

Moving from Coexistence to Collaboration

An Emerging Challenge for Police and Fire Leaders -

by
Kenneth M. Corney
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Ventura Police Department
Command College Class 40

This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future, but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

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“The future ain’t what it used to be.”

- Yogi Berra

The very thought of the term police and fire sends most members of our profession running for cover with visions of “cats and dogs living together” or looking for a “snowball fight in hell.” This paradigm has been bred from biases from within our own management structures. These biases are often sustained from long standing traditions of operating within a framework of government services that shelter us from the experience or expectation of having to deliver within a competitive environment (Osborn, Hutchison 2006). Unfortunately, these views also restrict the vision necessary to accept the inevitability of the need to consider consolidative processes within public safety services.

Take a moment to think about the impact of California’s public safety environment from the events that have occurred thus far in the 21st Century. Most would agree the ground beneath our feet began shaking with the events of September 11, 2001. This event preceded the beginning of the global war on terror and the realization that the North American continent is not immune from the terror campaign waged in the Middle East.

Beyond terrorism and related homeland security issues, Hurricane Katrina brought forward the complexities of response to natural disasters. The threat of the avian flu epidemic surfaced concerns of effectively providing public safety services under conditions brought forth by a severe public health plague. As if these events didn’t complicate the future enough, bring into the mix the host of fiscal issues shaping our future.

California is at best experiencing an unpredictable financial future complicated by a multitude of issues. While public safety is certainly not to blame for California’s financial struggle, there are undeniable contributing factors related to public safety services that have contributed to the State’s fiscal uncertainty. Among the major issues creating this instability for California and its local governments is escalating public safety personnel costs. Cops and firefighters have become an increasingly expensive commodity. Not only have salaries increased greatly over the last decade; the cost of pension benefits, health care costs and workers’ compensation costs have blindsided our state and local governments. These

costs are added to the necessary expenses to implement new technologies as one struggles to fulfill their mission in an era of fiscal constraints.

The likely result of these fiscal pressures for public safety may ultimately come down to two options: 1) Government will find a way to pay for it all, whether through increased taxes or shifting of resources, or, 2) Public safety leaders will be challenged like never before to find more efficient ways to operate within a restricted fiscal environment. In the end, given the voters continued aversion to tax increases, the obvious answer will be to find more efficient ways to operate and deliver acceptable levels of service to meet community expectations. The following excerpt conveys the essence of the challenge for public safety leaders.

“Strong, competent and visionary leadership will be key to implementing the organizational change necessary to ensure the continued success of our communities. Depending on the scope of the innovation introduced, new business models and new skills and competencies may be required among local government professionals. These changes can be unsettling and resisted at many levels throughout an organization or a community.”

Robert J. O’Neill Jr.,

Executive Director, International City/County Management Assn.

To truly recognize the breadth of this challenge, consider the possibility that public safety could be pricing itself out of the market. Over the last two decades, cop and firefighter union’s political lobbying has succeeded in garnering unprecedented increases in salary and benefits in California and elsewhere. However deserved, the reality is these raises likely come at a cost to the profession. In our zeal to gain the best possible compensation, we may have overestimated the ability of government’s economic engine to absorb these long-term costs.

If public safety expects to sustain higher levels of salary and benefits, we must accept the responsibility to explore ways to create greater efficiencies of service through both traditional and non-traditional approaches. Within traditional police and fire agencies, most managers would argue they have pretty much downsized and right-sized to the point where any further reductions would significantly impact the delivery of services. While this may very well be true, it may not be a complete answer. The quest for the complete answer will not be satisfied until police and fire leaders form on-going collaborative processes with a goal of discovering the potential benefits of consolidated organizational models.

