalition will likely be built only if it reinforces growth of the empire. “Secret stuff” is the commodity which helps fund the empires and the coalitions.

Obviously, community policing seeks to forge coalitions between the police and diverse groups—neighborhood associations, other government departments, service organizations, and so forth—in order to solve problems. However, how open will each coalition member be if it seeks to continue protecting its “stuff”? Moreover, if a breach in the secret occurs, how will it influence the coalition? A common problem is that the influence (or value) of “secret stuff” is exaggerated by the holder. Thus, its value is not as great as it is perceived, yet the paradox is that efforts to protect the “stuff” may be detrimental to the coalition.

When used to build empires—by the police or any other group—actions based on “secret stuff” appear to be conspiratorial or perhaps arrogant. In either case, the leveraging of “secret stuff” and the process of empire building will undermine efforts to build community policing coalitions. While the process is frequently subtle, its impact will eventually emerge. At the least, these behaviors will be a disincentive to participate in the coalition, at the most they can cause actual damage to public institutions. The consequence is that efforts to effectively develop a

community policing practice will end up in a political dungeon for which escape is improbable unless “secret stuff” is shared by all parties as a means to bridge political differences.

The sharing of these “secrets” goes beyond mere communications. It means opening doors so others can see all aspects of the organization. For example, to understand that the police department is not a highly efficient crook-catching machine or that elements of the police culture produce conflict about what the police should do and how they should do it. While exposing the gritty problems of the police, the sharing of “stuff”—albeit a difficult thing to do—will lead to stronger support in the long term as the police executive remains vigilant in changing the organization while at the same time pursuing community-based goals. These are lessons we learned from the “spoils system” of politics and should not be lost.

THE STRUCTURE OF POLITICAL THREAT

Political threats are factors which may undermine organizational control or impede successful implementation of the community policing philosophy (see Figure 1). These threats may be characterized in four basic forms. First, threats *external to government* are political influences exerted by the community—the so-called “body politic”—which can place the police in difficult managerial positions. For example, community police officers who develop a strong, substantive rapport with a neighborhood may find community members flexing their political muscles if an officer is to be reassigned. A protest from community members stating that they “don’t want to lose their police officer” places unusual demands on the department—particularly if community demands are voiced to political leaders. A community empowered in this manner places limits on administrative flexibility of the department and may even impede the officer’s career development. Police organizations must be prepared to rationally respond to this pressure in order to maintain organizational control while at the same time avoiding alienation of the community or political leaders. To buckle to political pressure can open unwanted doors, to not respond can slam needed doors shut. The conundrum is omnipresent.

From an entirely different perspective, external political threats can also be an undermining influence when the community’s perceptions of “success” are not met. Given the nature of community policing activities—crime prevention, resolving quality of life issues, influencing long-term social change, problem solving—results are difficult to see, or just as importantly, hard to quantify. How do the police demonstrate such things as “prevented crime” or “changed values”? Moreover, the compulsive nature of American society wants to see immediate results from a new initiative; something which will not happen with community policing. When no successes are obvious, political support from the community will begin to erode.

