COMMUNITY POLICING AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Increasingly, police departments are transforming the way they do business. Community policing, a new policing model, employs customer-based organizational strategies, partnerships, and problem-solving processes to reduce or prevent crime and disorder and to improve the community’s quality of life. Community policing programs vary widely in their goals and methods. They range from active police intervention into underlying social and economic problems fostering crime and civil disorder to a fundamental restructuring of police work and management.

The comprehensive view of community policing is inconsistently applied. Community policing often centers on external change, such as efforts to redefine a police department’s mission within the community, rather than on internal change, such as reorganization of the agency itself (Zhao et al. 1995). Effective transformation of the organization requires a simultaneous internal and external focus.

Theorists and strategists argue that internal organizational concerns are essential to implementing change. Two key elements in changing public organizations are improving problem solving within the system and fostering employee growth (Chin and Benne 1969). This approach is very difficult, time consuming, and costly. It may require overcoming cynicism from previous failed initiatives, and changes in leadership style to include employees in developing goals and strategies. This may be especially difficult in a command-and-control environment, such as a police department, where the stakes are elevated by the potential for injury or even death.

INVOLVING EMPLOYEES

The various methods for involving employees in strategic planning for community policing present dilemmas. If management handpicks employees, the rest of the workforce may mistrust the selection process. Obtaining input from a "representative" group of employees or from volunteers may do little to relieve suspicion. If employees are selected by their peers, trust may be restored but representativeness is not assured. Moreover, there are no institutional safeguards for employees voicing unpopular opinions.

Unionized organizations provide a unique opportunity to create real partnerships in the design and implementation of change. Union leaders are duly elected representatives; union policies assure that individual employees are heard and unions protect employees from reprisal for voicing unpopular ideas.

Despite the potential contributions of unions, most police departments shifting to community policing do not involve labor in the process. Focus group interviews and literature reviews find little evidence of significant labor (or employee/supervisor) involvement in the design and implementation of community policing programs.
Though this approach is consistent with traditional command-and-control methods, it is inconsistent with current management philosophies emphasizing high quality and performance.

**IMPEDEMENTS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY POLICING**

A number of internal and external factors compel police departments to consider, and often to implement, community policing programs. Work force knowledge and skills, community demands, and the desire for high quality public services and stronger communities are all important motivators. Yet, to advance the goals of community policing, departments must recognize and remove barriers to progress.

The research (on community policing) reveals many obstacles to community policing design and implementation including:

- confusion over the definition and appropriate application of community policing;
- middle management indifference;
- lack of community support;
- perceptions of employee resistance;
- disagreements about resource allocation and personnel deployment;
- confusion or disagreement about changes in departmental systems and structures;
- clashes between "command-and-control" management styles and expanded decision making by line officers; and
- failure within the department to view employees as "internal customers."

Interviews with several Michigan police department labor leaders revealed still other barriers:

- failure to integrate community policing with traditional police responsibilities;
- confusion about the differences between community policing and traditional police work leading to skepticism about the program and the department’s leadership;
- lack of involvement in the initiative’s design, implementation, and monitoring;
- performance measures incongruent with community policing goals;
- management assumptions that a "union buy-in" means "giving in" to management control;
- lack of team focus;
- failure to recognize accomplishments;
- perceptions that community policing is a management tool to circumvent the contract, particularly seniority provisions;
- preferential treatment for community police officers; and
- poor communication between the administration, middle management, and union.

These barriers are neither unique to police departments nor insurmountable. Yet, if left unattended, they are likely to fester, causing discontent and cynicism, and undermining the department’s leadership and the community policing concept.

**LABOR’S ROLE IN COMMUNITY POLICING**

Research suggests union involvement can contribute to community policing success. Juravich (1996) found that labor-management programs overall are more likely to change management operations when they meet frequently, have adequate resources, and are jointly operated with strong union involvement. A recent Department of Labor study reported that ventures engaging employees in service planning and implementation typically resulted in: better, faster, and/or expanded services with greater responsiveness to citizen needs; increased cost-effectiveness; better employee work life including greater opportunities to contribute, learn skills, and enhance job security and respect; and less conflict, faster conflict resolution, more flexible contracts,
and greater emphasis on mutual responsibility for improving service (U.S. Department of Labor 1996). These benefits are all consistent with community policing goals and the goals of individual managers and employees.

COMMUNITY POLICING: A JOINT LABOR-MANAGEMENT APPROACH
The transformation to community policing is a demanding process which may take from three to five years of intense effort. The following stages represent beginning steps for police department joint labor-management groups to consider. These stages and steps may overlap and some require continual monitoring, but each is a discrete area for inquiry and action.

Exploratory Stage
Building a foundation. Management must identify the specific local conditions and define the questions or problems the plan is intended to address. Labor and management should build this foundation together.

