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# Doing More with Less

## Solutions to Budget Cuts to Municipal Police Departments Based on the Meta-Leadership Concept



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This article explores the effects of recession on police departments around the country from the perspective of recruitment, training, supervision and deployment. Strategies for circumventing the cuts and relying on creativity and meta-leadership techniques are introduced and analyzed from the perspective of some possible contributions from the academic body of knowledge to the struggling departments, especially in the areas of budget cuts for police training. The need for creative and forward thinking leadership in police organizations becomes more acute than during the past decades of prosperity and overall decline in crime rates. Historically, when the economy takes a plunge, the crime rates go up. We do not need just more officers on the streets – we need them to be prepared for the unforeseen domino effects of high unemployment rates and the quasi anomie state that might follow.

### INTRODUCTION

As the grim economic situation of 2009 and 2010 impacted upon many states and national budgets, police departments around the world are not immune from the dreadful concept of “doing more with less” as it permeates various governmental agencies. In the United States, similar to other countries hit by the recession problems, police departments experience the cuts almost on a daily basis. The budgets that are allocated by various municipalities and states look upon law enforcement organizations as fully capable of delivering the services they delivered routinely over the years, with the same effectiveness and professionalism albeit with less resources.

In an attempt to gauge the scope of the problem, Haberfeld, Ortmeier and Morreale (Haberfeld et al. 2009) conducted an in-

formal survey of police departments across the United States. The purpose of this study was to, informally, assess the impact of the recession on police departments across the United States and propose some solutions based on the more recently developed concept coined as Meta-Leadership. The informal approach to police departments was based on numerous considerations. First, from the author’s contacts with many agencies and their leadership, it was established that the problem is indeed severe, and in some cases critical, however, if the organizations are going to be asked to report on the exact nature, scope and intensity of such a problem, be it through a distribution of surveys or questionnaires, the response rate to this methodology will not reflect the actual situations. Budget allocations for police

departments in the United States are extremely political in nature and a slight misconception or misrepresentation of what has been said or reported can, potentially, have very dire consequences for the police chiefs and or commissioners. Police chiefs and commissioners in the United States are appointed by the elected politicians and, by default, very sensitive to any type of information that their respective departments provide to the researchers or the larger public.

Based on these considerations, the researchers decided to approach the departments they had personal contact in and asked, informally, for the answers to a number of questions related to the impact of the recession and based on the responses identify the contour of the problems and suggest some potential solutions without the need to identify the agencies that responded to the questions. By identifying the contours, they were able to concentrate on the problems that were identified by most of the departments that participated in this informal data gathering and propose some solutions that appear to be as valid for the police departments around the United States as they might be as well for law enforcement agencies around the world.

### **PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY THE AGENCIES**

The information collected from municipal police agencies from ten states indicates that the following problems appear to have common denominators for most of the agencies, as a direct outcome of the budgetary cuts:

- ▶ Recruitment,
- ▶ Training,
- ▶ Layoffs,
- ▶ Downsizing of different units,
- ▶ Added responsibilities for supervisors.

Of specific concern were the cuts allocated to training. Police training is usually

the first one to be affected during financial duress, since it is somehow implied that police profession can continue to deliver the services in the most effective manner regardless of the professional development, or lack of, that its members receive. The cuts in the training budget ranged from as little as 25 % cut to a total elimination of the training budget.

### **THE PENTAGON OF POLICE LEADERSHIP**

The author identified in her previous writings the concept of Pentagon of Police Leadership (Haberfeld 2002). The term “Pentagon of Police Leadership” was introduced as a model to be emulated by police agencies in their attempt to maintain effective order within police organizations and outside in the community. The five prongs of the pentagon:

1. Recruitment,
2. Selection,
3. Training,
4. Supervision and
5. Discipline

represent the five approaches that police agencies need to look at and modify and customize in accordance with the principles of democratic policing. In order to ensure that an organization that derives its authority from the ability to use coercive force does not violate the rights and liberties of the citizens it polices, these five prongs need to be evaluated, re-evaluated and adjusted on an ongoing basis in order to identify the errors, correct the deficiencies, and further democratic principles.

Training represents the third prong of the Pentagon and the strongest one that aims at bridging between so frequently inadequate approach to recruitment and selection process, that is more often than not based on political pressures, considerations and physical availability of potential recruits rather than on the relevant skills

and competencies for effective and professional policing and, on the other hand, the overreliance on supervision and discipline due to the weakness of the first two prongs.

In the ideal world of police profession the Pentagon of Police Leadership would be composed of prongs of equal length, where each prong represents a substantial, and equally resource loaded, approach to maintaining a professional organization. However, in the case of political pressure to staff the academy class or to provide more officers on the street to give the public an impression that officers are present on the streets, the first two prongs are frequently shorthanded and the need to extend the prongs of supervision and discipline (turning the supervision to more oppressive and the discipline to more severe) only a proper allocation to the prong representing training can mitigate the decline of a model democratic police organization. Turning the regular pentagon, in which all the prongs are even, to an irregular one where one or more prongs require more attention and, in police organizations, this could translate into a more oppressive work environment and is not something that law enforcement organizations should strive for. However, given the traditional approach to training within police organizations, where under a financial duress the first cuts are almost always directed at the training resources, it is imperative to find another way to maintain the level of training that is a necessary component of an effective and democratic policing.

