

**GENERALIST OR SPECIALIST:
WHAT WILL BE THE STATUS OF THE POLICE
PROFESSIONAL BY THE YEAR 2003?**

**JOURNAL ARTICLE
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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).

INTRODUCTION

"Policing will become a profession (equivalent to that of doctor, teacher, or attorney) during the next generation. Society will demand a respected, qualified, well-trained, **super cop.**"¹

-Sheriff James Metts (1983)

The evolution to professionalize law enforcement has continued for over sixty years. The seed for the police professional was planted by August Vollmer, who served as police chief in Berkeley, California from 1909 to 1932. Six decades later, Sheriff Metts of Lexington County, South Carolina (the first U.S. Sheriff to earn a doctoral degree), articulated his vision in the quote above, and promised this evolution would continue, in dramatic fashion, into the next decade.

A half century ago, formal, structured police training was a rarity. On-the-job training was the customary practice. A college education was of little concern. Even a high school education was not required, although officers were expected to be reasonably literate in order to prepare basic reports. Police work being fairly basic, there was little diversification of departments into specialized functions, with the exception of investigations and patrol.² Thus, the sophistication of education, training, and diversity of experience was in its infancy stages. The post-war decades gave rise to a number of technological and social developments that would revolutionize law enforcement. Old fashioned police call-boxes were replaced by advanced two-way radios and telephones, while the seeds of cultural diversity, as it was to impact law enforcement, were sprouting. Through all these changes, however, police personnel structure and policies remained entrenched in traditional operational approaches.³

The public scrutiny and distrust of law enforcement agencies seems to have grown exponentially over the last sixty years. The analysis of police involvement in many socially disruptive events throughout this period has resulted in society's increased skepticism, and therefore, increased scrutinization, of government. Nowhere has this scrutiny been more intense than on the most visible extension of government...the police. The most recent and perhaps most dramatic event was the 1991 Rodney King arrest incident and its aftermath. The Christopher Commission wrote that "The Rodney King beating stands as a landmark in the recent history of law enforcement..." On an optimistic note the Commission added that the King incident "...provides an opportunity for evaluation and reform of police procedures." ⁴

Additionally, crime, drugs, out-of-control gang violence, crowded courts and prisons are draining local, state and national resources. Equally evident is that the police alone, employing traditional methods, is proving inadequate in an attempt to turn the tide. Many believe we need a different approach, a different way of looking at policing that addresses the causes of crime, encourages a partnership with the community, and makes better use of existing resources.⁵

Led by California's Attorney General Dan Lungren and other law enforcement leaders, new concepts of policing, under the general heading of Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS), are being developed. COPPS is a concept whose time has come.⁶ Traditional police work is by no means becoming extinct...nor should it be. It is still vitally important for police administrators to insure that a uniformed police officer responds to the call of an awaiting citizen in a timely manner. COPPS is meant to give balance and depth to traditional

proactive patrol, and better satisfy the rising demands that citizens have of the police and the quality of service.⁷

The success of policing through the 1990s and into the next decade will depend, in large part, on the characteristics of the men and women we recruit to be law enforcement officers, and on the character and caliber of those individual police officers. The complexity of skills and the initiative required of the future police professional, as outlined under COPPS, will be substantial.⁸ Thus, police administrators are being forced to rethink the responsibilities, capabilities, and the contributions that law enforcement can make to society.