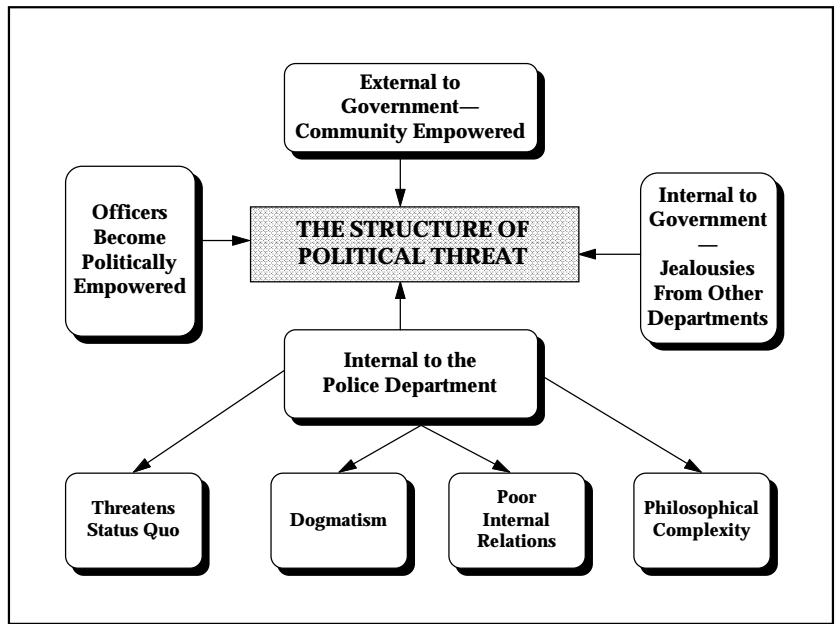
A second type of political threat is when the *officer is politically empowered* by the community as a result of the relationship the officer has established with citizens. As an example, in one city the residents of a neighborhood were opposed to pending action by the city council to re-zone a portion of the area for commercial use. Unsure of what to do, the citizens sought advice from their community police officer on how to fight this proposal. Rather than acting simply as a *resource* for the community, the officer began acting as an *advocate*, taking actions which were essentially a political campaign to oppose the proposal. Acting as both an organizer and catalyst, the officer’s actions culminated as he led a protest demonstration (in uniform) at the city hall. (The re-zoning proposal was defeated.) When called to task for this action, the officer maintained he was “doing his job” by trying to solve a “quality of life” problem defined by the community he was serving. When the department informed the officer that he may be disciplined (simply a letter of reprimand), the community raised its voice in support of “their officer”. Thus,

empowering the officer, via citizen support, influenced political decisions and intervened in organizational control practices.

A third threat exists *internal to the government entity*. That is, as the police department establishes a stronger relationship with the community, garnering political support from that constituency, it also gains political leverage within the broader government structure. If the police department finds itself in the position of being the most prominent among equals in its relation with other government departments, problems may arise. Other department heads may feel somewhat disenfranchised in the political structure if they feel their departments are being de-valued. Rifts and jealousies may occur leading to poor support and interdepartmental cooperation on activities which are designed to provide better service to the community. Consequently, police executives need to give special attention to team building, noting that any successes which enhances the quality of life in the community are a result of combined efforts, not just those of the police department.

The final political threat exists *within the police department*. This has manifested in four basic ways. First, community policing threatens the *status quo*. People who have invested their energies in a certain career path may find the avenue to professional development has changed. Consequently, they have an incentive to not support, perhaps even undermine, any new initiative. Second, the natural tendency of dogmatism emerges when any new initiative is proposed—the grander the change the greater the resistance. Despite the presence of a well-intentioned and well-devised plan for implementing the community policing philosophy, if a political “sales job” is not done to convince all organizational members—sworn and nonsworn alike—of the need and benefits which can be achieved, then community policing will not be successful. In particular, line-level officers are the linchpin to success and consequently hold important political power on which experimentation with the philosophy rests.

**FIGURE 1
POLITICAL THREATS**



Third, because community policing is a philosophical change in law enforcement and cannot be explained or demonstrated as easily as a new program—such as Neighborhood Watch, saturation patrol, physical crime prevention, or street sweeps—the concept is difficult to understand, particularly in the short term. Stereotypes of community policing are assumed to be the sum and substance of the philosophy, thus, new community-based operational initiatives may be attempted in the traditional philosophical manner. Without understanding the breadth of community policing as a *philosophy*, organizational members may become misdirected in their efforts.

Poor internal relations, the final element, exists all too frequently and is often more intense in community policing. Such organizational conflict occurs when emphasis is given to new initiatives that replace traditional activities and individuals from the “spotlight” (such as highlighting community policing officers instead of SWAT officers). Aggravating the problem is that typically inadequate attempts are made to incorporate all employees into the new initiative. Those employees who feel disenfranchised by this situation may not participate or support the initiative; in the worst case, the employees may sabotage the effort.