Attributes of the new system. Labor and management must choose the new system’s key attributes. What is the new system’s design? How will individual roles and responsibilities change? What will the daily lives of employees, supervisors, and managers be like? The joint committee must agree on the goals, boundaries, and dimensions of community policing and identify a corresponding range of options. Even when guidelines are established externally, specific decisions must fit the department and be fully understood for effective implementation.

**Model for Joint Labor-Management Development of Community Policing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation: Identify local context and define issues to be addressed.</td>
<td>Elicit top-level commitments from stakeholders.</td>
<td>Decide on the initial scope of change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the new system.</td>
<td>Integrate community policing with other initiatives.</td>
<td>Make ongoing adjustments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify stakeholders and their interests.</td>
<td>Focus on middle management.</td>
<td>Manage the diffusion of change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate, educate, and train each constituency.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stakeholders and their interests.** The interests of key stakeholders (individuals and groups likely to influence and/or be affected by change) must be identified and taken into account. The analysis should include internal and external stakeholders—including community groups and the local governance system.
Preparation Stage

**Top level commitment.** Commitments at the highest level must be elicited from each of the key stakeholders. Verbal commitments are an important, but limited first step. To build or rebuild trust, labor and management leaders must show their commitment through changed behavior and efforts to remove barriers to community policing. Identify the demonstrations of commitment required by each group to establish confidence in the process.

**Integration with other initiatives.** Police departments often face a number of changes at once including new technologies, training, downsizing and/or growth. Determine whether community policing will be affected by other departmental changes, or conversely, whether it will interfere with other programs. Reconciling the needs of all programs will mean less competition for scarce resources.

**Focus on middle management.** Middle management, including union leadership, plays a crucial role in overseeing the operational transition to community policing. Functions will change dramatically and some managers may be concerned about job security or career paths. The measurement and rewards for performance, integration of community policing and traditional police functions, and methods for supporting managers in their new roles must all be addressed. In addition, managers need instruction in the new system’s management and supervision tasks and in the skills they will demonstrate to line staff.

**Communication, education, and training.** The joint labor-management committee must stay in contact with each of its constituencies; the department is beginning anew and needs input from all quarters. The type and timing of communication and training are critical. Stay sensitive to work force fears about being left out of either the decision-making process or the information loop. Decide early on what information to communicate and how to disseminate it; identify the types and sources of training needed.

Implementation Stage

**Initial scope of the change.** A key question is whether to change the whole organization at once, or to establish a pilot project. There are several factors to consider: Is part of the organization more ready for change than the rest? What information would a pilot generate? Would it help or hinder implementation throughout the department? Pilot programs should have time limits (three or four months) and include an evaluation strategy to keep the department focused and on track.

**Ongoing adjustments.** In the exploration and preparation stages, the department’s internal systems and structures are modified to support the change. Unanticipated issues will emerge as people work within the new system. Mechanisms must be in place to monitor progress, keep internal systems consistent with community policing goals, and improve internal processes.

**Managing the diffusion process.** Pilots implement community policing on a small scale, making the diffusion process smoother. Nonetheless, changing an entire department often creates heightened demands for limited resources, especially time. How will training demands be managed? What competing initiatives or priorities exist and how will they be reconciled with community policing requirements? Should top level labor and/or management commitments be restated? Emphasize the ongoing nature of change through mechanisms which continuously review, clarify, modify and improve the effort.

Ongoing Concerns

**Collective bargaining.** Collective bargaining issues may surface at any time. How they are dealt with can
significantly affect the level of trust between labor and management, the commitment that each exhibits toward the joint process and community policing, as well as the strategic choices they make about new work systems. In many organizations, joint committees rule out discussion of contractual issues in the design process and in other stages. In other cases, labor and management come to realize that some of the seemingly intractable problems can be most effectively addressed—and more enduring progress will result—when all options are open to exploration, including those bound by contract or management prerogative. The choice of which strategy to pursue is very individual. Keep in mind, however, that the way labor and management handle these issues may affect their satisfaction with community policing processes and outcomes and the long-term effectiveness of the department.

**Evaluation.** Evaluation should be ongoing—from the early stages of exploration through implementation and beyond. The exploration, design, and implementation processes as well as the outcomes of each stage should be subject to review. But, what is to be measured? Identify and objectively measure the criteria for success for each stage and decide how these measures will be packaged for review and then used by the joint committee and the workforce.

**SUMMARY**

Community policing is a process of organizational change that is most effective when it has the commitment and involvement of its key stakeholders. Employees are the stakeholder group most critical to the initiative’s success. Unionized police departments have a unique opportunity to make use of the workforce’s knowledge and expertise through the collective voice of the union. A joint labor-management committee using a systematic approach, including exploration, planning and implementation stages, offers the greatest opportunity for community policing success.

**REFERENCES**


© Copyright, School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, Michigan 48824, 1997

For more information on technical assistance with the joint labor-management development of community policing contact:

Michael J. Polzin Ed.D.  
School of Labor and Industrial Relations  
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1118
Phone: (517) 432-1288
E-Mail: Michael.Polzin@ssc.msu.edu