

**WHAT WILL BE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE
COSTA MESA POLICE DEPARTMENT AND THE MEDIA
IN MEETING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF THE
COMMUNITY BY THE YEAR 2002?**

JOURNAL ARTICLE

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ISSUE STATEMENT:

What will be the relationship between the Costa Mesa Police Department and the media in meeting the information needs of the Community by the year 2002?

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ISSUE:

Located in Orange County, the City of Costa Mesa has a total population of a little over 100,000 people and is increasingly becoming more ethnically diverse. The Costa Mesa Police Department has approximately 150 sworn officers and a total of about 250 personnel. Media coverage of news events regarding Costa Mesa spans the spectrum. A local daily newspaper follows stories for both Costa Mesa and a neighboring city as its major focus. On a larger scale the Los Angeles Times and the Orange County Register cover noteworthy city events as well as county, state, national, and international news. Local television media coverage includes a City-operated local access channel, a city-wide cable TV company and the Orange County News (OCN) which covers county-wide. High profile stories are often carried by the major TV networks in the Los Angeles area including CBS, NBC, ABC, KCOP, KTLA, and FOX. With the increasing Hispanic demographics of the City, some of the Spanish-speaking TV stations such as KMEX and KVEA sometimes cover stories relating to the Hispanic community.

Up until just recently, media releases from the Costa Mesa Police Department were made by the Watch Commander or a detective supervisor who would respond to direct inquiries

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from the media about specific incidents. On rare occasions, stories would be released before the media was aware of the incident in anticipation of inquiries, such as in the cases of homicides or major traffic accidents. Usually, however, the media needed to initiate the contact or there would be no information release. Although the CMPD media relations policy and the Chief of Police both encouraged cooperation with the press, the general feeling among the supervisors charged with dealing with the media was that at a minimum the media was a burden. At worse, the media was viewed with suspicion. Some supervisors were reluctant to divulge information as they feared it would be misquoted, taken out of context, or exaggerated to place the police department in an unfavorable light. Due to these factors, sometimes the media was deliberately told "no news" even if a newsworthy event did in fact occur or was presently occurring. Even if a supervisor wanted to be responsive and cooperative, there existed some doubt about whether that supervisor should release the information or defer the decision to the detective supervisor in case there was sensitive investigative information. This could lead to a time delay depending on whether the detective supervisor was on- or off-duty. The situation was compounded by a slow records management system in which the time between an officer's response to a newsworthy incident and the information's availability in report form could be 2 to 3 days or longer. Naturally, this exacerbated the media who wanted the story while it was still timely. This inevitably led to hard feelings between CMPD supervisors who felt "burned" by an irresponsible press and media personnel who felt they were denied timely access to information which they were entitled to and which they needed for the benefit of their customers.

Members of the media pointed out that stories which were newsworthy were often overlooked by supervisors as not interesting or routine. Further, the media indicated that the CMPD missed opportunities to present the Department and its employees in a positive

light. Recognizing and proactively disseminating information about good police work, cases where citizens and police successfully worked together in community problem solving, or human interest stories involving officers could present the officers to the community as real people, not just anonymous, faceless enforcers of the law.

This state of media relations probably reflected that of many law enforcement agencies.

In light of these facts, the CMPD instituted a single-source Public Information Officer (PIO) as the first step toward providing consistency in the dissemination of information. Underlying the creation of this position is the assertion that information regarding the police department and related public safety issues is of great value to the community. With timely, accurate and complete information the community is enabled to make informed and responsible decisions concerning public policy as it pertains to local law enforcement. Provided with information, the community will better understand the concerns and problems the police department faces and is more likely to provide support and assistance as needed. For example, citizens would have a increased propensity to act as witnesses in crime suppression efforts as they become more knowledgeable about crime problems confronting the community. Information specific to a neighborhood or business district would greatly assist in crime prevention and problem-oriented policing efforts. With the emergence of community-oriented policing it is imperative that the community receive sufficient information to respond as a responsible and active partner. This open exchange of information will develop in the community a sense of trust and confidence in the CMPD, deepening the commitment to the partnership. The ultimate purpose of media relations is to provide that necessary information to the community through the media. The goal of this future study is to analyze and identify strategies to take media relations to the next level to ensure that the community's information needs are served in the future.

