Transformational Leadership and Community Policing: A Road Map for Change

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The movement toward community policing signals a major effort at transformational change to redefine how a police agency operates. Transformational changes are very complex, long-term processes with many challenges and pitfalls. Yet, few models and virtually no training are available to chiefs, and other top officials, on how to manage a transformational change effort of this magnitude. Transformational change requires creative and innovative leaders who can facilitate as well as guide the efforts of others. While much has been written about the overall philosophy and general principles of community policing, fewer efforts have been directed to providing leaders with specific information on what they need to focus on to make change happen in their police agency. Simply put, based on our observations, leaders who are thinking about the move to community policing need a realistic perspective to the principles of organizational change and a specific navigational tool that provides the elements required to transform a police agency into new ways of operating.

Over the last three years, the Michigan Regional Community Policing Institute (RCPI) has been committed to facilitating organizational changes within police agencies, and to the development of community partnerships to institutionalize community policing. Based on experiences with more than 20 police agencies throughout the state of Michigan, we have found that they move to community policing can be successful only if the process of change is well managed by the police leaders and key members of the department.

An analogy can be drawn between navigating a change process and the qualities of an effective on-line navigation system for a car. An effective navigational system has a number of important characteristics. First, an effective navigation system prompts you to put in the start and end points of your trip so that they drive (leader) can get from the current place (status quo) to an alternative destination (community policing). Second, an effective navigational system provides an indication of the various ways that one can travel to get to the destination - there is often no one best way to get from "here to there." Third, an effective navigational system monitors your movements and can provide up to the minute information on impending traffic jams or traffic light malfunctions and suggest some alternative routes to take along the way. Fourth, an effective navigation system is adaptable to your changing needs - as you change your mind about the destination, where to stop to relax, what route to take and where you can go "off roading" rather than staying to the predictable road.

The purpose of this article is to develop a road map that provides a navigational system for making the change to community policing happen. To be most useful, the leader must have some idea of the destination or goals of becoming a community policing agency, be willing to be flexible and adaptable given changing conditions, and be willing to meet whatever challenges that might arise on the road. A leader needs three things to build this road map: an understanding of the stages one must go through to make transformational change happen in an organization; an understanding of the underlying elements for change in the move to community policing; and an understanding of key challenges a leader must face in any transformation change effort.
Community policing involves a significant change as the organization begins to adopt procedures consistent with the new approach to work. We have found that many of these changes follow a series of definable stages. The following model serves as a framework for defining the changes process and for helping leaders navigate through what can be a tumultuous process. The model consists of six stages -- exploration, commitment, planning, implementation, monitoring and revision and institutionalization.

Exploration is the first step of any change effort. It occurs as a result of need or curiosity and requires that organizational leadership actively investigate alternative approaches to the current system. Within this stage are three subcomponents; interest, awareness, and a decision point. Interest is the motivation or drive that fuels the exploration effort. It is the first point at which a leader recognizes that alternatives are available and may be worth pursuing. Awareness is the point at which a leader is conscious of the various approaches available and has enough information to make an informed decision regarding the viability of various alternatives. A decision point concludes the exploration stages and requires the leader to weigh the available information. The leader must make a choice to invest additional time and resources in the change process or to maintain the status quo.

In the commitment stage, the leader makes the decision to pursue change and presents the idea to the organization's management team. This group thoroughly evaluates the costs and benefits of pursuing an alternative approach and makes the decision on whether or not to proceed. Commitment typically involves pre-planning, a secondary decision point and developing a sense of urgency. Pre-planning is a rigorous phase in which the management team gathers a comprehensive collection of information on the proposed change effort (i.e., community policing). Unlike the exploration phase, this information gathering is intensive and is designed to be a thorough evaluation of all available information. The group then makes a formal decision on whether to commit to the change process. If the decision is to move forward, the management team presents their ideas to the entire organization and begins to build momentum for the change effort. This momentum is what we refer to as a sense of urgency. The organization is given a basic description of the intended change and provided with a compelling reason or motivation for moving forward.

