

**THE BADGE AND THE PEN: A LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP  
POLICE MEDIA RELATIONS BY THE YEAR 2005**

**By**

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**May 1995**

20-0402

**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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There are countless articles and publications providing instructions on how to write a press release, how to stand during a news conference, or even how to reply to questions from a hostile audience. Few, however, have provided a step-by-step practical guide for improving media relations through innovative technologies and policies.

This article will focus on the above topics in a futures-oriented model of study. Most futures studies identify strategic long-range alternatives for organizations with specifics on implementation. This article, while reporting the highlights of the study, will target the transition from the present to the identified future goal.

The need for a study of this type is increasingly obvious in these times of high profile criminal cases, cases like Rodney King, O. J. Simpson, and the Branch-Davidians in Waco, Texas. All three cases generated worldwide recognition for the agencies involved. Advances in technology will increase the speed, mobility, and flexibility of the mass media in capturing events.<sup>1</sup> Proactive policies and plans need to be identified, and implemented to keep up with new innovations.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The issue of the study is stated in question form: "What strategies are foreseen in managing media relations functions in large law enforcement organizations by the year 2005?" Large law enforcement organizations will be defined as those having over 500 employees and a full-time press information staff.

The organization that will be highlighted in this case is the Long Beach Police Department (850 sworn, 400 non-sworn). Long Beach is a racially diverse community located approximately 25 miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles.

The main issue is highlighted by three sub-issues, which provide a framework to better identify and examine the dynamics of the question. The sub-issues are as follows:

**Sub-Issue #1:**

**What societal changes may affect the managing of the media relation function?** (Societal changes - movement of community opinions and tolerance levels.)

The dramatic demographic shifts taking place in Los Angeles County and Long Beach may impact the manner in which the police organization will provide information for the news media. For instance, with a heavy influx of non-English speaking residents to Long Beach, new measures should be identified to provide non-English media outlets with information<sup>2</sup>

Another potential impact on local media relations is the potential for new laws pertaining to the video taping of occurrences.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the Rodney King case is a good example of a citizen capturing a criminal act on video tape. Now the question is, does law enforcement have the right to seize this video as evidence? Moreover, if the video is sold to a news station, does law enforcement have a right to the video? These are questions which are and will be played out in legal suits; the results will have a significant effect. The central emerging issue(s) to be aware of are a changing of the customer base and the potential for new laws as a result of new technologies.

**Sub Issue #2:**

**What impact will emerging technology have on the managing of the media relations function?**

There are a number of innovations which have the potential to impact the police media relationship; for instance, improved palm-sized 8mm video cameras, which can be concealed easily on the person of a reporter.<sup>4</sup> In the past, it was very easy to see from a distance a news crew approaching. The large bulky camera equipment that the cameraman carried was a giveaway. The future holds small self-contained equipment that one reporter can carry, and set up by him or herself. In addition, the explosive growth in the number of satellite ground stations, allowing the routing of video

recorded information to any place in the world, on a moment's notice.<sup>5</sup> The central emerging issue is that future technologies will afford the media the ability to be faster and more mobile.

**Sub Issue #3:**

**What new steps or technologies will law enforcement management use to mitigate negative public perceptions?** (Negative public perceptions—derogatory opinions or beliefs held by person(s) not substantiated by consistent linear lines of logic or facts.)

Several proactive steps may be utilized to deal with potential crisis situations before they occur; for example: establishing procedure(s) to engage in interest based bargaining with local or regional media, establishing agreeable standards which will allow or assist the media in reporting a fair and open story. In addition, training standards can be addressed in order to provide all law enforcement personnel with media relations training, above and beyond today's standards, and the adoption of higher standards of conduct for law enforcement personnel. The central emerging theme is to provide increased training of personnel in the areas of presentation and media-related laws, as well as establishing communication and negotiation with local media policy makers. The thought is that mitigation begins prior to events occurring.