Models of Consolidation

There are five basic models of the consolidation of police and fire services that could be evaluated for use in any community:

1. Full consolidation occurs when all police and fire duties are combined under a single agency.

2. Partial consolidation occurs when an agency keeps the police and fire functions separate, but the sworn personnel are trained to perform both law enforcement and firefighting duties.
3. Selected consolidation occurs when public safety officers serve only an identified portion of a community while the remainder of the community is served under the traditional police/fire model.
4. Functional consolidation of public safety services relates to shifting or sharing of responsibility for traditional police or fire duties from one department to the other.
5. Nominal consolidation occurs when both departments remain separate, but consolidate key administrative processes and may be lead by a public safety director (Sobba, 1991).

The selection of a model, along with the level and manner of implementation, is clearly a local decision and should provide the best fit for the community it serves. A closer look at these models will allow the curious manager or executive to assess which one might fit their community's needs.

Full Consolidation

There are numerous options within each consolidation model that may merit consideration. The City of Sunnyvale is a California City functioning under a full consolidation model since the early 1950's. Under this model, both the police and fire departments function under the direction of a Public Safety Chief. According to Sunnyvale Deputy Chief Greg Kevin, one of the most significant benefits is the increase to patrol staffing. Kevin stated the police patrol resources are increased by over 30 percent compared with traditional police/fire service delivery. In their agency, when a fire/rescue emergency occurs, a patrol unit is dispatched to respond along with the fire apparatus deployed from one of six fire stations. This reduces the number of personnel on stand-by in the fire station and applies those resources to police patrol services. Kevin said the additional training for sworn personnel as Public Safety Officers adds about six months to the initial training process. He also dispelled rumors public safety consolidation negatively impacts mutual aid and disaster response. Sunnyvale fully participates in statewide mutual aid agreements and has greater resource of personnel available to callout should a disaster response or other local emergency occur.

Partial Consolidation

Partial Consolidation models are similar to full consolidation in that police and fire personnel are cross trained to perform both law enforcement and fire/rescue functions. The main difference from full consolidation is that police and fire departments remain as separate departments under the independent leadership of police and fire chiefs. Several local agencies in the states of New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania utilize a "Fire-Police" model. Fire-Police officers serve primarily under the Fire Department, but also are trained to perform police officer duties such as traffic and crowd control as well as immediate response to critical incidents. While these police duties are limited and far less a full

consolidation city like Sunnyvale, a Fire Police model has the potential to significantly increase on-duty resources to immediately respond to certain critical incidents (Delaware County Fire Police Association, 2007).

Selected Consolidation

A Selected Consolidation usually takes place within a district or other identified geographic area where public safety officers share the police and fire functions. Harbor or Patrol personnel are most often utilized in this manner as they are trained to perform a variety of law enforcement, fire, rescue and emergency medical functions. Selective consolidation of police and fire services has a record of success for more than 40 years for the City of Santa Barbara's Harbor Patrol. According to sixteen-year veteran Harbor Patrol Officer Monica Broumand, while the City maintains separate police and fire departments, Harbor Patrol Officers perform law enforcement, fire suppression and EMS services in the Harbor District. Broumand cited swift response times to medical emergencies and enhanced customer services as two key benefits of selected consolidation. With little modification, this model could be expanded to traditional police and fire agencies seeking to move towards consolidation.

Functional Consolidation

Functional consolidation shares or shifts only specific duties while police and fire departments remain separate. The use of police personnel to respond to emergency medical calls is an example of duties that could occur under functional consolidation. According to a 2005 report by the National Fire Protection Agency, the percentage of fire department calls relating to emergency medical response is growing and has increased to 80 percent nationally (Committee on the Future of Emergency Care in the United States Health System 2007 p.116). As America ages with the maturity of Baby Boomers, fire resources may become increasingly burdened with response to these calls. The functional consolidation model may provide an effective solution to offset the need to add fire resources to meet increased service demands. An increasing number of municipal police and sheriff departments have implemented active EMS response providing both basic and advanced life support functions.

