

**HOW WILL THE LEADERSHIP STYLE OF GENERATION Y IMPACT
THE TRADITIONAL STANDARDS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT BY 2020?**

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

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Introduction

The current era of policing is marked by a number of tremendous changes attributed to unpredictable financial, social, and technological shifts. Among these changes is a diverse multi-generational workforce that has demonstrated a defined contrast in philosophical values and beliefs from their predecessors. Although the policing profession tends to follow a quasi-military structure, the input of employees who contribute to the day to day efforts of the organization can often diverge as a result of this generational collision. The competing interests of workers can be beneficial or detrimental to the organization, and may very well hinge on the capacity of an employee from a particular generational cohort leading a team of subordinates.

The emergence of the Generation Y cohort, also known as Millennials, and their unique personalities create questions about how they will react and comply with the norms and standards of traditional policing, specifically as they begin to assume supervisory and leadership roles in their organizations. There is a plethora of existing information on Generation Y characteristics which can create unique opportunities for police departments to adequately prepare for the emergence of the Millennials as future leaders. However, today's leaders need to first extrapolate the potential of Generation Y and find a mechanism that can best assimilate their talents into the framework of today's policing and into the future.

The Current Multi Generational Workforce

The composition of today's police personnel is reflective of diverse demographics of age, gender, ethnicity, values and beliefs, including those of the newest cohort, Generation Y. The existence of a multi-generational workforce in California police organizations fuels formidable challenges for a profession bound by conformity to specific codified law, countless policies and procedures, and public perception. These characteristics parallel the conceptual make up of

traditional police culture, which sees very little deviation from traditional practices of policing. According to Walker (1985), his study of race and employment noted that law enforcement personnel practices are known to be resistant to change. Such resistance does not adequately complement the continuous changes that the organization may go through, particularly those related to personnel management and leadership.

Today's law enforcement employees consist of three, and in some instances four, different generations. The presence of this multi-generational workforce magnifies a number of differences in values, beliefs, and perspectives, and can contribute to varied behaviors in workplace interaction (Houlihan, 2008). These differences can often magnify amongst the interactions of Generation Y workers (born 1981-1994), Traditionalists (born prior to 1946), Baby Boomers (born 1946 - 1964), and Generation X (born 1965-1980) (Giancola, 2008). Some of the generational conflict can be a result of ethnocentrism, one's judgment of beliefs and actions against their own belief system (Smith, 2009). The inability to contextually understand others can lead to judging another generation as inferior. Under these circumstances, the decision-making process by managers, regardless of cohort association, can be influenced to personal biases, consequently resulting in stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Fryer & Jackson, 2008). The biased decision making can be a catalyst to undermining authority, rampant distrust, and a frequent command and control environment.

Organizational Culture

The fraternity of California law enforcement officers must live up to the highest possible standards in professional policing. As official representatives of government who are endowed with powers and duties to safeguard their communities, police officers must be guided by fundamental practices that convey impartiality, equality, and courtesy. The mechanism that can

facilitate these practices are embedded in the traditional culture of paramilitary policing which follows provisions of laws, ethical mandates, rules and regulations, and policies and procedures. Police organizations often identify as having a paramilitary organizational hierarchy that, by and large, is status quo oriented (Goldstein, 1990; Greene & Mastrofski, 1988). Within these parameters, discretion to the individual officer can be exercised under the doctrine of reasonableness, yet it is granted under calculated and measured means in the law.

Police departments are infamous for being bureaucratic and conservative organizations (Marks and Sklansky, 2008). This has caused a lack of flexibility in decision making, yet it has been tolerated as a long-standing and accepted standard. Complex challenges have fueled the debate, however, over whether or not the police need to abandon some of their traditional quasi-military practices. The resistance in becoming more flexible stems from the ideal of rank-based authority, which frees management from the barriers associated with dissent and debate (Murray, 2002). As creatures of habit, it becomes increasingly difficult for managers to deviate from the normal protocols of the department. Although that difficulty may have been adequate in the past, it is woefully insufficient to lead the generation now entering policing.

Generation Y

Labels such as the Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y (aka Millennial) are commonly used to help identify a particular set of characteristics for groups of people born within a particular time period. According to Lower (2008), each labeled generation possess its own unique identifying characteristics, core values, attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses. These characteristics of generations are developed and influenced by events that occur during their formative years. For example, Generation Y grew up with the expansion of social media and smart phones; as well as events from 9/11, the Iraq War, and Hurricane Katrina.

When these generational influences are absorbed into a working environment, it can conceivably lead to or create a degree conflict. These dilemmas are magnified in organizations that have paramilitary structures, especially in law enforcement. Welsh & Brazina (2010) states that Generation Y is often characterized as cynical and frequently question authority. These attitudes do not work well in the traditional culture of command and control environments of police work. The questioning of authority, then, is a value of Generation Y incongruent with other generations in the organization. Although an ideology of Generation Y, such as in the example of questioning authority is well intended, their views have created cultural clashes with organizational management.