Planning is an organization-wide effort to clearly articulate the goals of the change effort and develop a strategy for achieving those objectives. It is important that all departments, units or subdivisions, a guidance team is formed to help facilitate the change process. Planning involves identifying the vision and goals for the organization, developing indicators of success, designing action plans and collecting baseline data. Identifying the vision and goals is the phase at which top management articulates the main purpose of the change effort. The vision should be a concise description of the future state of the organization. The goals should be difficult but achievable objectives, tied to specific action plans, and aligned with the organization's new vision. From these goals the organization can then identify indicators of success. These indicators are the observable and quantifiable signs that will be used to evaluate the change effort. The next phase of planning involves the development of the specific action plans for achieving organizational goals. This step is to ensure that transformational change is conducted in a systematic and methodical manner. Finally, the organization should collect baseline data. This process involves measuring the indicators of success prior to action plan implementation to provide a baseline for future evaluation.

The implementation stage is perhaps the most visible component of the change process and involves the implementation of action plans, an adjustment phase and the reconcentration of effort. The initial step is to implement the action plans that have been developed. During this implementation process, it becomes clear that some efforts are more effective than others. This feedback should be used to adjust action plans and refine implementation efforts. In addition, it is important for organizational leaders to reconcentrate efforts and maintain a sense of urgency despite setbacks and adjustments. Leaders need to invigorate organizational members, maintain positive morale and continue to make the change effort a top priority.

Monitoring and revising is a formalized system for evaluating the change effort and revisiting the planning stage of the change process. This stage is used to quantify progress, identify gaps, develop new action plans
and revise organizational goals. Progress is assessed by comparing the success indicators with baseline measures while evaluating in light of organizational goals. Progress is assessed by comparing the success indicators with baseline measures while evaluating in light of organizational goals. Gap analysis is a two-part process of (1) identifying where deficits exist between desired goals and the current state of the organization and (2) identifying the root cause of those deficiencies. If gaps are caused by unrealistic expectations, future goals should be modified to be more attainable. However, if gaps are caused by a flawed action plan or by improper implementation, the process used to enact change should be revised. Depending upon the results of this analysis (1) action plans can be modified to better achieve lasting change, (2) new goals can be established based on those plans and (3) new indicators of success can be identified.

Institutionalization is the final stage of the change process and occurs when the procedures, policies and systems that emerged as a result of the change effort formally replace the old methods of performing. This stage involves systems alignment, solidification of new behaviors and a transfer of knowledge. Alignment occurs when the organizational structure (e.g. roles and responsibilities, accountability, communication patterns), operating systems (e.g. budget and time allocation), and human resource systems (e.g. rewards, selection criteria, training) are consistent with the vision for the change effort. Solidification occurs when old policies and practices are replaced with new systems and methods of operation and those new behaviors become standard procedure. Finally, change is institutionalized when new employees are trained in the organization's new approaches to work and knowledge is systematically transferred from incumbent employees to new employees.

The stage model of change highlights the intensive, long-term approach that leaders must take to move an agency from an exploratory stage to the institutionalization of a change to community policing. To proceed through these stages, a leader must have a clear understanding of the specific elements that need to change relevant to how the police agency operates day to day. The combination of these key elements with the stages of change previously described provides the building blocks of a navigational system for a change to community policing.

A good road map has complexity built into the navigational system but provides the user a framework that gives meaning to the complex information management source. Similarly, we wanted to construct a comprehensive system that has all the "bells and whistles" while at the same time presenting them in an organized way. The navigational system includes three components - core elements or principles, key concepts for change, and the six stages in the change model described above.

First, there are five basic elements or principles that must change for community policing to be effective. These factors are key drivers in any organization; a failure to consider any one of these components is likely to cripple a transformational change initiative. The five elements at the heart of the change effort are:

1. Enhancing partnerships with external stakeholder groups,
2. Re-engineering operating systems to support the move to community policing,
3. Restructuring the organizational hierarchy to increase empowerment and accountability of all police personnel to the goals and philosophy of community policing,
4. Managing human resources to align them with the philosophy and goals of community policing, and
5. Adopting a problem solving perspective to daily operations for continuous improvement of police services.