If the belief and vision of Attorney General Lungren and Sheriff Metts prove correct, performing police functions in the next decade may, indeed, require "super cops." To develop this super police professional will require a fundamental rethinking of three areas: 1) training, 2) education, and 3) diversity of experience.⁹

TRAINING, EDUCATION, AND EXPERIENCE

Police academy training is a critical area in the formulation of the generalist police professional. Japan, Germany, and Ireland, for example, have two year police academies, while in contrast the length of training for the majority of academies in the United States is currently six months or less. Among the recommendations made by the Christopher Commission was the expansion of the basic police academy.¹⁰ Indeed, POST Basic Training Bureau Chief Bob Fuller is currently spearheading an effort to upgrade and expand the police academy curriculum, broadening its scope and preparing officers to be better equipped to handle the demands of COPPS policing.¹¹

Education is no less important in broadening the abilities and judgmental skills of the future police professional. Numerous studies have shown that college educated officers perform at higher levels of competence, generate significantly fewer citizen complaints, and fewer disciplinary action.¹²

The third criteria needed to build the generalist "super cop" of the future addresses the elimination of **permanent** specialized assignments, replacing them with assignment rotation. Diversity of assignments, encouraged by a rotational system, can help minimize or eliminate four organizational cancers that have given the title "civil servant" a bad name. These four are stagnation, elitism, cliquism, and citizen's perception of corruption resulting from sensational cases driven by the media.¹³

G.H. Kleinknecht, superintendent of the St. Louis County Police Department wrote of stagnation, "When an officer has mastered his current assignment, he begins to feel that the position holds little challenge, causing a reduction in job satisfaction"...thus becoming..."complacent with their assignments, which is reflected in the quality and quantity of work produced."¹⁴ Regarding corruption, Lieutenant James Tuttle, commanding officer of the Southeast Michigan Conspiracy Organization of the Michigan State Police wrote, "Rotation benefits the [organization] by reducing the potential for burnout and corruption"...as well as..."providing officers with career enhancement opportunities."¹⁵ As to cliquism, the Christopher Commission reported, "...a rotational system would reduce the problems of cliques and regularly bring new energy to a division."¹⁶

The opening quote from Dr. (Sheriff) James Metts nearly a decade ago, seems to have been prophetic. As a reformer, Metts and other visionary law enforcement

leaders understand that the role of the police officer is rapidly expanding due, in large part, to significant social events that drive that need to change. That expansion will require broader basic academy and post-academy training, higher entry level education, and a diversity of experience. Renoun police visionary and COPPS advocate Chris Braiden, Superintendent of Police in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada said when discussing the advancement of the COPPS approach, "There must be radical de-specialization. My bias is a generalist-type police officer."¹⁷

It seems clear that a shift in strategy from a narrower, specialist approach, to a broader, more professional, generalist approach, is necessary.

A PERSISTENT THEME

One theme dominated the findings of this study: The professionalization of law enforcement, indeed the building of a generalist "super cop," appears to be an inevitability demanded by the citizens we serve. The August Vollmers of the 21st century must understand and act on these concepts now, during the 1990s, to begin the process of developing the generalist police officer of the next century. Because of a number of significant societal events, most notably the Rodney King incident, the environment, both internal and external to the police organization, is ripe, some say overdue, for change. Police leaders must seize this moment of opportunity and lay the groundwork for that professionalization process.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

This study indicated that before such a professionalization process was to take place, there must be a rethinking of policies impacting training and education. To be most effective, the two should merge and be elevated to a four year bachelor's degree professional development curriculum. There would be virtually no cost to POST or the police agency since the candidate, as with all other disciplines, pays his or her college expenses. Scholarships would be a viable consideration. Graduation would mean an almost certain position with a law enforcement agency, unlike the disappointment faced by many in other disciplines, who find themselves unable to locate a job after earning a degree.

The new, expanded curriculum would be developed through a partnership between a four year college system Board of Regents and a committee of experts representing POST. That committee will have been convened after receiving the

approval of a number of groups critical to the success of implementing this vision. A few of those groups include California Police Chiefs Association, California Sheriffs Association, California Police Officer Association, Police Officer Research Association of California, and others.

The curriculum would greatly expand instructional areas like legal education, scenario training, analytical and judgmental skills testing, ride-alongs or in-service training, psychological evaluations, and others that would better prepare future officers for the complex skills necessary to advance the COPPS approach to policing.