**PROFESSIONAL SURVEY**

With the main question providing a direction, and the three sub-issues establishing a framework, the process for gathering opinions from known professionals was constructed. A twenty-six question survey was developed and mailed to one hundred news and law enforcement practitioners. The responses indicated four key areas that these experts thought were crucial to law enforcement media relations. They are as follows:

1. A need for improved media/law enforcement training.
2. Technology will dictate that greater amounts of information will be needed.
3. The pace at which this information is provided to the media will increase drastically.
4. Policies governing law enforcement interactions with the media should be strengthened with viable sanctions.

These four crucial points had a distinct correlation to the points identified in the sub-issue framework. In order to estimate a possible future state, a futures forecasting process was undertaken.

### **NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE**

The Nominal Group Technique was utilized to capture potential future impact upon the identified topic using a nine person expert panel.

During an intensive six hour session, the expert panel identified over eighty-six (86) possible police/media relations trends and events. The ten most crucial trends and events, which may impact the main question, were identified by the panel, and are listed below:

<u>Trends</u>	<u>Events</u>
1. Media/Police Cooperation	1. Legalizing Narcotics-related Offenses
2. Social Responsibility	2. Court Decision Limiting Media Access
3. Cultural Awareness Training for Media and Law Enforcement	3. Social and Racial Riots
4. High Technology Police Reporting Systems	4. Closing of Mexican Border
5. Changing Demographics	5. Long Beach Becomes 65% Latino
6. Police Training Standards	6. City Government Corruption

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|--|--|
| 7. Global Demand for Information                                       | 7. Long Beach Becomes Major Tourist Destination    |
| 8. Ratio of Income Gap Between Top 10% and Lower 10% of the Population | 8. Vigilante Acts                                  |
| 9. National Media Policies   | 9. Police Scandal                                  |
| 10. Sensationalized Entertainment Reporting                            | 10. Local Cable News Broadcast Station Established |

The four apparently crucial areas identified by the NGT panel corresponded to those illuminated by the questionnaire survey:

1) Training, 2) Technology, 3) Policies, and 4) the ability to gather large amounts of information.

The trends and events were utilized to compose a "most likely to occur" future scenario.

### **SELECTED SCENARIO**

A data based series of forecasts were used to develop a coherent scenario—one with enough specifics to guide the strategic planning phase. The following paragraphs will provide the reader with a brief synopsis of the "most likely to occur" scenarios.

The scenario takes place in the city of Long Beach in 1997. Large media companies begin to merge, in order to control the news market. A positive that comes from the mergers is a National News Policy. The large media conglomerates introduce two new technologies: 1) desktop 24-hour computer news video, and 2) a 24-hour interactive news channel.

The city of Long Beach is chosen as a location for the first experimental systems. As a result of the new technology, the demand for information from the Long Beach Police Department increases. The Chief of Police responds by enlarging his

press information staff. After this fails, he institutes new 40-hour training program for all employees on media presentation skills. The Chief also has new policies drafted that allow greater freedom for officers when addressing issues to the media; however, severe sanctions were put in place for any violations of the new media policy. The Chief also investigates new technologies, like paperless reporting systems for the department, to assist in providing more information to his Reduced Press Information Staff.

The scenario was drafted to point out the potential that new technology brings. As companies like Fox Media continue to grow and assimilate new stations, there is a likelihood of companies merging.<sup>6</sup> The making of these large conglomerates would allow for greater power and influence of public policy. The police may respond to the increased demand by enlarging their PIO staff, ignoring news requests, or by training a larger number of people who can become onscene PIO's.

A strategic plan was then constructed to address the concerns identified in the scenario.

### **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

The process involved several steps: 1) the development of a mission statement, 2) analysis of stakeholders, 3) identifying alternative strategies, and 4) the development of an implementation plan.

The mission statement identified Long Beach Police Department as becoming a recognized leader in the field of media relations. Eleven objectives were developed to serve as guide posts for the accomplishment of the goal.

The stakeholder analysis identified ten groups (i.e., community special interest, city council, and local business organizations) that would be impacted by the implementation of the plan.

Based on the above information, three possible strategies were constructed, one focusing on external change, the second focusing on internal change, and the third focusing internally and externally.