Second, within these five elements are 22 concepts that must be the focal point for the change effort. During a change process it is imperative that organizations evaluate their traditional approach to each of these concepts, and consider how these approaches should be changed to be consistent with the values of community policing. For example, to restructure the organization, leaders must focus on concepts such as roles and responsibilities of police officers, issues of divisional alignment and work emphasis. Traditional policing models focus on individual officers as specialists within a
tightly controlled organizational hierarchy. A community policing perspective requires a move toward the officer as a generalist, with realignment of divisions to allow for greater focus on geographical areas of responsibility and a teamwork emphasis.

Third, the navigation system focuses on changes in the 22 concepts across the six stages of change - exploration, commitment, planning activities, implementation efforts, monitoring and revision procedures and institutionalized changes. In other words, the change in divisional alignment requires leaders to move across these six stages of change to institutionalize a new way of aligning the organization in a way that is consistent with the philosophy of community policing. While the specific details of a change effort will fluctuate across organizations, we feel that the five core elements, six stages of change, and 22 specific concepts are relevant for all policing organizations as they implement community policing. To demonstrate the utility of the model we would now like to walk the reader through an iteration of a change process. Our example focuses on the element of changing the organizational structure, and more specifically, the concept of divisional alignment. The table presents part of the road map for change relevant to organizational structure.

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<th>EXPLORATION</th>
<th>COMMITMENT</th>
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<td>Action Items/Bench Marking Recommendations</td>
<td>New Knowledge and Implementation</td>
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<td>- Redo job descriptions</td>
<td>- Identify key &quot;generalist&quot; roles and evaluate the number of personnel who participate in this role.</td>
<td>- Redefine relationships across functions and workgroups.</td>
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<td>- Blend Specialist CPO's into overall patrol units. Define those task areas requiring specialization department-wide and train accordingly. Develop teams utilizing a combination of specialists whenever possible. Review other best practices.</td>
<td>- Redefine relationships across functions and workgroups.</td>
<td>- Identify key &quot;generalist&quot; roles and evaluate the number of personnel who participate in this role.</td>
<td>- Track the efficiency of services/systems likely to be affected by a more generalist role and evaluate whether improvement are made as a result of new roles.</td>
<td>- Evaluate the amount of extra work that is avoided through generalist approach (fewer call backs, few referrals, etc.)</td>
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<td>Baltimore, MD - Over the past decade, the agency has evolved from specialized community policing units with a rather narrow focus to a department wide community policing mandate. Every facet of the agency is geared toward meeting the goals of community policing. Relationships throughout the department have been restructured to allow information, guidance, and authority to flow through the organization without supervisory barriers or traditional &quot;chain-of-command&quot; restraints.</td>
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### Organizational Structure

#### Divisional Alignment

- Geographic subdivisions developed, with internal and external input for assignment of personnel. Reporting lines tailored to activity and geographic area of accountability, rather than function.
- Review other best practices.

#### Organizational Accountability to Community

- Expand measures beyond crime statistics and response times to include citizen perceptions of safety and security (quality of life)
- Review other best practices.

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<td>Grand Rapids MI - One centralized agency is in the process of moving into five district areas. Officers are responsible for a geographical area within their district.</td>
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<td>Lansing MI - Decentralized the dept. into problem solving areas and made officers accountable for a specific area. Two new precincts were created to decentralize services.</td>
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<td>St. Petersburg, FL - The city was divided into geographic regions and all employees are accountable for activities in the area to which they are assigned.</td>
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<td>Sagamore Hills, OH - An agency serving a rural community initiated their change to community policing by surveying residents. Based on survey, strategies for decreasing residents’ fear of crime were developed.</td>
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In traditional police organizations, police operations are typically coordinated from a central headquarters. The assignment of personnel for the delivery of service is accomplished through bureau and divisional allocations that focus on patrol functions and specialized assignments (i.e. investigations, crime prevention, youth, community policing, etc.) Patrol officers are assigned to sectors, districts or beats based on call load and criminal incident equalization; there is little or no consideration of neighborhoods and the natural organization of communities. Moreover, each specialization performs its own function with minimal communication and coordination with others in the department. A sense of ownership and personal responsibility for a neighborhood is often non-existent. This lack of coordination and ownership often prevents the seamless delivery of services to community members.