There are currently at least three states, Mississippi, Florida, and Minnesota, that have integrated a four year liberal arts college education with the police academy curriculum. William R. Carter, director of the Minnesota Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), discussing that state's model of how to integrate higher education with professional training said, "We want law enforcement to understand conflict resolution and constitutional law and be able to weave all that together with use of force."¹⁷ According to Carter, research shows a strong correlation between attributes developed through college education and those desirable in an officer: In making those comparisons, Carter points out that college educated officers are:

"...less authoritarian and rigid; more socially conscious; sensitive to minorities; willing to experiment and apt to take on decisions and leadership; better communicators and report writers. Characteristics of non-college-educated officers are preference for routine and supervision; an inclination to be aggressive and counterattack people who are belligerent; and less imaginative and innovative. " ¹⁸

The future police professional will be required to do more than react to specific situations limited by guidelines and regulations. Rather, the future "super cop" should be a broader thinking professional, coupling imagination and creativity with a well rounded knowledge base. He or she will be expected to identify and solve problems, and develop cooperative relationships in the community, rather than be constrained by rules and omnipresent supervision.¹⁹ Already the police mission is expanding beyond crime control to prevention, resolution, mediation, and negotiation. In addition to these skills, front-line officers are expected to analyze, plan, and initiate action. In contrast with the past, the use of officer discretion is recognized and developed, rather than discouraged. The future integration of the police academy and higher education must encompass these needs into the curriculum in order to build the future police professional demanded by our citizenry.

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The concept of further professionalizing law enforcement by building a generalist police professional carries over, logically, into the individual law enforcement agency. A police organization, per se, has limited ability to build the future "super cop." It is this author's belief that a careful, unified approach, requiring strong leadership and commitment from the critical groups mentioned, POST, and a dedicated, reputable university system, is necessary for the ultimate success of this vision. However, an individual police organization can implement policies that greatly personify that goal.

In addition to expanded training and education, a third critical step is the

implementation of a staggered rotational system (this is where the officer, supervisor, and manager ranks rotate several months apart) that offers diversity of assignments to all levels of police employees. Assignment rotation is a key factor in providing diversity to employees, insuring an understanding of the goals and objectives of the whole, not part of the police organization. Empire-building, a phenomena that occurs when managers fight one another for limited resources regardless of how that resource distribution would best benefit an organization as a whole, is another serious internal problem that could be minimized by assignment rotation. When employees know that within a given period of time they may rotate into a new assignment, decisions, including how resources are to be distributed, are made in the best interest of achieving the over-all mission, not just the micro-mission of a particular section.

In the introduction it was mentioned that a generalist approach, implementing a rotational system, can minimize or eliminate stagnation, elitism, cliquism, and corruption. Specialization, on the other hand, has been shown in studies to promote an internal atmosphere where these types of cancers can flourish. The dicta given by the public to law enforcement underscores the persistent theme of this study...police executives and managers must provide an atmosphere where professionalization is promoted, not discouraged.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In the shift from specialization and traditional police operational approaches, to a broad-based generalist approach which incorporates the COPPS concept of policing, financial implications must be addressed. In order to recruit future "super

cops" will require an increased salary and benefit package. During tough economic times, when citizens are demanding "more for less," how can police budgets over-come this obstacle? Four money-saving concepts should be considered: (1) As already noted, the up-front education and training costs are absorbed by the police candidate, no longer born by POST or the hiring agency. (2) Down-sizing middle management and further empowering future "super cops" means fewer people on the payroll, thus making significant savings. (3) A highly educated, well trained, well respected police professional who, through the COPPS approach to policing has the support of the community and the media, is far less likely to invite the multi-million dollar judgments that are currently being paid across the country. Statistically, college educated officers cause a comparatively small number of legal actions against police departments. (4) Many initiatives seeking additional funds for law enforcement would have a far greater likelihood of passing due to broader community support.

Through these four steps, coupled with a renewed public confidence and respect for law enforcement, revenue would be available to raise the salary and benefit package of the super police generalist. It is this author's opinion that the entry level police officer package should be equivalent to the compensation afforded an entry level public defender or district attorney.