A perfect illustration to examine some of the more prevalent modern day conflict between Generation Y and superiors from previous generational cohorts is to examine sick time use and abuse. The law enforcement profession comes with a generous benefits package, which include a tremendous amount of sick time given to each employee. In many instances, the employing agency has a “use it or lose it” clause which becomes a catalyst for excessive use. Although the agency provides the employee the ability to earn their sick time up to a certain limit, the thought of an employee exhausting all of the time accumulated time earned in any given period is an unusual pattern of using sick time in the policing profession. The entitlement belief of Generation Y justifying the use of “their” time causes a number of issues problematic for supervisors which include scheduling conflicts, exhausting of overtime budgets to backfill the sick employees, and in many instances a systemic problem of sick time abuse. According to South Gate Police Department Captain Hupp (personal communication, January 9, 2013), the Department has been addressing the issues associated with sick time abuse by unwavering strict adherence to sick time policies and procedures and imposing disciplinary measures for violators.

There are other perceptual issues inherent in Generation Y that can affect how they are led, and then how they will lead once in supervisory positions.

Generation Y has witnessed a number of cultural experiences of their own time, including historic terrorist acts, school violence and natural disasters. They have also been exposed to significant technological advances and lived throughout a pro-child culture where mothers have frequently worked outside of the home (Welsh & Brazina, 2010). These prominent experiences cannot help but to influence attitudes toward work and underscore the existence of different behaviors and values within different generations.

One sentiment shared among those of Generation Y is the feeling that because the World is dangerous, as evidence from catastrophic incidents reported in the media, life could end suddenly. These feelings, therefore, provide justification for their generation to live life to the fullest by doing so now. However, these feelings do not necessarily provide an absolute outlet for Generation Y to escape responsibility. In fact, on their list of high importance, Generation Y enjoys autonomy and work-life balance, while in contrast, Baby Boomers have demonstrated their focus on more traditional model of dedication to work (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008).

Generation Y is identified as a group that possesses narcissistic tendencies and often crave attention and affirmation to help them maintain the feelings of encouragement showered on them by “misguided” parents and teachers (Erikson, 2008). These needs, at times, do not fit well within the realm of policing, because many policing tasks are reactive and negative in nature. To take a recidivist criminal off the street or incarcerating a reckless drunk driver before great bodily injury occurs is very noble, yet is simply part of the job description and often does not garner praise or recognition from superiors. Lower (2008) suggests Gen Y are easily bored and possess a strong sense of entitlement where there is an expectation others will take care of

undesirable duties. Therefore, much is to be said about paying particular attention to the tasks being assigned and being creative when disseminating the less-pleasing duties. Although Generation Y is not always the first to step up and volunteer for the displeasing and intangible duties, they will willingly perform these duties if meaning is placed on their importance and praise or recognition is provided at the conclusion of the tasks.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Generation Y is highly adaptable and adept to multi-tasking, an asset in police environments. They demonstrate they are confident, self-reliant, and thrive on challenging work, which is highly desirable for those who enforce the laws. They expect to enjoy their work, and are determined to succeed with future goals of linear promotion, satisfying their own personal goals, and career development. To help facilitate these objectives, they seek opportunities for professional development through training. As college graduates, Generation Y wants to apply their educational knowledge to opportunities of higher-level promotions within the organization. Generation Y also has high expectations of their employers to provide a good working environment with supportive supervision that is positive and encourages meaningful suggestions. They find comfort in working alone, seek out opportunity and responsibility, and welcome empowerment. (Broadbridge, Ogden & Maxwell, 2009). Each of these positive and adverse tendencies will no doubt affect the manner in which Generation Y acts and reacts once placed in leadership roles.

Leadership Challenges

Law enforcement leaders have a great deal of influence in their communities and within the organization (Miller, et. al, 2009). The influence they possess is often a result of their unique ability to balance conflict and accomplish goals successfully. These skills, though, do not come

without effort and costs. The success of police managers require a continuous effort and an ability to adapt to changing pressures and mandates.

The command and control style of leadership in the realm of decision-making can also fuel conflict which can be the onset of disconnecting with the Generation Y employees. The resulting conflict that was generated from a command and control decision is often misconstrued as an act of defiance or rebellious behavior on behalf of Generation Y employees. According to Becker (2009), Generation Y is special and radically different, yet when placed into context, their fundamental differences are more consistent with a measurement of maturity rather than a clash of generations. This suggests that perhaps Generation Y is seeing the matter strictly through the lenses of their own eyes and not those of others.