PROBABLE FUTURE:

To determine probable futures, several research methodologies were employed to gather, analyze, evaluate, and develop data regarding the issue of media relations in disseminating information to the community. The research methodologies were literature scanning, brainstorming sessions, and a nominal group technique.

The nominal group technique (NGT) entailed an expert panel convened to forecast trends and events which potentially could impact the CMPD and its relationship with the media. Comprising the NGT panel were representatives from the media, law enforcement, and legal fields. The print media representatives were from the local daily paper (Daily Pilot) and the two major news agencies (Orange County Register and Los Angeles Times). The backgrounds of the print media representatives ranged from reporters experienced in court and crime reporting to editorial staff. Representing the television media were the local cable TV company (Media One) and the county-wide TV news station (Orange County News), presenting the viewpoints of editor, anchorperson, and producer. Law enforcement was represented by ranking police managers with media relations experience. The legal profession was represented by attorneys from two law firms specializing in legal matters relating to law enforcement.

The NGT panel was first tasked with identifying emerging trends based on their potential impact on media relations involving the CMPD through the next 5 years. The trends could be drawn from the social, technological, economical, environmental, political, or legal realms. Over a dozen applicable trends were first identified by the panel. Subsequently, the top five trends were selected by vote as to potential importance in impacting the issue. A

relative weight for each of the top five trends was established, ranking each by order of prominence. The top five trends identified are as follows in descending order of significance:

1. Technology available to media
2. Disclosure of information to the public and media
3. Community involvement in law enforcement
4. Law enforcement image
5. Fear due to the perception of crime

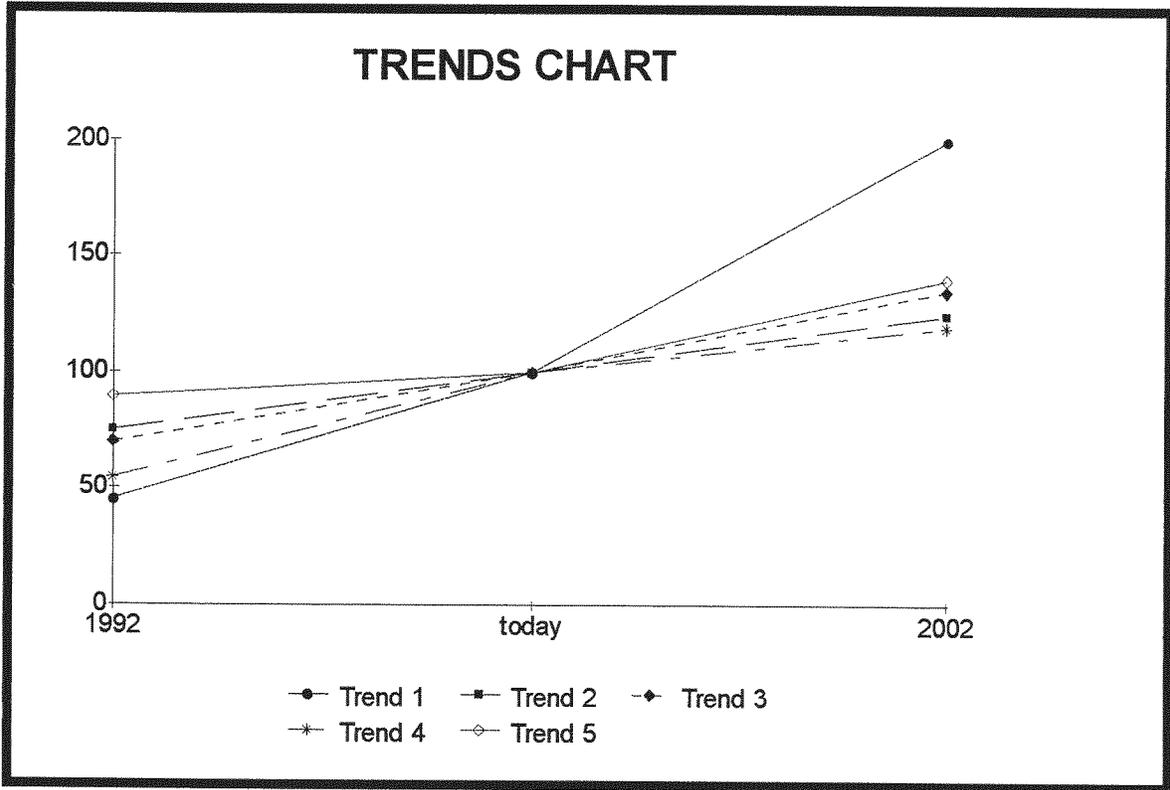
The magnitude and direction of each of the top five trends was determined using “today” (1997) as the reference point. To accomplish this, “today” was normalized to a value of 100. Each of the top five trends was then evaluated as to its estimated value relative to the issue five years ago (1992). Next each of the top five trends was then forecasted as to its projected value relative to the issue five years in the future (2002).