A community policing orientation would restructure the system to better reflect the geography of the patrol area to better serve the community. One action plan might be to move away from a rigid hierarchy to a flatter, more flexible structure that can more efficiently respond to the needs of community members. Cross-functional teams of officers would be assigned to specific neighborhoods. The continuity of assignments and integration of policing resources would be designed to facilitate communication and coordination among officers, instill a sense of personal ownership for communities, encourage partnerships with community members and improve the quality of service delivery.

Prior to the implementation, it is important for departments to clearly articulate their goals for the plan and to identify indicators of success to allow for the monitoring and revision of the change effort. For the purpose of our examples, we might be interested in improving policing effectiveness by geographical area of we might want to target specific areas of concern such as crime rates, frequency of complaints, quality of life, etc. Once these goals have been articulated and baseline data has been collected, the department can begin to implement the change.

Implementation could include the formation of cross-function teams to be assigned to specific neighborhoods for extended periods of time. The decentralization of function could extend further and include the establishment of satellite stations to be located at key areas within the community. Regardless of the plan, it is important for the department to dedicated sufficient resources and effort to fully realize the goals of the change effort. As change is implemented the department can begin the monitoring and revision process.

Measurements or indicators of success can be compared with baseline data to demonstrate progress and identify areas of weakness. If the goal was to reduce crime in an area, statistics could be evaluated to see if significant reductions occurred. These data should also be used to identify areas in which more work needs to be done. In this manner, the change process incorporates a continuous improvement loop that allows for adjustments and the incorporation of knowledge gained through experience.

Over time, this process will yield a highly efficient, self-perpetuating system for the delivery of services. At this stage, the organization has institutionalized the change. The behaviors that were once new and different are now the standard mode of operation. Through our experiences we have encountered and catalogued many organizations that have institutionalized change and made community policing an integral part of their daily activities. On the topic of divisional alignment, the Lansing, Michigan, Police Department; the St. Petersburg, Florida, Police Department; and the Grand Rapids, Michigan, Police Department are examples of effective change. The Lansing, Michigan, Police Department has institutionalized a team-based work system targeting 20 geographical areas. The department also added two new precinct facilities to its headquarters to decentralize efforts and place officers closer to their assigned areas. The St.
Petersburg, Florida, Police Department implemented a geographic deployment plan involving all members in the problem solving process. The Grand Rapids, Michigan, Police Department is developing a plan to replace police headquarters with five community service facilities strategically located throughout their service area.

The focus on divisional alignment is put one example from the twenty-two concepts that could be discussed as part of the change to community policing. The key leadership issue is to understand the complexity of a transformational change effort toward community policing. The navigational system provides the elements of the change - the leader must provide the support and direction for the change and have the patience to allow the change process to unfold over time. Many large-scale and small-scale change efforts fail to meet their aims for a variety of reasons. This final section focuses on the challenges faced by leaders as they facilitate and guide a change effort to transform a police agency to a community policing organization. Organizational change specialists highlight the important role that leadership plays in the preparation, planning, implementation, monitoring and institutionalization of any change effort (Rothwell, McLean and Sullivan, 1995). This calls for leaders to take on new roles and responsibilities as change agent, facilitator and motivator. How well leaders enact their new roles and responsibilities will have a major impact on the success of the transformation effort (Zhao, Thurman and Lovrich 1995).

One leadership challenge is the need for the leaders of the police agency to establish a clear sense of urgency for the change (Kotter, 1995). This sense of urgency must be felt by others in the organization as the transformation process requires a number of highly motivated individuals willing to cooperate to drive the transformation, manage the change process and motivate others to work for rather than against the change.