The third plan was selected as the most preferred, and the best for assisting in the accomplishing of the goal. This plan identified ten phases to assist the Long Beach Police Department in becoming a leader in the media relations field.

## **THE PREFERRED STRATEGY**

### **STRATEGY THREE (10-Phase Concept)**

- Phase I —** Establish a mandatory media relations training matrix of all police personnel. The training would be inclusive of the recruit police academy, advanced officer training, command officer training, cultural awareness training, and in service squad meeting training. The Matrix should include a 40-hour in-house training module for all employees (sworn and civilian). In addition, ethical standards must be incorporated into these sessions. Law Enforcement receives the vast majority of its negative press as a result of on or off duty indiscretions, or voids in ethical behavior.
- Phase II —** Instill a "customer-driven philosophy" in the police organization, the customer being the mass media.
- Phase III —** Ensure that the police organization has state-of-the-art equipment, in order to provide the media with timely information.
- Phase IV —** Ensure police personnel have the state-of-the-art equipment to gather information; for example, interactive report-taking systems from the home, or laptop paperless systems for the police vehicles. These devices offer faster dissemination of information.

- Phase V** — Establish a well-drafted Media Relations Policy, which has sanctions (i.e., discipline) for violations.
- Phase VI** — Establish organized local and regional press information associations to 1) exchange information and learning experiences, 2) provide political and external leverage on news organizations in a watchdog capacity, 3) provide regular joint inservice training sessions for media organizations and law enforcement, 4) conduct quarterly meetings with radio, T.V., and news-related associations, and 5) engage in interest-based bargaining programs.
- Phase VII** — Utilize political leverage with the news-related associations, to introduce a regional media policy on the reporting standards of the news. Moreover, mandate ethical standards training for new and present reporters and editors.
- Phase VIII** — Implement Computer Desktop Video Police Programming (24 hours) (Rapid Information Retrieval).
- Phase IX** — Implement interactive local municipal 24-hour cable police program to disseminate information.
- Phase X** — Ensure that promotions are geared towards advanced knowledge of media relations.

This plan was designed to impact deep rooted organizational cultural norms through training, locking in place new norms with policies, and providing technological innovations to support change.

The advantage of the 10-phase plan is that it allows for the responding to environmental changes. The disadvantage is that it is a complex procedure which entails some risk. It also requires effort and extensive follow-through.

The emerging issue identified during the strategic plan was that the majority of stakeholders identified would be supportive. The only potential snaildarter (obstacle) was thought to be apathy in the command structure.

The next and most crucial step was to identify a feasible and viable implementation plan. The transition plan will be presented in great detail to emphasize the importance of its role in futures studies.

### **Transition Plan**

Transforming the strategic 10-phase plan into operational effectiveness requires the development of a transition plan or structure. The transition plan is to ensure the orderly completion of the goals identified in the strategic planning stage. However, change can be a destabilizing force in organizations today. Patrick Connor states in his book, Managing Organizational Change, "The hallmark of organizational and managerial life in this, the last decade or so of the twentieth century, is change."<sup>7</sup> Change requires exchanging something old for something new. People have to unlearn and relearn, exchange power and status, and exchange old norms and values for new norms and values.<sup>8</sup> The transition referred to is the movement of the organization from the current state to the new state. The transition plan provides careful management in overcoming resistance, or unforeseen problems. The following areas were addressed in the management of the strategic changes:

- Critical Mass/Commitment Analysis
- Management Structure
- Transition Management Timeline

### **Critical Mass/Commitment Analysis**

Critical mass is an analytical tool to help identify key players who are critical to the success of the strategic plan. It is designed to impose political realities in the planning process.

