Human Resource Issues for Community Policing

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Human resources are crucial to the successful implementation of community policing initiatives. This article overviews some important personnel factors related to community policing.

CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFICERS
What are the most desirable characteristics of community police officers? In community policing, officers are called upon to be particularly thoughtful, creative problem solvers. They are asked to listen to the concerns of community members, to logically reason out the roots of problems, to identify and research potential answers, to implement solutions, and to assess results.

Education: Preliminary findings suggest that police officers with some exposure to college education have an advantage in performing these tasks. Higher education can provide a framework for the particular tasks associated with community policing, as well as help develop research and reasoning abilities.

Personality: Most importantly, officers who are ethical and responsible are sought for community policing posts. People with a record of using good judgment in their discretionary decisions, while abiding by the "do no harm" ethical credo, are good candidates.

In addition, the ability to communicate effectively is crucial for community police officers. They must establish rapport with diverse groups in order to resolve problems and disputes. The most important communication skills are an even temper, empathy, helpfulness, and a positive outlook.

Policy Implications
The selection process should assesses applicants' characteristics and identify the best candidates. A requirement of at least two years of college should be established.

RECRUITMENT
The recruitment process must not only identify suitable candidates, it must also be active in promoting the police agency as a good employer.

Police administrators identify three main barriers to successful recruitment: 1) law enforcement agencies' salary and benefit levels are not competitive, 2) few college graduates are drawn to work in local police agencies, 3) very few college-educated minority group members are interested in local law enforcement. Yet, research reveals much evidence to contradict these presumptions.

A review of starting salaries found law enforcement agencies' salaries and benefits to be very competitive with other fields such as retailing, school teaching, and other occupations requiring social science degrees. In addition, research suggests there is a significant body of students who prefer law enforcement careers in municipal or state agencies versus federal agencies. Several factor are significant, including personal preferences for local police work, the desire to avoid relocation, and local law enforcement salary scales which have outpaced federal scales. In addition, many candidates will apply to both local and federal agencies even when their preference may be for federal positions.

Finally, although there is a smaller pool of college-educated law enforcement candidates who are minority group members, research indicates that a significant proportion of minority members in college are enrolled in the social sciences--many are in criminal justice programs.
**Policy Implications**

Short-term: Make recruiting a high priority by selecting effective recruiters and by giving them the status and tools they need. Develop a marketing plan, using successful models from other government and private sources, which includes operational, tactical, and strategic objectives.

Medium-term: Develop a regional applicant pool using public service announcements, paid advertising, and other forms of publicity. Make your department the most attractive in the region and make sure recruiters are always on the lookout for good prospects regardless of the current number of vacancies.

Long-term: Evaluate the organization and its duties, and reconsider the skills needed to effectively perform them, focusing especially on the community policing component. Consider using civilian specialists in nonenforcement positions.

**TRAINING**

Unlike some policing tasks like criminal investigation or traffic enforcement, community policing tasks may vary greatly among jurisdictions. As a result, training needs are also varied. Topics which may be relevant to training include:

- Communication skills
- Logic and deductive reasoning
- Applying creative ideas and using discretion
- Information about community resources, bureaucratic structures, and making referrals
- Special knowledge training (e.g., building and health and safety codes)
- Community organization and motivation
- Negotiation skills

Especially good training methods for community policing include exercises in identifying and solving problems and role playing specific situations. Supervisors and managers may need training in effective coaching and leadership of line officers.

Policy Implications: Training curricula should be designed to fit the particular mission of the police agency and the characteristics of the community. Training is important for line officers as well as supervisors and administrators.

**LABOR RELATIONS**

There are wide variations in collective bargaining agreements among police units--some are very restrictive, while others are nearly nonexistent. A number of labor issues may pose problems for community policing. These include:

- Contracts mandating shift requirements--including assignment priorities and procedures. It may be necessary to negotiate exceptions for community policing initiatives.
- Seniority rules may reduce flexibility in assigning community police officers.
- Shift and assignment clauses may need renegotiation to permit the use of "flex time".
- Contract exceptions may be needed to permit new criteria for community officer evaluations

Policy Implications

Long-range planning for community policing should be a part of all contract negotiations. Good communication and a willingness to negotiate, perhaps through several contract periods or through arbitration, may be required. Be prepared by: 1) developing clear goals, 2) tying changes in contracts to the departmental mission and responsibilities, and 3) showing how the rank and file will ultimately benefit from the changes.

**FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT**

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) is designed to protect employees and to ensure they are fairly compensated. FLSA provisions may require payment to officers who perform work-related duties beyond the
eight-hour day, even when this is voluntary. A balance must be struck between officer's enthusiasm and desire to participate in community activities and the department's compensatory obligations.

**Policy Implications**
Carefully consider the range of community police officers activities, and establish clear policy guidelines. The department must establish a compensation system that meets the officers and its needs as well as satisfies FLSA requirements.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
Professional development is an important goal for many police officers. If community policing becomes known as a sidetrack to advancement, many of the best officers may avoid it.

**Policy Implications**
Develop a personnel development system which rewards officers in a number of ways aside from promotions. Incentive pay, merit raises, recognition, special designations, time off for exceptional performance, etc. can all stimulate professional dedication and development.

**PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS**
Personnel evaluations perform a number of important functions. Evaluation policies must address the following questions: Who is evaluated? How frequently? Who performs the evaluations and what training do they need? What form will evaluations take?
Based on anecdotal evidence, important factors for evaluating community officers were:

- A clear sense of objectives (including an understanding of the department's mission and goals and the officer's role in fulfilling these, as well as a sense of direction)
- An understanding of operational policies and procedures
- An interest in professional self-improvement
- Feedback from the public, peers, and the department
- Performance of job roles responsibilities

Line officers may also be asked to evaluate supervisors and managers on a number of factors including: leadership, communication skills, teamwork, attention to quality issues, and planning skills.

**Policy Implications**
A broad range of flexible criteria, tied to community needs and officer duties, should be developed to accurately assess performance. Personnel should also be given opportunities to evaluate supervisors and managers.

**ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**
Community policing is a significant shift from traditional policing; its implementation will entail resocialization of all departmental personnel. This process requires time, commitment, and patience.

**Policy Implications**
The department must develop a strategic plan to implement change which includes steps to resocialize those within the organization in order to shift the occupational ethos toward a community policing philosophy.