This willingness to cooperate must go beyond simple compliance and become of a commitment to a new vision for a better police agency. The leadership challenge is how to create this sense of urgency given the lack of a survival crisis to be addressed. Police agencies are not going to become less legitimate or are not going to be eliminated if they do not "do something different." Police leaders must begin by having a firm belief system that changes the way the agency is run is critical and is worth the effort. The leader must then emphasize to staff and officers alike that the status quo is not good enough, that business as usual cannot be tolerated and that the move to community policing as a philosophy of doing business differently might be a strategy worth pursuing. True transformation requires a debate within an organization to shape and mold the change effort to meet the challenges faced by the police agency.

It is critical that community policing is viewed not as the ends or expected outcome of any change effort but that it is the means or engine to becoming a more efficient and effective police agency. Unless the leader and various members of the agency can clearly identify how community policing can lead to "good things" (minimize weaknesses, build on strengths, increase opportunities and minimize threats) there will be no sense of urgency for the change effort. Unfortunately, many attempts to transform an agency to community policing begin with a bold vision but lack any attempts to generate a real sense of urgency throughout the organization.

A second leadership challenge is how to set up a strategic planning process that allows for important input and involvement but at the same time creates the momentum to move the change effort forward. Kotter (1995) contends that a key outcome of the planning process must be the creation of a committed and powerful enough guidance team or coalition that can lead or drive the change effort. In most change efforts for community policing, top leaders form a guidance team that cuts across organizational levels and departmental functions to define the vision for the transformation and to discuss how to implement the change process in the organization. It is critical that leaders clearly specify the goals of the team, gain consensus that change is needed and determine what power the team has to proceed within the existing organizational structure.

The leadership challenge is to ensure that the guidance team has the goals or direction and the power to make change happen. All too often, police chiefs assume that high involvement means little direction. Thus, guidance teams are given some general goals to think about but no real boundaries within which to operate. This lack of management of the change process can lead to two key problems. One problem is that the guidance team members might feel they are adrift. These feelings of ambiguity can lead to discussions but little action. A second problem is that the team might plow ahead and suggest a bold plan for change, only to find out that the chief is uncomfortable with the direction the
team is taking. This can lead the team to be frustrated with the change effort and reinforce the notion that involvement works only if the end result is what the chief wants.

Police agencies tend to assume that an ad hoc guidance team will somehow overcome or be more powerful than the existing hierarchical structure to drive the change process. This clearly underestimates the difficulties that the guidance team will face in trying to produce change. In a sense, without dealing with the issues of goals, commitment and power, the leader is hoping against hope that the entrenched hierarchy will do things that they were not willing or able to do on their own. This is a recipe for failure.

From an organizational development perspective, the assumption is that collaboration, cooperation and joint problem solving are better ways to get things done in organizations than relying solely on politics and control. This means that the guidance team needs to include key players in the organization, including union representation, administrators, record keepers, investigators, officers, first-line supervisors and middle management as well as the top leaders. While the existing hierarchical structure maintains the administrative and day-to-day realities of police, this new coalition of individuals must create a structure to deal with the changing realities that come with the move toward community policing. The agenda must include how the agency will conduct its work differently in the future, including changes to the hierarchical ordering or control that currently exists.

Transformational change requires a long-term commitment to challenging the status quo. This change will not occur unless individuals most affected by the change are given the resources and power needed to implement the plan in a way that best meets the needs of their customers. The move to community policing is in attempt to deal with long-standing problems. These types of problems often require creative and innovative solutions with integrated and sustained actions. These notions of innovation, creativity and sustained experimentation are at odds with the typical organizational push for standardization, conformity and moving quickly to the next crisis. Consequently, the third leadership challenge revolves around the need for creating a climate that supports creativity, innovation and experimentation relevant to the change effort.