All the top five trends were determined by the NGT panel to be increasing in magnitude from 1992 through today and on to the year 2002. The most notable trend in terms of increasing in magnitude is the trend regarding technology available to the media: the values doubled over each five year segment with a value of 50 for 1992, 100 for today (1997), and 200 by the year 2002.

The results are tabulated in the Trends Summary Table.

| TRENDS SUMMARY TABLE | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Trend Ranked by Descending Significance | 5 Years Ago 1992 | Today 1997 Normalized to 100 | 5 Years in Future 2002 |
| Trend 1 Media Technology | 45 | 100 | 200 |
| Trend 2 Information Disclosure | 75 | 100 | 125 |
| Trend 3 Community Involvement | 70 | 100 | 135 |
| Trend 4 Law Enforcement Image | 55 | 100 | 120 |
| Trend 5 Perception of Crime | 90 | 100 | 140 |

The Trends Chart graphically illustrates the increasing nature of each of the top 5 trends.



The NGT panel was also tasked with identifying events which could conceivably occur over the next five years from today that would, if they occurred, have some impact on the CMPD's relationship with the media in serving the information needs of the community. Over two dozen potential events were identified. The NGT panel then voted on the top 5 events and ranked them by order of significance on the potential impact on the issue. The top five events identified are as follows in descending order of significance:

1. Critical incident perceived as questionable in terms of the officer's actions, performance or conduct
2. Change in the CMPD media relations policy to tighter disclosure of information
3. Legislation or case decisions mandating tighter restriction on disclosure of information
4. CMPD implements electronic record management system significantly expediting the flow of disclosable information
5. CMPD implements encryption technology reducing the media's ability to live broadcast in-progress incidents

The NGT panel determined the significance of impact of each of the top five events on a relative scale of 1 to 10, with a rating of 10 indicating the most significant impact on the issue should the event occur. The impact was measured using the assumption that the CMPD does not change or modify its media relations policies, procedures, or practices during the next 5 years. Next the NGT panel assigned an approximate probability as to the likelihood that each event could occur sometime during the next 5 years using a scale of 0% to 100%, with 100% indicating the event would absolutely occur. After assessing the

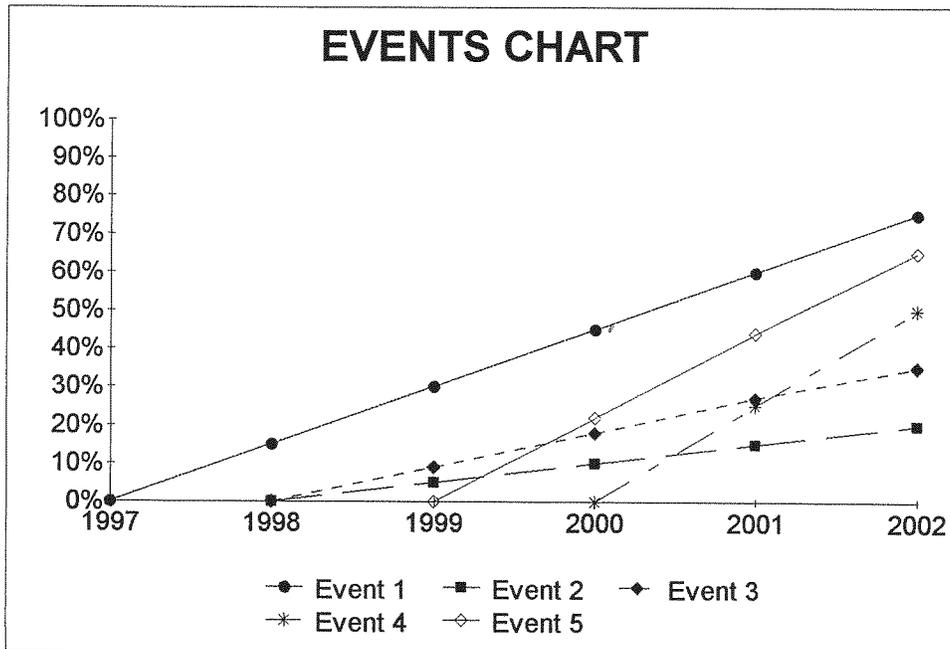
probability, the NGT panel determined the first date that the event could possibly occur. Event 3, for example, pertains to new legislation which could not take place before 1998 as that is the duration required for the bill to be introduced into the legislative process and enacted as law.