Despite their self-serving interests, Generation Y sees themselves as part of a global community where diversity is an advantage and their work should make a difference in the world (Simoneaux, 2012). Simoneaux further states that Generation Y are talented individuals whose immersion in technology give them the power to radically transform every aspect of society. In today's law enforcement climate with technology at the helm, Generation Y is endowed with a tremendous amount of redeeming value that can enhance the policing profession. The depth of Generation Y talent can actually be a beneficial attribute to organizational success but may require intervention of Transformative Leadership, which may hold the key to unlocking their potential.

Transformative Leadership

The study of transformative leadership is relatively new, yet it has been a dominating topic for leadership literature since Burns introduced in 1978 (Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Bass and Riggio, 2006). The operational definition of transformative leadership is a set of particular

behaviors that would inspire followers to perform beyond their ordinary limits in the interest of achieving organizational goals (Fu, et.al, 2010). Transformative leadership is based, in part, on the values of individuals in the decision making circle. A value is considered a conception, explicitly stated or implied, that is distinguishable of an individual (Kluckhohn, 1951).

The value system of a police manager must shift in the overarching interest of adapting to the changing times, especially in a rigid environment of law enforcement. Bass (1985) has stated the organizations most likely to adapt to transformative leadership are the ones that are mechanically oriented and identifies police organizations. Law enforcement, as a prime example, has centralized authority, standardized operations, routinized superior-subordinate relationships and formal, but rigid career routes. The characteristics alone suggest that any transformative movement could disrupt the flow of the organization. However, time and place are situational variables that justify a transition to employing new organizations strategies.

The current trend of the law enforcement workforce presents clear and convincing evidence that Generation Y will be a large part of future law enforcement leadership. This trend is further validated through the inevitable attrition of Baby Boomers and in the near future, Generation X'ers. As line level workers today, many are aspiring to move up within the ranks of the organization and in some instances, are occurring now. The timing of this phenomenon suggests that the mantle of leadership needs to move in a direction that is conducive to the foundational practices of the police organization and into the hands of Generation Y. The implementation of transformative leadership in today's environment can be a mechanism to facilitate a balance that focuses centralized authority with Generation Y at the helm, re-enforcing the long standing policies and procedures and perhaps re-visiting out dated ones, and finally embracing positive relationships regardless of generational association.

Generation Y can often be partial to assignments that offer autonomy and discretion. Community policing teams, school resource officers, and technological committees are a number of desired and sought after assignments. These specialized units require multi-modal approaches to help solve quality of life issues and organization efficiency. Allowing Generation Y the freedom to help formulate the direction of particular policy decisions within these units can help expand the possibilities of their knowledge, skills, and abilities while at the same time enhance their social power within the context of the organizational mission. Encouraging Generation Y to formulate strategies to attack the quality of life issues as line level workers will only enhance their understanding of subordinates when they become supervisors and leaders.

The reality is that Generation Y is the future of police organizations and strategies should be explored to address the changing workplace dynamics. Some of these strategies should include a mentoring program that prepares employees for leadership positions far before they are earned; developing a plan that can draw out a clearly defined career map; and, allowing Generation Y employees to make decisions that truly affect the organization in positive and negative ways. The consequences of these strategies cannot guarantee a seamless problem free-work environment, yet it can be a starting point that guides the organization and Generation Y in the same direction. The proactive behavior of today's administrators is critical at this juncture and the window of opportunity is ripe.

Conclusion

Generation Y possesses a tremendous level of talent and ideas that can contribute to organizational value. Characteristics of Generation Y, however, have indicated they have a tendency to exhibit a range of contradictory impulses. One perspective is that they seem to value the opportunity to take initiative and try radical and new ventures, while another perspective is

for them to seek conformity and security. These conflicting impulses create formidable problems for police departments operating under a quasi-military system requiring attention to codified law, rigid policies and procedures, with very few options to allow discretion.

The emergence of new ideas from talented intellects as seen with Generation Y can add tremendous value to a police organization. The placement of this cohort into police organizations, though, is not as flawless as many would expect. Law enforcement is heavily influenced in a quasi-military environment that frequently engages in slow incremental changes as opposed to radical and cutting edge changes. The methodical and slow processes of these organization changes can cause a degree of frustration with Generation Y because of their emphatic need to accomplish tasks with swift efficiency. However, the foresight of modern day leadership has the authority and ability to mitigate a crisis waiting to happen. The deployment of transformative leadership in today's policing environment is the mechanism that facilitates the transition of today's line level worker into tomorrow's law enforcement leaders. Through transformative practice, leaders have the ability to now exam the dilemma from a global perspective and institute behaviors that can merge the interests of Generation Y and align them with the future goals and missions of their organization.

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