**META-LEADERSHIP APPROACH**

Such a solution can be possibly implemented by adopting the concept of “Meta-Leadership” that was originally developed by Marcus (Marcus et al. 2009). The main concepts of Meta-Leadership can be summarized in the following points:

- ▶ Meta-leadership is a term used to refer to a style of leadership that challenges individuals to think and act cooperatively across organizations and sectors. Meta-leaders develop ways to engage in interactions outside the scope of their traditional professional boundaries, providing inspiration, guidance and momentum for a course of action that spans organizational lines.
- ▶ Meta-leadership became a vital ingredient for effective emergency preparedness and response. In a crisis, business, government and nonprofit leaders are thrown together, exchanging information, directing resources and managing systems and personnel. The commitment of leaders across sectors to contribute to and guide a coordinated strategy can be a critical factor in the overall success of the response.
- ▶ Meta-Leadership identifies the process and practice of leaders based on three functional components: 1) A comprehensive organizing reference to understand and integrate the many facets of leadership; 2) A strategy to engage collaborative activity; 3) A cause and purpose to improve community functioning and performance.

**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

As this author identified in 2002 (Haberfeld 2002), operating outside the traditional professional boundaries in providing adequate training for police organizations will indeed require a commitment from leaders across many sectors to contribute and guide the process but, at the same time it will provide the collaborative activity that will improve the functioning and performance of any police department.

Some of the suggestions identified include:

- ▶ Mandatory subscription to periodicals like Law and Order, Police or Police Chief,

will provide training tips perfectly suited for roll-call training sessions that can be delivered basically by any first line supervisor, or any line officer – by taking turns.

- ▶ Join professional law enforcement training associations with periodical publications.
- ▶ Join academic associations – American Society of Criminology and Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.
- ▶ “Adopt” a college – preferably one with a Criminal Justice (CJ) major but not necessarily.
- ▶ “Adopt” a professor – preferably an untenured one.
- ▶ Provide the right environment: create a new concept “every officer – a training officer”.

One of the most important concepts identified here is the concept of “every officer – a training officer”. What is basically advocated here is to make every officer aware of the need for constant update in his/her knowledge of police profession and the awareness should be based on the realization that this knowledge is not going to be provided by the police organization. The realization that self-learning is part of the police profession will be a new concept for most police officers who tend to view this profession via skills acquired at the basic academy training and later on either honed during the field training process or rejected and built anew based on the experience on the streets.

In order to develop this new breed of officers, police organizations need to adopt some ideas from the academic community and more specifically from the scholars who specialize in adult learning theories. Thierry (Thierry 1998) identified a number of theories that could be useful in approaching the difficult, albeit mandatory task, of turning the confident officers into knowledge seekers.

- ▶ Content theories – what draws attention and what causes the behavior to occur.
- ▶ Process theories – how behavior is charged, channeled and changed from a dynamic aspect.
- ▶ Reinforcement theories – looking at motivation from a positive (rewards) and negative (punishment) aspect, with the individual as a passive organism.
- ▶ Cognitive theories – the person is actively involved through his cognitive processing systems (Thierry 1998).

By drawing upon these four theories, police leaders will need to identify, respectively, what kind of situations will motivate police officers to change their rather passive frame of mind (passive from the standpoint of actively seeking professional development through self-tutoring) into a dynamic and active seeker of information about new developments pertinent to the way they perform on the job. Police organizations are notorious for providing less than adequate rewards systems to their employees and, on the other end of the spectrum, they are quite well known for their punitive approach to the most minor of the violations. Figuring the delicate balance between creative rewards and an implied discipline in the case of nonconformity, the self-tutoring system will definitely prove to be challenging to mention the least. However, it will be a true test for each police leader to come up with some innovative and inexpensive way to reward his/her employees and engage their cognitive processing systems in a quest for skills that would have otherwise not been delivered during the recession impacted budget cuts.

Such creativity can be achieved by looking at the ideas inherent in the stewardship approach to leadership. Bowen (Bowen 2000) identifies a number of concepts that might provide much guidance for police leaders buying into the idea of creating “each officer – a training officer”

theme. These relevant innovative approaches can be summarized in the following points:

- ▶ Entrusting with the care and safekeeping of all valued employees.
- ▶ Employees are credited with intelligence, accountability and motivation.
- ▶ Employees are not “owned” or “controlled” – they are resource of the organization “on loan”.
- ▶ Employees are recognized as partners with the leaders.