WHAT DIRECTION SHOULD BE TAKEN BETWEEN 1994 AND 2003?

In this study, the Palms Royal Oak PD (PRO-PD), a fictionalized police department with 120 sworn officers, located in the heart of West Los Angeles, was used as a model to develop strategies, both internal and external to the organization, that

would help accomplish the continuing and inevitable professionalization of law enforcement. The city elected officials, the city manager, and the police chief are progressive thinkers, open to new ideas. This type of visionary leadership is important to the success of implementing this strategic plan.

The external plan, briefly mentioned earlier, is a careful meshing of higher education and the basic police academy. After receiving support from their respective constituencies, critical stakeholders such as POST and a university Board of Regents would outline a curriculum that would result in the finest police training program in the world. (The implementation of this portion of the strategic plan would take between 7-10 years. It would take 2-3 years to plan and organize the initial effort. Another 4-5 years would be needed to evaluate the program, the candidates, etc. Finally, the conversion process may take two or three more years).

The internal plan, also briefly mentioned, is the implementation of a rotational system. This is a five step plan:

1. COMMUNICATE - It is imperative for the PRO-PD Chief to clearly articulate and define the vision, being careful to avoid raising expectations to unrealistic levels.
2. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK - Personally discuss the plan with the employee association (meet and confer), and other potential dissenters or supporters, representing every rank structure, to assist in marketing the best plan possible.

3. REVIEW INPUT - Analyze and evaluate critiques or suggestions from all sources to determine if the plan can be improved.
4. TEMPORARY IMPLEMENTATION/DATA COMPARISON/FEEDBACK - Put the plan into effect, insuring all those impacted that it will be for a given period of time, at which point the plan will be evaluated for effectiveness. Feedback, both formal (surveys, statistical data, etc) and informal ("management by walking around"), should be evaluated frequently during this trial period. Reward and recognition systems that can help promote the plan should be considered.
5. THE FINAL PLAN - At the end of the trial period, using all of the data collected supporting the plan, the PRO-PD chief should repeat step #1 by selling the plan's successes. Communicating successes is particularly important as it gives official credibility to the plan.

MANAGING THE CHANGE

The internal transition should be spearheaded by the PRO-PD chief because of his clout and respect. The chief is in the best position to lead, manage, persuade, motivate, and bring groups together to buy into the idea of mandating higher education, broader training, and most importantly, to implement a rotational system. The chief can generate an atmosphere of participation, teamwork, and democracy. Finally, because of his status, the chief is in the best position to coordinate efforts outside the organization (POST, educational institutions, elected officials) to

elevate educational and training minimums.

The chief should form a group made up of representatives of various levels, cultures, and functions within the organization (including the Police Officer Association Board of Directors). The success of the transition would be greatly enhanced when those affected felt they had some input. This diagonal slice of the organization allows for open channels of communication at all levels.

The City of Palm Royal Oak has a committee comprised of citizens and local government representatives called "Direction 21," referring to the 21st century.²⁰ They are a steering committee responsible for defining the direction Palm Royal Oak will take entering the next century. There are relatively powerful and "well connected" individuals on the committee who collectively could play a helpful role in supporting the idea of a "super cop" generalist to those **outside of the police organization** (namely POST, The Board of Regents, the media, and the public). Such an Executive Committee would be coordinated by, and receive guidance from the PRO-PD police chief.

IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE, IT'S... "SUPER COP"

Through the generalist approach, this author believes that the tremendous police bashing currently taking place, the declining respect of the public towards law enforcement, and the dwindling morale of once proud police officers, can be dramatically turned around in the next decade.