The California Highway Patrol (CHP) and Miami Dade Police Department are but two examples of this model. The CHP began training officers for EMT duties in the late 1970's to mitigate issues with extended EMS response times in isolated areas. Ten years later, they revised the program to train all academy trainees as Emergency Medical Responders (EMR's). This level of training is about 40 hours of instruction, nearly 1/3 of the EMT requirement, but five times the eight-hour state requirement for peace officers. While this change only slightly altered the overall capabilities of the officers, it significantly reduced the scheduling and fiscal implications of providing EMT trained officers. (Sianez, 2004 p. 8-9)

Nominal Consolidation

Depending on the structure of local government, a nominal or administrative consolidation of police and fire functions may yield considerable efficiencies. The Ventura Police Department utilizes a consolidated approach to police and fire fiscal and facility management. While both departments are lead independently by police and fire chiefs, a cadre of non-sworn personnel is assigned to accomplish these functional duties for both departments. This model serves to enhance the identification of collaborative processes between departments.

Advances in Medical Technologies

The development of medical technology may enhance potential for functional consolidation practices. The deployment of Automated External Defibrillators (AED's) with trained police officers to treat victims of sudden cardiac arrests is becoming more prevalent across the County. For example, the Miami-Dade Police Department's deployment of AED's with patrol officers resulted in an eight percent increase in the survival rate of sudden cardiac arrest patients within two years after implementing the program. (Sianez, 2004 p.10). According to Michael Myers, President of Emergency Responders Network, the changes in medical technologies have created the potential for widespread use of automatic external defibrillators (AED's) through out communities. Myers believes the "standard of care" for sudden cardiac arrest events has changed from CPR to AED's, and that AED's have become a critical tool for in the "survival chain" for cardiac events. According to Myers, "the proper application of AED technology increases the survival and recovery rate of sudden cardiac arrest victims exponentially." Myers points out that the use of AED's is now a standard part of the American Red Cross CPR training program for emergency responders.

Possible Impact to Dispatch Centers

Public Safety Dispatch Centers also present an opportunity for the utilization of a functional consolidation model. Since the events of September 11th, 2001 police and fire departments have recognized the critical nature of interoperability of communication centers. A solution to this problem is complicated by long-standing traditions of separate police and fire dispatch centers in many communities.

According to a 2004 report to the Minnesota Legislator on Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Consolidation, this dilemma not only affects the ability for police and fire departments to easily communicate during emergency operations, but also results in increased costs for personnel and capital expenditures. However, consolidation of dispatch centers, though, may not always yield favorable results. As identified in the Minnesota study, once a communication center is functioning at near capacity, the benefits of consolidation are negated by the need to staff additional personnel to handle the increased workload.

Fiscal Implications

The obvious goal of police and fire consolidation effort is to create an outcome that provides more efficient and effective public safety services to the community. As an initial step, the consolidation of administrative processes could provide some level of cost savings. Once identified, duplicative processes such as payroll, clerical and other administrative duties may be combined in a manner leading to reduced personnel costs and/or increased productivity. While administrative consolidation practices would likely prove beneficial, operational consolidation practices offer the greatest potential for fiscal benefits.

A wide range of variables can greatly influence the forecasting of fiscal savings from the implementation of any specific consolidation model. Understandably, the costs of providing police and fire services vary widely due to local economic issues, labor contracts, community expectations of police and fire services, etc. However, regardless of these factors, a perspective of how collaborative police and fire efforts may provide fiscal benefits can be gained through the use of performance based budgeting process also known as budgeting for outcomes. Unlike the traditional governmental budgeting process that most often begins with predetermined cost for services, a performance-based budget begins with a goal or outcome. Once identified, the goal or outcome is then assigned the fiscal resources necessary to attain the stated goal or outcome. This process is widely used in the private sector as a means to improve profitability as profit is good for the Company, its' shareholders and employees.

Analogous to the private sector, profit in the public sector can be best defined as "value." Value can simply be defined as simply getting the most (in terms of quality and quantity) for your money. While this is a familiar concept in our personal affairs, it is not always as generally accepted in public safety governance. Much like profit, value is good for the shareholders (citizens and taxpayers), good for the Company (city or other local jurisdiction) and good for the employees because it can provide confidence in governance by the community we serve.