THE POLITICS OF “QUALITY OF LIFE”

An important goal of community policing is to improve the “quality of life” in a community. Implicitly, this includes a range of factors traditionally related to the police function including reducing victimization, apprehension of criminals, reducing fear of crime, and resolving conflict (such as domestic disturbances). Similarly, regulatory activities such as traffic control, the towing of abandoned cars, and enforcement of laws related to alcohol, health and safety have been viewed as a police responsibility but with lesser importance than the crime-related functions. Working with youth has traditionally been viewed as a collateral area where the police frequently act, but not so much as an inherent responsibility, although this has slowly changed with programs such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE). And dealing with problems of neighborhood decay, unsightliness, street maintenance, parks and the like have rarely been associated as a traditional police responsibility.

The priorities of law enforcement are now beginning to change with the advent of community policing which more equally balances traditional foci with those activities historically viewed as being peripheral to law enforcement. As officers begin performing diverse tasks which produce a better quality of life, they build broader expectations in the public’s mind with respect to “what the police should do.” These broadened—and heightened—expectations have important political ramifications.

The most obvious political issue becomes one of budget. When the public demands broader services, then government is “persuaded” to respond. It is difficult for elected officials, in particular, to deny the mandates of their constituency. Thus, funding support may have to be increased as a means to deal with broadening police activities. It is important to note that advocates of community policing argue that additional officers and funds are not necessarily needed because police officers are used in different, more efficient, ways. Indeed, there is evidence to support this (Carter and Radelet, 1999; Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux, 1990). However, in the political environment, public support for popular programming will frequently translate into more funding and growth.

This leads to a problem noted earlier: disenfranchisement of other government departments. At the first level of disenfranchisement, when government leaders decide to

increase the police budget, it typically must come at some expense to other government departments. Thus, even if outright cuts do not occur in other departments, growth and/or sustained levels of staffing or programming may not be maintained. Reduced funding support by one entity in order to build support for another is a sure method to build resentment. Thus, budgeting disenfranchisement not only reduces a department's ability to perform its work, it likely diminishes the quality of the relationship between the police and other departments. This poses an interesting paradox—as other government departments lose their funding and programming ability, they also reduce their ability to effectively work with the police department to solve community problems. Moreover, as resentment builds, other departments may be less inclined to help the police department. The police must respond to their community's quality of life “mandate” in some manner, thus they become more aggressive, hence more politically empowered. Disenfranchisement, therefore, can broaden in a growing spiral.

The movement toward quality of life programming also brings with it new models of government accountability. If the police are providing broader services to the community, what can other government departments do? In essence, as police responsibilities broaden and become more responsive to community demands, citizens may begin to ask how other government departments should change. Should parks and recreation be more aggressive and promote public health activities? Should the street department be more aggressive in developing safe and aesthetic roads and rights-of-way rather than focus on maintenance of roadway surfaces? Should the sanitation department aggressively promote a recycling program?

With these changes in accountability, perhaps public administrators should look for interdisciplinary alliances all of which can help the other develop programming—another example of team building. For example, it may be feasible for fire inspectors to also perform crime prevention “target hardening”. Similarly, the public health service may help in programs directed toward reducing violent crime, building inspectors may be given training in “crime prevention through environmental design,” and social workers may work more closely with the police in identifying people who are victims or perpetrators of such crimes as domestic violence, sexual assault, drug trafficking, or theft.

Police executives must avoid an inwardly-directed myopic view of change to the exclusion of understanding systemic effects posed by community policing initiatives. Enlightened police leaders must develop (and practice) sound political acumen in order to enlist cooperation from other departments, sharing the vision of a broadened “quality of life” for which all elements of government must contribute.