Finally the NGT panel evaluated what type of impact - positive / neutral / negative - the event would have, assuming it in fact occurred, on the CMPD's media relations in providing information to meet the community's needs. As an example, Event 1 was identified as having the highest probability of occurrence (75%) as well as the highest impact (9) on the CMPD's media relations. The NGT panel stated that the impact would be negative on the CMPD as the lengthy media scrutiny and exposure could cause significant damage to the image of the CMPD and consequentially erode the trust and confidence of the community in the CMPD's ability to enforce the law without needlessly or recklessly endangering its citizens.

The Events Summary Table tabulates the top five identified events.

| EVENTS SUMMARY TABLE | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Event Ranked by Descending Significance | Year Event Could First Occur | Probability Event Could Occur by 2002 | Amount of Impact on Issue 10 = high 1 = low | Type of Impact on Issue + 0 - |
| Event 1 Critical Incident | Day 1 1997 | 75% | 9 | - |
| Event 2 New Management Philosophy Restricting Disclosure | Year 1 1998 | 20% | 8 | - |
| Event 3 New Law Restricting Disclosure | Year 1 1998 | 35% | 7 | - |
| Event 4 CMPD Implements New Technology to Expedite Information Dissemination | Year 3 2000 | 50% | 7 | + |
| Event 5 CMPD Implements New Technology to Encrypt Radio Transmissions | Year 2 1999 | 65% | 5 | + / - |
| Note: The impact of these events on CMPD is forecasted assuming that CMPD maintains its current media relations practices through the year 2002 | | | | |

The Events Chart graphically represents the increasing probability over time of each event occurring and the first time each event could possibly occur.



Discussion of trends:

Each of the following five top trends are discussed here for further clarification:

Trend 1 (Media Technology)

The media will have an increasing level of technology available to cover news events faster and to greater audiences

The NGT panel identified several areas in which technology will increase the ability of the news media to cover police-related stories. A trend which first emerged several years ago is the proliferation of home video cameras to supply video footage of events that were not captured by the media. One of the most notable and visible technological advances is the capability of covering incidents live with helicopter cameras. This live coverage of visually compelling events was demonstrated with the OJ Simpson pursuit and the North Hollywood bank robbery shootout. With satellite uplinks live coverage can be broadcast to wide audiences, in some cases nationally and internationally. Such an example is the broadcast of the Heaven's Gate mass suicide in San Diego county. Potentially the largest increasing technological advance is the on-line Internet capability. This technological advance has also been widely discussed by others in addition to the NGT panelists.¹

On-line news services can provide 24-hour instant access to news to an audience unlimited by geographic boundaries. The instant access of on-line news services make them viable competition for traditional print media which usually circulate on a next day basis. In fact on-line news services also have a competitive edge over traditional TV news which only broadcasts at set time slots. On-line Internet capabilities also provide an opportunity for law enforcement agencies to utilize the Internet themselves to disseminate information via

the agency's web page. The advantage of law enforcement becoming a news service itself is that the agency can present all the information it chooses without filtering, editing, or unwanted viewpoints. This could be especially advantageous in the event of a controversial incident. In an effort to educate the public rather than sensationalize as may be the case with the media, the law enforcement agency can present its version of the incident, explain why the incident occurred as it did and what actions will be taken next . The CMPD can also accomplish this with a lesser audience through the use of the City-operated local access TV. A countertrend limiting the use of technology may emerge, however, as privacy issues are raised and litigated. A number of professionals in the media and legal fields have echoed this identification of a countertrend surrounding privacy issues.²