Within most traditional police and fire agencies, there is little effort to investigate collaborative approaches to reduce the total overall costs of public safety services. Within a collaborative process of police and fire operations potentially overlapping, redundant or more effective services could be explored. Two scenarios of potential consideration involve response to injury traffic accidents and response to sudden cardiac arrests.

Typically, police fire and EMS (ambulance) resources independently respond to reports of injury traffic accidents. Depending on the jurisdiction, this constitutes up to three public agencies expending public resources to respond. Once on scene, traditional roles dictate that fire personnel render emergency medial aid, handle any extrication and other imminent life safety situations (fires, power lines leaking fuel etc). Police resources provide traffic control, accident investigation

and investigate any unlawful actions regarding the accident. EMS personnel transport the injured in need of further medical care as well as take the lead or assist fire personnel in rendering first aid and/or provide basic and advanced life support.

Similarly the response to sudden cardiac arrests also involves the deployment up to three publicly funded agencies (fire, ambulance and police). All respond with the same goal to begin basic and/or advanced life support as quickly as possible. Traditionally, fire and EMS resources come from a fixed deployment site like a fire station and response time is a matter of travel time to the call. The closer the stricken person is to the fixed resource, the more quickly help is likely to arrive. As the previously described information of the potential for widespread use of AED's with a minimal amount of training

Combining these scenarios into a performance or outcome based budgeting process leads to the development of overarching public safety performance measures that would create the potential for increased value in police and fire services.

- Reduce the total public safety cost per call for service to traffic collision by 10 percent.
- AED's and trained personnel arrive on scene to reports of possible cardiac arrests within 5 minutes of less 90 percent of the time.

Developing action plans to meet these goals brings forth some non-traditional use of police, fire and EMS resources. A few potential considerations include:

- Police officers trained to be primary providers of emergency medical care at traffic accidents. (Advanced first EMT or Paramedic)
- Fire fighters or EMS personnel trained to investigate traffic accident reports or provide traffic control measures.
- Police officers trained and equipped to respond to reports of sudden cardiac arrests with AED's.
- Requirement for staffed public areas and identified businesses to have AED's and trained staff available.

It goes without saying that these examples are simplistically stated and do not address a laundry list of complications and considerations that exist in most jurisdictions. However, the examples clearly demonstrate the potential use of a collaborative public safety budgeting process.

Accepting the Challenge

Creating a process to move from thought to action provides a means to access the potential for increased efficiencies through resource consolidation. A

baseline from which to assess the consolidated models and their possible impact can be determined using a hypothetical scenario of how to sustain comparable police and fire services over a five to ten year period assuming no increased fiscal resources. Answering the challenge of this exercise begins with the following questions:

- How could existing resources be used differently to accomplish this goal?
- What changes would be necessary to use these resources differently?
- What are the major barriers to implementing these changes?

The usual practice of “what if” scenario exercises by used police and fire professionals focus on responses to major emergencies, disasters and the like. A fiscal “what if” scenario not only helps to prepare police and fire leaders for the inevitable fiscal challenges we face in the future, but also develops a broader perspective of the potential for collaborative practices that exist today.

Shifting the Paradigm

Even when the inevitability of the need for greater police and fire collaboration is recognized, the problem remains of how to best shift the paradigms of the distinct cultures of police and fire organizations into a more holistic model. In short, how do we get there from here? To best analyze the potential of any merging of resources, police and fire leaders should develop a joint strategic plan based upon the commonalities of organizational mission and goals.

Under most traditional police and fire organizations, a common theme in the mission exists that centers on the protection of life and property. While police and fire organizations may fulfill the mission of the protection of life and property in different roles, the common result is the reduction of harm to the community. Harm comes to citizens in two ways, personal injury and loss of property. These two categories of “harm” are the general basis for all police and fire activities and services. Using a “harm reduction model” will help guide police and fire organizations to develop a mutual perspective of a common organizational mission leading to collaborative goals and activities.