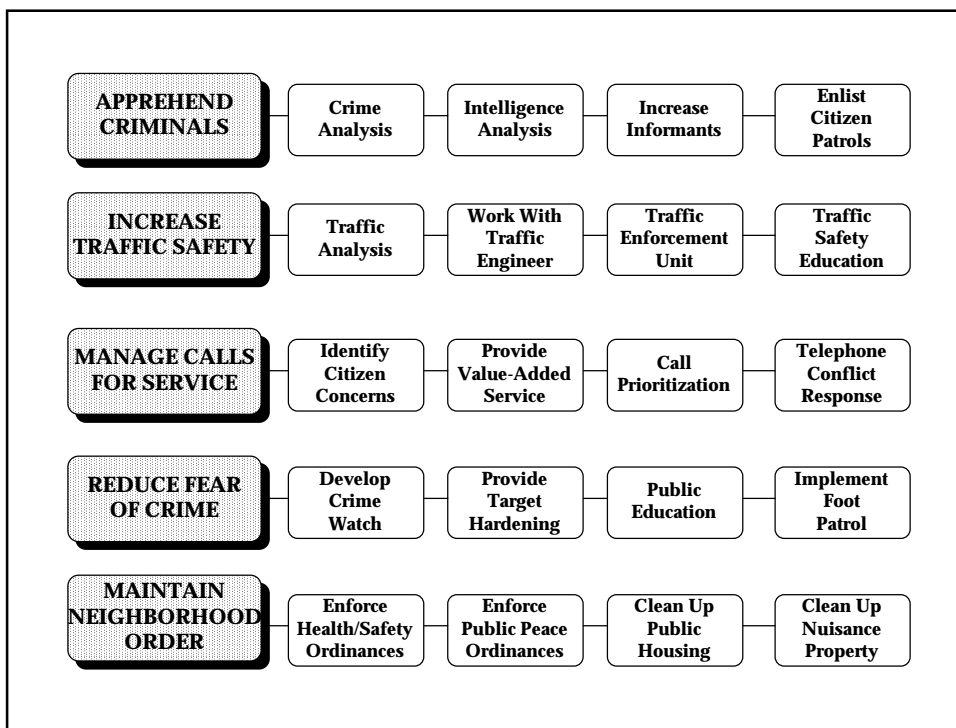
BROADENING THE POLICE MANDATE

Unquestionably, as noted in previous discussions, community policing broadens the police mandate (c.f., Manning, 1978) which, eventually, will either tread on responsibilities of others or be viewed as an inappropriate exercise of police authority. In either case, if police actions are viewed as a political trespass, then conflict will emerge thereby displacing initiatives and goals. For example, the Portland, Oregon police provide training for landlords in such areas as tenant selection, eviction processes, and other strategies of “tenant management” in order to keep “undesirables” out of rental property (notably public housing). If members of the community or civil libertarians interpret this training as an inappropriate use of police authority, systemic damage could be done to other programs in the community policing initiative.

In another example, the Mission, Texas Police Department expanded its presence in the schools to a total of thirteen officers providing two years of Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) in the elementary schools, three years of Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT), in the middle schools, and providing a full time Education Resource Officer (ERO) in each of two high schools. Conceivably, initiatives such as this could be viewed by teachers and school officials as a political trespass on their responsibilities, inferring that “anyone can teach” and that “the schools are doing an inadequate job” in their preparation of children to be good citizens. Such a reaction could conceivably undermine the program altogether.

There is little debate that community policing expands the traditional vision of law enforcement. In many ways this broadened mandate integrates traditional duties with non-traditional tasks as a means to resolve problems (see examples in Figure 2). Ethically, the police have the obligation to articulate reasoning for this expansion and reach only into those areas which are legitimized by the community and public institutions. Politically, the police must be able to defend their position on logical criteria based on sound reasoning and community needs, not emotion or prattle. Make no mistake, broadening the police mandate is an important decision which can have a wide-ranging impact on police budgeting, staffing, and operations both now and in the future. As such, it is an endeavor fraught with risk and tenuous support in the political environment. To not recognize and prepare for this political journey is dangerous indeed.