Stewardship, according to Bowen, places a very important emphasis on safekeeping of all valued employees. This is not necessarily the traditional approach towards employees of police organizations<sup>1</sup>. If anything, officers, and this author is aware of making a rather generalized statement however, each and every police practitioner will recognize the validity of this notion, are generally treated as commodities that can be transferred from one assignment to another, from one geographic location to another, without any consideration for the officer’s preference or lack of such preference with regard to such a reassignment. It is very rare to find a police organization that is truly invested in the recognition of its employees’ intelligence and motivation. If anything, the accountability brought upon various ranks that appeared to be introduced by the COMPSTAT<sup>2</sup> process, is frequently challenging in its implementation to the officer’s intelligence and motivation. Challenging not in the sense of pushing them to the limit to produce their best possible work output but rather questioning their intelligence in the case of imposing unrealistic demands to reduce crime rate under such circumstances that the only way such reduction can be achieved “on paper” is by what is referred to in police jargon as “cooking the books” (or downgrading reported crimes).

Despite the widely implemented rhetoric of the Community Policing philosophy, it

is rare to see officers without a rank or with a low rank treated as partners with the leaders. If anything, officers are treated as “owned” and “controlled” under the guise of police organizations being paramilitary institutions that need to act reactively to the problems they face and therefore, the need to treat its employees as “runners” in a chess game rather than “figures”. Nothing further from the truth as far as the stewardship approach to leadership is concerned. Police chiefs and commissioners should not be hiding behind the paramilitary nature of law enforcement organizations while making their discretionary decisions. Therefore this exercise in creativity, that the mega-leadership approach to budget cuts mandates can be proven very cathartic, in long run, as far as police leadership evolves in the future.

Bowen (Bowen 2000) provides some solutions to the challenges of implementing the stewardship approach. By aligning strategy and rewards, police leaders can arrive at the intended results. Such alignment will include the following steps:

- ▶ Constantly reframe work initiatives within the context of the organizations’ mission and major strategies to ensure that all employees understand and commit completely.
- ▶ Ensure that your reward strategies are integrated and holistically address all aspects of performance – including emotional and intellectual.
- ▶ Establish a sound philosophical basis and good motives for your reward and recognition process, to make it respectful and constructive in every possible way.

## CONCLUSION

Mission statements became the mantra of the police organization in the last few decades since the inception of the Community Policing philosophy. Very much in line with political correctness of the moment,

they reflect the changing trends and orientations of the local politicians and what the general public wants to hear rather than the true nature of police work at any given moment. Work initiatives, including the one related to every officer becoming a training officer have to be weaved into the statement of the police organization, even if it mandates the need to rewrite the mission statement. Mission statements of police organizations, especially during monetary cuts and economic duress, must reflect the understanding and commitment of its employees to the concepts and ideas incorporated into the missions. For example, the mission statement of the New York City Police Department reads as follows:

“The mission of the New York City Police Department is to enhance the quality of life in our city by working in partnership with the community and in accordance with constitutional rights to enforce the laws, preserve the peace, reduce fear, and provide for a safe environment.”

It is obvious that many of the concepts identified in this mission are not only ambivalent in meaning but some are clearly unrealistic. It is doubtful that the members of the NYPD will be able to work in partnership with the community, as this concept is just too esoteric to comprehend for individual officers. There are many, many definitions of the word “community”, in fact they can represent many conflicting communities, that will exercise much pressure on the members of the department to enforce rights that are perceived as violated by one community but if taken away from another will be perceived as violations of their constitutional right. For example, the noise ordinances that sent scores of officers to ticket drivers who blasted their car radios while driving on the streets of New York City certainly exemplified a working partnership with one segment of the community while at the sa-

me time working against another one whose “right to pursue happiness” by listening to a loud music while driving were seriously curtailed.

It is yet another challenge for police leaders to create a sound philosophical basis for the allocation of rewards and recognitions that will identify the officers who are leading the way in self-tutoring and sharing their knowledge with the colleagues. It will be hard to identify each and every officer who spent hours seeking the newest information about technological inventions that could be beneficial for the department or identified academic articles on use of force that will enhance the performance on the street and mitigate the number of violent encounters between the police and the public. However, it is not impossible to identify the ones who reached out to other agencies, utilizing the principles of Meta-Leadership, in order to further the performance on the job.

Such reach out is not just the privilege of the ranking officers. This author was contacted, a number of times, by non-ranking officers or first line supervisors at the rank of sergeant, and asked to provide some references about the use of force by other police organizations or counter-terrorism tactics or leadership training. Such initiatives come from officers from the larger as well as the smallest police forces and indicate that officers willing to become trainers are there and just need to be encouraged and rewarded for their work in order for others to emulate their behaviors.

As a final note to this article, the author would like to quote from some of her earlier work:

Respect and high status for police profession is not just a mirage, it is a real possibility, all it will take to make it happen is a lot of courage and vision, and since policing is a profession of courageous and visionary men and women – the task is already accomplished half-way! (Haberfeld 2002).

<sup>1</sup> *At least in the USA.*

<sup>2</sup> *COMPSTAT is a collection of modern management practices, military-like deployment and intensive enforcement strategies based on statistical crime data. It has 4 principles:*

1. *Accurate and timely intelligence and statistical crime information – with aid of computers and geographical mapping*
2. *Quick deployment of resources*
3. *Focus on quality of life crimes*
4. *Follow up and assessment and accountability.*

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**Further literature**

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