Consider the following scenario as if it was written in the year 2003:

Through the turbulent times of the 1980s, and early 1990s, the law enforcement profession took some hard shots. Citizen scrutiny of law enforcement increased by 600%! The public was no longer satisfied with police work, or police management, as usual. They expected a law enforcement officer of the highest caliber...a police professional who was well educated, highly versatile, fearless, and compassionate. It has taken ten years of building, molding, training, and educating, but finally the public got what it wanted...the highest caliber public servant imaginable...a "**super cop!**"

In 1994, the budget crisis hit public agencies and down-sizing of personnel at all ranks, particularly middle management, was painfully implemented. Through all this, Palm Royal Oak PD handled the problem well. This was due, in part, to its chief, Thomas Robag's rotational policy which had broadened the total organizational understanding of all personnel. His officers were able to make broad, yet functional judgments that benefited the goals of the **whole** department, not just an individual's section or bureau. Even with fewer personnel, the department ran smoothly and efficiently because the stagnation and boredom that came from permanent specialized assignments no longer existed. Everyone worked as a team, unlike the elitism that specialization had caused in years past. Down-sizing also left a void in promotional opportunities. There was a lack of vertical, or upward mobility. However, the chief's rotational system allowed employees to be horizontally mobile, broadening their skills and talents, and providing needed challenges in a variety of assignments. Thus, morale remained high.

While other departments in the county were rocked by scandals alleging corruption, PRO-PD's rotational policy contributed to its community's complete confidence and trust in every member of the department, including those in sensitive positions, like narcotics and vice.

In the meantime, POST had been putting its last touches on developing a two year police academy that was to help in furthering the concept of Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS). POST, working in partnership with the University of California Board of Regents, had integrated the two year academy with the four year under graduate program. Among the expanded courses was a sound legal education and special training in new technology, as they relate to law enforcement. This move resulted in raising the quality of entry level recruits from an all-time low in 1995 to an all-time high by the year 2000.

Now, three years later, the social status of police officers nationwide is equivalent to that of doctor, teacher, or an attorney. Citizens love and respect their "finest." The media and the law enforcement community enjoy a new harmony that has not been experienced in decades. In the first years of the 21st century, the police professional had finally been elevated to a generalist super cop!

Indeed, when considering today's (1993) events and trends, the previous scenario sounds like pie-in-the-sky thinking. However, this author believes if law enforcement leaders implement the policies suggested in this study, the generalist police professional of the future is within our reach.

CONCLUSION

With the data generated during this study, coupled with over two years of literature scan, this author suggests that the police professional of the future will be a generalist: (1) highly educated, (2) superbly trained, and (3) have the opportunity to work a variety of specialized assignments, but for shorter periods of time. These three factors will cause the police professional of the future to be elevated in status socially, receive a more significant salary, and be looked upon with great respect from all segments of society. Permanent specialized assignments will be, for the most part, viewed as an antiquated police management concept, that too often played a destructive role organizationally. Stagnation, boredom, elitism, cliquism, corruption, and empire-building will be so minimized that the often degrading image brought to mind by the term "civil servant," will have been reshaped.

Specialization, in many cases, is steeped in traditional operational approaches to law enforcement. While many of these traditional approaches certainly have great value, permanent specialized assignments are clearly counter-productive to furthering the Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS) approach to law enforcement. COPPS requires a broader thinker with more complex judgmental skills. **This author believes it is unfair to today's police officers to expect the advanced performance required by COPPS without providing and requiring advanced training and education.**

The narrow focus of specialization was seen as "comfortable" for individuals who resist change...individuals who are satisfied with working within a limited corner of the organization, unattuned or unaffected by the on-goings outside of their domain. In years past, a police department could operate in an atmosphere that

was a bit narrower in focus. However, in the post Rodney King era and the severe citizen scrutiny that has followed, it is an impossible luxury.

Specialization is not cost effective due to the under utilization of personnel resources. This is particularly true at the middle management level. Peter Drucker, talking about organizations portrayed as top heavy, stated it strongly. He said, "Middle managements today tend to be over-staffed to the point of obesity..."²¹ As a consequence, administrators must address the loss of promotional opportunities, replacing vertical mobility with innovative methods to retain job enrichment. One key method discussed was horizontal mobility...the implementation of a rotational system.