FIGURE 2
EXAMPLE INTEGRATION OF TRADITIONAL AND BROADENED POLICE DUTIES



The thorny questions in this venue which must be answered center around the types of programming the police undertake, whose responsibilities they may encroach upon, the extent to which the public wants the police to pursue non-traditional activities, and the intent or reasoning behind the broadened mandate. If the rationale is strong and politically palatable, then expansion

will be accepted with the political proviso that some successes will be seen on the horizon. If not, “chips” will be expended and one’s political star may begin to fade.

THE CHANGE PROCESS: LESSONS LEARNED

Change is difficult for any organization. For police departments—which are paramilitary, bureaucratic structures with members who have been somewhat socially isolated from the community as a result of their occupation—attempts at change are particularly challenging. A common response in humans is to resist change; to say that a new approach will not work. Our history of policing has shown, however, that many previously sacred beliefs about law enforcement have been forced to give way to new ideas after research suggested that there may be flaws in the traditional logic (Carter and Radelet, 1999). Based on that knowledge, law enforcement leaders explored new police responsibilities and different operational tactics. Within this framework, community policing evolved and grew as research and experimentation pointed the way. Pundits have begun to look at the concept anew. They have witnessed how it flourishes in numerous departments and though some still will not concede that it can work, at least they are willing to take a fresh look at the possibilities.

How does this change occur? While not definite, a general transition process appears to emerge. First is the recognition that traditional police approaches have not succeeded. Second, attitudes about the police function among administrators, line personnel, and citizens must change. Third, community assessments must be performed to identify new police responsibilities. Fourth, new organizational and operational approaches must be conceived to meet the newly defined police responsibilities. Fifth, the community must be enlisted to work cooperatively with the police to achieve the desired results. Finally, there must be a commitment both by law enforcement and the community to continue the initiative’s growth.

Importantly, managing the process requires political maneuvering, negotiation of positions, bartering “chips”, sharing information (i.e., secret stuff), assessing directions for new activities, and responding to the diverse needs of citizens, elected officials, and employees. Whether a police executive is working with a citizen’s group, city council, or collective bargaining unit, the dynamics of the political process will be substantially the same, with differences being a matter of explicit issues or substance.

Managing change therefore requires police administrators to practice the lessons learned from the political environment. These keystones include the following:

- *There must be a stimulus for change.* This is a leader with a vision willing to take the first step in challenging the status quo; a “change agent”. Importantly, this stimulus must be on-going and widespread. Given this, there are two significant elements that a change agent must address: (1) vigilance in effort and (2) diversity in focus.
- *There must be administrative commitment.* The effective administrator must provide on-going support for a new initiative or program; that is, providing consistency between what is said and what is done. If administrators are not willing to try such things as reallocation of resources, amending policies and procedures, or experimentation with new ideas, then there is little reason to believe the sincerity of their pronouncements. If commitment is not be shown to either employees or politicians, the probability for success will be significantly reduced.