The initial step in the development of this process would be to have each organization conduct an organizational assessment as a means to establish clarity and understanding of current organization activities. Over time, many organizations can suffer from mission-drift, resulting from the displacement of organizational goals (Bowman, West, Berman 2004 p.45). The process of an organizational assessment serves as a tool to compare the alignment of activities and if necessary reassert the purpose and mission of the organization. This assessment need not be a complex process, but should involve a cross section of employees from through out the department. Simply put, the goal of an organizational assessment is to determine:

- What activities the organization is doing
- Which of the activities the organization does best, and,

- To identify the activities the organization may be doing that do not produce expected results or contribute to the overall organizational mission.
(Collins 2001)

This process will serve as the foundation for a comparative analysis and can lead to the future development of a joint organizational analysis from a public safety model perspective.

Using the information gained from the organizational assessment, each group could develop individual strategic plans. These plans should represent the anticipated future needs and direction the leaders intend for the organization, as well as identifying individual department goals and a path for achieving the envisioned outcomes.

Using their individual organizational perspectives, police and fire leaders can then come together and collectively decipher areas where a collaborative approach could provide for increased effectiveness and productivity. This process would best involve a cross-section of department personnel, including labor union representatives. To best facilitate an open and equitable process, break down barriers and ensure equality in the process, a professional facilitator with experience in the public safety sector may be preferred.

The understandings and agreements reached in the collective process must next take the shape of a joint strategic plan for public safety services. This plan should identify the following:

- Common mission, goals and desired outcomes
- A process to measure the progress towards the goals, and,
- Specific action plans or activities that are expected to influence the outputs.

This joint strategic plan may best be represented in three sections that combine individual department strategic plans that as well identify individual department initiatives in the same manner.

An on-going evaluation process is also vital not only to monitor the success of the program efforts, but to also help guide and evolve the adaptive change process necessary to further develop a culture of collaboration. The evaluation of these indicators should reflect results of the consolidation service as well as individual police and fire operational activities. This evaluation system would best be accomplished through monthly review meetings that involve personnel to include: first line supervisors, mid-level managers, division heads and the chiefs. These meetings would follow progress towards stated goals by tracking the progress of the identified measures and evaluating the effect the action plans or activities have on those measures. In evaluating the effectiveness of these indicators, the leaders should remain steadfast to stated goals and measures, but remain flexible on activities or action plans that may favorably influence the measures. While naysayers may attempt to undermine the process by falsely interpreting the progress results, staying true to the evaluation process for a

dedicated period of time is required to gain an accurate evaluation of overall program effectiveness.

As with any significant project or change, leadership is vital to its success. The police and fire chiefs must be at the forefront of this process and their leadership is essential. The chiefs must convey a strong sense of personal buy-in for the process along with an unquestionable belief of the need to search for greater efficiencies to provide long-term benefits to the community and the future of the public safety profession.

Conclusion

During most of our careers, significant changes to our profession have occurred that have helped transform us into the problem solving, community service organizations we are today. Some of these changes were the result of proactive leadership (community policing practices, less lethal technologies) while others were the result of headline events (Rodney King, Rampart, the loss of firefighters and police officers on September 11, 2001). Looking back, our proudest moments often resulted from the proactive changes, while we may still live in the shadows of the changes caused by tragedy. Our challenge is to strive to expand upon proactive approaches as a means to avoid the dark shadows of change brought about by the unknown and unanticipated future.

Ultimately, the best result of a consolidation study may not necessarily rest in the final decision to combine functions of police and fire departments, but from the exploration itself. It serves to challenge the orthodoxies that exist in many traditional police and fire organizations and provides a shift towards a broader view of the potential to improve the efficiencies and effectiveness of existing public safety services. To do less is to rely on a future of response and reaction; one with outcomes no one today may envision.

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