Developing new norms or a climate of innovation is not easy. Innovation requires new mechanisms for identifying problems, analyzing root causes, developing action steps and generalizing or diffusing innovations developed in one part of the agency to other parts of the organization. For example, a group of sergeants may come up with an effective way of tracking community problems, assigning officers to the problems and monitoring effective responses to problems identified. These sergeants could then provide a mini-training program on their system and how to use it. After the training, support can be given to those trained to utilize their new skills.

A key step is for leaders to "model the new way" (Kouzes and Posner, 1995). Leaders must show a willingness to explore within the agency the issues surrounding innovation, creativity and experimentation. It takes not only a clear statement that innovation will be supported but action by leaders to show that they mean it.

Most organizations are able to develop a vision or mission statement and do some planning for the change process. Sustaining momentum for a transformation requires much more effort. Leaders need to communicate the vision repeatedly, encourage and manage the process of implementation and deal with ongoing dilemmas of change. Thus, once a transformational process is beginning to unfold, a key leadership challenge is to demonstrate constancy of purpose (Deming, 1986).

With many change efforts, leaders devote a large amount of time early in the process of building a shared vision and directing a guidance team on creating an implementation strategy. Once the plan for implementation is completed, top leaders often go back to the important work that could not be addressed while the change process was initiated. As an analogy, often leaders feel that the rock of change has been rolled up the top of the hill and is ready to roll down the hill of implementation. This is an understandable reaction as top leaders are faced with new issues and fires to fight. The leadership challenge is how to stay focused and show commitment to the change throughout the implementation process given the harsh reality that their attention must be in multiple places at the same time.
The paradox of change is that the implementation of the transformational effort such as community policing requires even more time and energy than the initial planning steps. For example, time must be spent on understanding the changes the organizational systems are undergoing relevant to the change to community policing. This requires the development of accurate information and feedback. In addition, the leaders must encourage and support midcourse corrections to maintain information. Constancy of purpose is difficult to accomplish, as there are always other issues that can distract a leader from full attention to the community policing effort. In addition, there are clearly forces within and external to a police agency that are resistant to any change effort. Thus, leaders must show constancy of purpose relevant to guiding the efforts of the forces for change but also recognize, acknowledge and continually address the forces that may be resistant to the change effort.

Successful change has occurred when the traditional police model is the "way we used to do things" around here. New behaviors become routinized and there are new norms and shared values (Kotter, 1995). Thus, the move to community policing begins with a vision based on values that now have become reality in everyday life. Clearly for change to last, leaders must manage a process that changes the core components (organizational structure, reward system, communication system and human resource system) of an organization. This institutionalization process will not occur with just changing the core components. The changes in those core components must then lead to changes in what individuals see as their roles and responsibilities as part of this new organization. Therefore, a final leadership challenge is how to build upon initial successes so that new behavior patterns and new norms and values become institutionalized across individuals within the police agency.

Effective leaders look for ways to encourage the heart (Kouzes and Posner, 1990) while the change process is implemented. Encouraging the heart can come from recognizing small wins on the way to fully implementing community policing. This can come in the form of rewarding individual contributions and celebrating team accomplishments. The rewards and accomplishments can be effectively recognized only if there are clear performance and service level improvements. This calls for information systems that monitor success over time, in areas that traditional policing may not have paid attention; attending community meetings; solving long-standing problems in the community; aiding individual community members; and officers going out of their way to help victims get back on their feet.

The celebration of small wins helps reinforce the notion that the transformation process is continuing and that the effort is not going to diminish. Combined with changes in the way the agency is run and what is valued, personnel in the agency will begin to feel that the move to community policing is taking hold. Former resisters can become new drivers for the transformation process.

The Michigan RCPI goals are to: support the effective, efficient and equitable delivery of police services that institutionalize the elements of community policing; and serve as an informational resource for the accumulation, development and interpretation of community policing knowledge. This article has provided a framework for change that is being used by the RCPI as a catalyst to police agencies that are moving towards becoming a community policing organization. A complete version of the road map for change is available by contacting the authors of this article.

Reference Sources:

W.E. Deming, Out of the Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Center for Advanced Engineering Study, 1986)


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