It is not enough that target-group members are merely aware that change is indicated. A change can be facilitated even more appropriately when they (critical mass) believe that change is a must.<sup>9</sup> Change is made easier if those of the critical mass: 1) perceive the presence of the problems, 2) are willing to work to remedy those problems, and 3) have the ability to do so.<sup>10</sup> The vast majority of the targeted critical mass in Long Beach are city government employees. As the title infers, "critical mass" targets are vital to the success of any plan. The following persons were identified as the critical targets:

- 1) The Mayor
- 2) City Manager
- 3) Chief of Police
- 4) Deputy Chief of Administration Bureau  
(Responsible for Press Information Office, Policies and Training)
- 5) Police Officers Association President
- 6) President of the Radio Television News Association of Southern California

It is believed by the author that all six perceive a problem, are willing to help, and are in a position to help remedy the situation. It is further believed that all six would be supportive and committed to the strategic changes. Five of the six leaders work very closely together on a regular basis in Long Beach. To their credit, all work harmoniously together as a city/labor management team. All would enjoy the benefits of positive media relations. Although the RTNA president does not interact with the police organization directly, the members of her group who do would be very supportive. The only estimated resistance to the plan would come from the Police Officers Association President, who would be opposed to discipline of the new policy. Probably the most frequently used method to overcome resistance to change is to educate people about change.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the P.O.A. President would be provided with the opportunity to give input on the formulation of the new policy(ies). He would

also be informed that officers are accountable for and expected to obey all department policies.

After identifying the critical players in the transition plan, the next step entailed the formation of a ten member committee to oversee implementation.

### **Management Structure**

The implementation committee would have the responsibility of ensuring that all goals and timelines are met or adjusted. The chairperson of the committee would be the commanding officer in charge of Media Relations. What is also key, is that the identified members of the committee be educated on the need and goals of the department. It is a must that all members have a sense of commitment or "buy in" into the program. The committee would be made up of the following members:

- |  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. Chairperson - Media Relations<br>Section C/O        | 6. Dept. Personnel Office       |
| 2. City Budget Rep.                                    | 7. Police Officers Association  |
| 3. Research & Development Rep.                         | 8. Long Beach Police PIO        |
| 4. RTNA Board Member<br>(Radio Television News Assoc.) | 9. Long Beach City PIO          |
| 5. Cable Company Rep.                                  | 10. Organizational Psychologist |

The key component of the team will be the chairperson, who will provide leadership, instruction and vision. This position may also prove to be that of the snaildarter. Currently, in the Long Beach Police Department, all commanders are required to rotate their positions every three years. There are no guarantees that the new replacement will have the same level of commitment to the program. However, the committee members serve as a check and balance to this potential.

Once a management structure has been identified, it is crucial that all employees are informed of what is taking place. In light of this fact, Long Beach is

decentralized into four stations and numerous storefronts, several methods will be utilized:

- Electronic Mail Systems
- Department Newsletters
- A Roll Call Video
- Department Memos
- News Releases

The committee must next assess the organization's readiness for change.

There are three major categories from which the assessment starts:

- Depth of Change Wanted
- Pervasiveness of Change
- Size of the Organization<sup>12</sup>

The Long Beach Police Department has harbored an anti-media sentiment for several decades. This sentiment has become a part of the organization's culture. The ten-phase plan is proposed in order to unfreeze old ideas, while moving and freezing into place new norms. The plan should address depth pervasiveness and size.

Moreover, an informal verbal survey of employees indicated a motivation to change; however, the skills and resources needed for change are not present. The plan was designed to address these concerns.

The next step was to develop a timeline.

### **Timeline**

A timeline for the implementation of the plan was developed with three key areas:

- Planning Phase
- Implementation Phase
- Evaluation Phase

The planning phase would encompass a time period of one month. This month will allow for the assembling of the transition committee, as well as the studying of the current state, and opportunities to educate those who will be impacted.

The implementation will take a two year period for all ten phases to be incrementally introduced to the department.

The third phase, evaluation, will be ongoing throughout the implementation process. A complete evaluation will be conducted after all ten phases have been implemented. The evaluation process will be conducted through surveys, audits, and onscene observations by committee members. The committee will also recommend solutions to problems, based on the observations reported to them.

