Measuring Quality: The Scope of Community Policing

David L. Carter, Ph.D.
School of Criminal Justice
Michigan State University

The emergence of community policing as the cutting edge of the law enforcement field has led to confusion and questions about its scope and implementation. This article attempts to clarify the role and direction of this important trend in police work.

The Philosophy of Community Policing

Leaders in the field of community policing define it not as a new program, but as a new philosophy of police operations and management. For example, Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux define community policing 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... 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 (Community Policing, 1990:5).

From this perspective, change is called for not only in police responsibilities, but also in the goals, operations, and management of the police force.

This definition of community policing raises the question of how quickly its framework can be implemented. Pragmatically speaking, it would be difficult for most police departments to change their underlying philosophical approach overnight. Incremental change offers a manageable strategy with time for experimentation, transition, and a safer political climate. Given a commitment to change, a willingness to reallocate resources, and procedural flexibility, a piecemeal approach can prove effective, though full implementation will be slower in coming.

Management Orientation

Traditional police management grew from efforts to reform police work by improving the quality of police service and increasing organizational control and accountability. Over time, "reform policing" became characterized by rigid organizational controls; limited discretion; personnel specialization; centralization of authority; organizational inflexibility; and clearly defined lines of authority, responsibility, and communication. The broadened mandate and increased officer activity typical of community policing appears inconsistent with traditional reform era police management. Rather, community policing seems most compatible with contemporary management philosophies such as total quality management (TQM), value-added management, and the re-engineering the corporation approach.

Community policing shares with these management systems an emphasis on customer demand, providing the best possible service, comprehensive problem solving, and employee motivation and job satisfaction. Based on contemporary management principles, a number of improvements in police departments have be suggested:
• Police executives should create an organizational vision to provide long-range direction for their departments.
• The police executive's life and leadership style should be in tune with community expectations.
• Police executives must listen to both employees and community members and provide ongoing feedback.
• Personnel recruitment and selection should be future directed and geared toward fulfilling the departmental vision.
• Policing should primarily focus on neighborhood and citizen problems, not on time management and officer deployment schemes.
• Community perceptions of crime, police performance, and quality of life problems are significant and should not be ignored.
• Police executives should strive to provide the best possible service and value to the community in relation to police resources expenditures (Couper and Lobitz, 1993).

Such changes will not come easily, but experience suggests that a transition pattern often develops. At first, traditional police approaches are recognized as limited or even unsuccessful. Second, attitudes among administrators, line personnel, and citizens begin to change. Third, community assessments are performed and police responsibilities redefined. Fourth, new operational and organizational approaches are developed. Fifth, the community is enlisted to work cooperatively with the police. Finally, both law enforcement and the community must commit to the initiative.

Public Mandates for Police Activity
An important goal of community policing is improving the quality of life. A number of factors may be included under this concept, including traditional police functions (such as reducing victimization, apprehending criminals, reducing fear of crime, resolving conflict, enforcing regulatory laws, etc.). In addition, areas traditionally de-emphasized in police work, (such as educational and youth activities, and addressing community problems like neighborhood decay, street and park maintenance, etc.) may receive more attention. As demands for increased service surface, police budgets may also increase. Paradoxically, greater funding may lead to other problems. For example, other municipal departments may suffer corresponding budget decreases, in turn leading to resentment toward the police department and to reduced public service.

Police administrators may counter these trends by building alliances with other departments and by sharing their vision of a broadened quality of life. In addition, police departments have the obligation to clearly articulate the reasons for expanding the scope of law enforcement and to reach only into those areas viewed as legitimate by community and public institutions.

Operational Impact
The operational scope of the police department is dependent on its chief executive's interpretation and implementation of the community policing philosophy. Defining a strategy is crucial to developing an effective set of operational activities. Figure 1 illustrates various police responsibilities and suggests a blending of traditional and innovative responses.

Place Figure 1 (Examples of Community-Based Police Operations) About Here

Political Environment
Community policing is inextricably related to the political environment of which it is a part. Threats to the organizational control and implementation of community policing can come in four forms (see Figure 2).

Place Figure 2 (The Structure of Political Threats) About Here
The first threat is from sources external to government. Examples include community pressure on police administration to retain a particular officer in a neighborhood, or eroding support when community expectations are not fulfilled. Police organizations must be prepared to respond rationally in order to maintain organizational control while at the same time avoiding alienating community and political leaders.

A second basis for political threats can be the political empowerment of community-based officers. An officer may become so involved in the community that he or she becomes a political advocate instead of community
A third threat stems from internal government sources. As described above, as the police department grows in prominence, other departments may feel disenfranchised and conflicts leading to poor cooperation and inadequate service may develop. Police executives must focus on team building and sharing credit for advances in the community's quality of life.

Finally, threats may develop from poor internal relations when the emphasis shifts from traditional activities to new initiatives. It is crucial to focus adequate attention on incorporating all employees into new initiatives.

**Planning for the Future**

An important aspect of long-range planning in police management and operations is comprehensive self-assessment through a 3-staged approach including refocusing, refining, and reallocation. Refocusing involves re-examining the department's mission, goals, and objectives and redefining their significance. The activities and services the police department will provide in the future must be articulated in written form.

Refining occurs after the department's direction has been formally refocused. At that point, policies, procedures, job descriptions, personnel evaluations, and training must be adjusted to match the new mission. Reallocation of departmental resources (i.e., people, budgets, equipment) is required to meet the needs of a newly defined departmental direction.

Future problems can be addressed by building an adequate foundation for change through thoughtful planning and the development of a strong vision.