- *Any change must be grounded in logical and defensible criteria.* While it is somewhat of a cliché, it is worth noting that changing to simply “shake up” the organization will be dysfunctional rather than productive. If politicians and employees are going to tie their professional fortunes to change, they must be given good evidence to support the change. Moreover, since change consumes resources, it is wasteful to pursue it unless this change is well-grounded in logic and evidence.
- *People at all levels must be able to provide input.* The importance of team building for a new endeavor cannot be under stated. Any initiative must have participation from as many people as possible. Not only will this diverse input provide new insights, but team building provides “ownership”, hence a sense of investment and responsibility by members of the team.
- *There must be sufficient time for experimentation, evaluation, and fine-tuning of any new program or idea.* When a new initiative is started for the first time it will inherently have “bugs” in it; not every malady or problem can be anticipated and some ideas will not work as originally conceived. Just because operational problems arise does not mean the idea was bad. Administrators, politicians, and employees must be flexible, adjusting their activities until there has been sufficient time to actually evaluate the initiative’s true effects.
- *Before change is introduced, you must communicate to all persons and enlist their support.* Politicians, citizens, and employees alike must understand clearly what is being done and why. There is a tendency to assume that everyone knows and understands the issues of a new endeavor to the same extent as those who are immersed in the planning. Lack of communication is something which can destroy a new activity but, fortunately, is fairly easy to avoid. Remember that communication is more than sending messages, it also involves gaining feedback to the messages. Be cognizant of the issue recalling the admonishment, “don’t leave people in the dark.”
- *Change takes time in order to have an effect; major change may take a generation.* As has been noted, we are generally a short-term and impatient culture. However, when implementing major organizational and behavioral change such as community policing, a key ingredient is re-socialization of employees, citizens, and political leaders. This is inherently a long-term endeavor which requires patience and stamina before positive results can be seen. This sense of time must be instilled in all involved in order to minimize frustration and impatience.
- *Recognize that not everyone will “buy in” to new ideas.* For virtually any endeavor that is proposed, we must recognize that complete support is improbable; it is the nature of the human psyche. One must take care, however, to avoid discounting people who oppose new initiatives as being “lost causes” or obstructionists. Listen to their concerns—they may raise some valid issues which need to be addressed. By using them positively, they may become part of the team. Realism dictates, however, that there will still be those who oppose the new system (frequently for emotional or personal reasons). In these cases, an administrator’s options are: (1) continue to try to convince them to change; (2) ignore or avoid them; (3) place employees in an assignment where they can do little damage; (4) increase the quality of the relationship with those political leaders and employees who support the initiative; or

(5) tolerate employees or politicians until they resign, retire, lose their influence, or die.

- *Be flexible and open in your view of organizational, philosophical and programmatic change.* No matter how much thought is given to a new initiative and how much effort is invested in planning, we still must recognize that many ideas are “losers”. However, we frequently will not know this until the idea has been tried and evaluated. Even in failure, we have learned something. Unfortunately, given the culture of our political environment, there is a tendency to mandate success; a practice which is tantamount to a search for mediocrity. Both within the police organization and the broader political system, we must maintain the “freedom to fail”—without this, creative new ideas will be few and far between.
- *The chance always exists that one may be placed “on the hot seat” from a political perspective.* It cannot be denied that any attempt at change carries risks—the more massive the change, the greater the risk. Questioning traditional orthodoxy is not easily accepted by organizations, particularly bureaucratic organizations as typically found in government. Thus, proponents of new initiatives must understand that when they are on the forefront of change, their political necks are on the line. In light of this, administrators must be supportive and empathic with the politicians and employees supporting the change.
- *Change requires challenging conventional wisdom; or at least traditions.* Debating the value of traditions has not been a politically popular avenue for people to follow, yet it is a necessary one in order for new ventures to be undertaken. When conventional wisdom is challenged it will be met with resistance, criticism, and perhaps ridicule from doubters, dogmatists, and traditionalists. The astute leader must be prepared to deal with these reactions both personally and professionally. Importantly, when those who support the leader’s ideas of change are ridiculed, the leader has the obligation to reassert that person’s value and contributions to the organization.
- *The organization’s personnel evaluation system must measure and reward effective involvement in change.* Since change requires a personal commitment, or investment, there must be some individual benefits which can be accrued from one’s participation. Benefits do not have to be monetary, but can include such things as positive reinforcement, job perquisites, creative freedom, recognition, and awards or commendations. Similarly, awards and expressions of appreciation must also be afforded to politicians and others who substantially help usher change. In essence, without rewards, failure is assured.

These lessons for change have broad applications to political relationships both within the police organization and with external entities. Recognizing their value can have a substantial impact on hurdling political roadblocks and attaining the desired change.

SUMMARY

The intent of this essay was to explore the political terrain of police management with particular attention to community policing. Political dynamics are not cast in stone, rather they are malleable rules which must be moderated to fit the issues and personalities involved. Thus, by examining variables and providing a perspective on the political machinations of crime and

community policing the police executive has a framework from which change can be structured and guided through the political environment.

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