When change is as complex as the Long Beach Police 10-phase plan, it requires a sophisticated management mechanism. The transition plan should provide that sophistication. If the entire futures process is successful for the Long Beach Police, it should:

- Produce positive changes in line and staff attitudes.
- Prompt employees to behave more effectively.
- Enhance the organization's potential for future achievement.<sup>13</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This conclusion is intended to bring focus to this research effort, and to provoke further thought and study of the issue. The focus of the futures study was centered around the question of:

**What strategies are foreseen in managing the media relations function, for large law enforcement organizations by the year 2005?**

The futures study project identified a 10-phase strategy and transition planning process. The ten-phase plan was constructed to provide alternatives for the Long Beach Police Department in its goal to become a recognized leader in police media

relations. The plan targets internal and external factors, while ensuring that deep rooted cultural norms are impacted. The plan also provides for the potential use of technology for the rapid dissemination of data to the media and the public.

In addition, the strategy provides for the impacting of the future critical areas identified in the mail-out survey. Those areas of concern were 1) training, 2) technology, 3) policies, and 4) and the ability to gather large amounts of information for dissemination to the public.

The three sub-issues that provided the framework for the main question are:

**Sub-Issue #1:**

**What impact will emerging technology have on the managing of the media relations function?**

Technology will be the driving force behind advances in police media relations. New advances in camera equipment, computers, and satellites will allow the media to be faster and more mobile in the coverage of news events.

Law enforcement must obtain technologies like paperless reporting systems, interactive cable shows compute bulletin boards, desktop video systems, that will provide greater amounts of information.

Quicker response to events by the media will necessitate better trained officers who can answer questions professionally.

**Sub-Issue #2:**

**What societal changes may affect the media relations function?**

The two most critical changes will be demographic changes in the city of Long Beach and surrounding communities. The second is potential changes in laws pertaining to the video taping of occurrences.

Law enforcement will need to provide information to non-English speaking media outlets in their native language. A changing customer base means the work force must adapt.

**Sub-Issue #3:****What steps will law enforcement use to mitigate negative public perceptions?**

Mitigation of negative perceptions does not begin at the scene of a crisis situation. Mitigation begins internally, years or months prior to a major incident. It starts with in-depth media training and viable policies.

Proactive mitigation of potential hazards will necessitate a new way of thinking and training. The new mindset will have to be woven into the fabric (culture) of the organization. Anti-media sentiments will have to be addressed and modified. A mindset of "opportunities to improve" will be introduced to substitute the attitude of "Let's circle the wagons."

**SUMMARY**

In closing, the same issues today will need to be addressed tomorrow. This futures piece was compiled to provide the reader with pragmatic alternatives to future media relations issues. This article focused on the most difficult and important part of a strategic plan, the transition.

The major hinderance in carrying out a strategic plan is usually due to the inadequate management of implementation. Lack of commitment, as well as unmanaged resistance, often leads to sabotage and blocking. This paper attempted to illustrate the critical need for efficient transition management.

<sup>1</sup> Hoenig, Gary (1987), Coping With the New Technology. The Electronic Revolution in News Photography. Pg. 10.

<sup>2</sup> City of Long Beach 1990 Census Report, City Manager's Special Report (1972). Pg. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Home Box Office Video Presentation, "Shock Video" (1994).

<sup>4</sup> Lester Paul Martin (1993), Juggling Journalism and Humanism. The Ethics of Photojournalism. Pg. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Time Magazine (June 27, 1994), Cable's Big Squeeze, Richard Zoglin. Pg. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Tichy, Noel (1983), Managing Strategic Change. Wiley-Inter Science Publication, New York. Pg. 203.

<sup>8</sup> Connor, Patrick E. (1988), Managing Organizational Change. Praegar Publishers, New York. Pg. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Mohrman, Alan M. (1989), Large-Scale Organizational Change. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco. Pg. 76.

<sup>10</sup> Connor, Patrick E. (1988), Managing Organizational Change. Praegar Publishers, New York. Pg. 96.

<sup>11</sup> Watkins, Karen (1993). Sculpting the Learning Organization. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco. Pg. 239.

<sup>12</sup> Tichy, Noel (1983), Managing Strategic Change. Wiley-Inter Science Publication, New York. Pg. 210.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Pg. 214.