Finally, relative to training and educational levels, current requirements fall short of fulfilling the vision of a generalist "super cop." The trend, indeed the necessity, indicates the probability that educational and training requirements will rise dramatically by the year 2003. It would be counter-productive to waste valuable police training and years of education on a narrow focused specialist. Nearly every assignment requiring permanent specialization is likely to be an assignment that can, and should, be civilianized! For example, there is no need to commit resources to educate and train a helicopter pilot, search and rescue personnel, or criminal analyst to the same level required for the future police professional. This author believes it would be obscene to waste tax payer's dollars to develop, educate, train, and guide the ultimate generalist police professional through a world class police academy, then waste that time and money assigning such a sworn officer to a position which a lesser trained and educated civilian with a lower salary could perform.

This study addressed an issue that is unusually broad. By its very nature, the vision of developing the ultimate police generalist required the broader approach. A volume of research, indeed a doctorate dissertation, could be written only of the training aspect of this issue...or only of the educational aspect...or only of a rotational system within the police organization. These are certainly areas worthy of future study, hopefully by an interested Command College candidate! However, as unfair or unattainable as it may have been, this author has made an attempt to capture the essence of the future police professional. In the early 20th century, police reformers like August Vollmer and O. W. Wilson did a remarkable job in their efforts to professionalize law enforcement. This author sincerely hopes that by the early 21st century, one century later, the reformers of today will respond to the sophistication of society over these last 100 years and have the vision to develop the generalist police professional "super cop."

ENDNOTES

- 1 James Metts, "SUPER COPS: The Police Force of Tomorrow," The Futurist, October 1985, p. 76.
- 2 Victor McDonald and M. A. Martin, "Specialists and the Personnel Structure of Canadian Police," Canadian Police Journal, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1986, p. 189-190.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 "Independent (Warren Christopher) Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department," 1991, p. (i).
- 5 California Department of Justice, Attorney General's Office, Honorable Daniel Lungren, "COPPS: Definitions and Principles," p. 1, April 1993.
- 6 California Department of Justice, Attorney General's Office, Honorable Daniel Lungren, "Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving," p. Introductory Message, November 1992.
- 7 California's Attorney General Dan Lungren, "The COPPS Concept," California Police Officer, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 29.
- 8 U.S. Department of Justice, "Community Policing and the Police Officer," Perspectives on Policing, Edwin Meese III, No. 15, January 1993.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 "Independent (Warren Christopher) Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department," 1991, p. 134.
- 11 Author's telephonic interview with POST Bureau Chief Robert Fuller, July 1, 1993.
- 12 Michael Tyre and Susan Braunstein, Ed.D, "Higher Education and Ethical Policing," FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, June 1992, p. 6-10.
- 13 Tom Gabor, "ROTATION: Is It Organizationally Sound?" FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, April 1992, p. 16-19.
- 14 G.H. Gleinknecht and Mark Dougherty, "A Career Development Program That Works," The Police Chief, August 1986, p.66.
- 15 James P. Tuttle, "A Training System For Undercover Teams," FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, May 1993, p.9.
- 16 "Independent (Warren Christopher) Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department, 1991, p.145.

¹⁷Chris Braiden, His comments from video tape produced by the California Department of Justice, Attorney General's Office, Hon. Daniel Lungren, "Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving," April 1993.

¹⁸ Katy Benson, "Who Makes the Best Officers? - Merging Education and Experience," Police, July 1993, p. 38-41.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, "Community Policing and the Police Officer," Perspectives on Policing, No. 15, Edwin Meese III, January 1993, p. 2.

²¹ "Direction 21" is a concept that was made a reality by the City of Culver City, Jody Hall-Esser, Chief Administrative Officer and chairperson.

²² Peter Drucker, The Frontiers of Management, New York, Truman Talley Books, 1986, p. 200.

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