Trend 2 (Disclosure of Information)

The demand for disclosure of information related to law enforcement and public safety will continue to increase

The public's thirst for information of all kinds applies to law enforcement issues as well. Part of this thirst is driven by the increases in technology such as cable TV and the Internet. This technology has created an ever-growing expectation that more and more information be made available faster and faster. Corroborating this assertion by the NGT panel, Willis has identified this trend and coined the term "turbonews" to describe the ever increasing rapidity of information gathering and dissemination.³ There also is a continuance of the trend of increasing interest in law enforcement matters. As evidence, consider the popularity of police-related shows recording actual events of police work such as "Cops" and "LAPD: Life on the Beat." Another example of the desire for more

crime-related information is found in the support for and interest in obtaining information of sexual offenders through Megan's Law. In fact the NGT panel suggested the possibility that public demand for more information may extend to making available similar information regarding offenders of other types of crime. This perceived demand by the public for ever increasing amounts of information of police related matters fuels competition among the different news sources to provide even more such news in a sensationalized manner which spawns yet even greater public interest and demand.

The NGT panel noted the potential for countertrends on restrictions of the amount of information disclosed. One area may be a backlash either by grassroots political means or by legal action against Megan's Law (or similar disclosure laws in the future regarding other crimes) by those who feel the sex offenders are being unfairly ostracized and punished. Another manifestation of this countertrend is evidenced by the fact that some news agencies have placed self-imposed restrictions on the number of crime related stories that are printed or broadcasted daily. Spaeth mirrors this identification of a countertrend by the NGT panel, contending that any news agency lacking such self-imposed restrictions does so to their own detriment.⁴ Another arena in which restrictions on police-related information are being sought is the effort of police unions to limit the amount and scope of personal information disclosed about individual officers. The NGT panel stated that any of these potential movements towards restricting disclosure will be met with legal challenges by media.

Trend 3 (Community Involvement in Local Government / Law Enforcement)

The community is demanding a greater voice in all aspects of local government including law enforcement

The NGT panel indicated that the community of Costa Mesa has shown a trend towards increasing demand for involvement in the activities of the City government. This involvement has extended to the CMPD in that community members increasingly request to be involved with matters of policy making, budgetary considerations, quality of life issues, and accountability of officers' actions. To a degree, the CMPD has encouraged greater involvement through such programs as the citizens' academy and in Community Oriented Policing. The NGT panel noted that intertwined with this trend is the growing interest by the public at a national as well as local level regarding the activities of law enforcement. This is again demonstrated by the interest in TV shows such as "Cops" and in the large viewership of the Rodney King and O.J. Simpson trials. As a result, the public in general is becoming more knowledgeable of police procedures and is more likely to speak out concerning police actions. This is evidenced in the increased litigation against law enforcement and calls for greater accountability.

Trend 4 (Law Enforcement Image)

The image of law enforcement is steadily increasing in a positive direction

The image of law enforcement in general reached a low point five years ago in the aftermath of the Rodney King incident and ensuing civil disturbances. The image of Southern California law enforcement was further tarnished in the wake of the O.J. Simpson trial and the beating incident of undocumented aliens by Riverside County Sheriff deputies. According to the panel, all Southern California law enforcement agencies, including the CMPD, were painted with this broad brush. From this low point, Southern

California law enforcement has been slowly rebuilding a positive public image through multi-faceted enhancement efforts. Some efforts are mandated as in increased training in subject matters such as cultural awareness and ethnic diversity. Another is the public discourse of the Christopher Commission Report. A third effort is the continuing shift in philosophies toward Community Oriented Policing to establish partnerships to build trust and confidence. Outreach programs like citizen academies have supplemented existing programs such as DARE, Neighborhood Watch, and bike patrols as ways to enhance the law enforcement image through interaction with the community. The NGT panel stated that the public now has greater expectations of accountability for law enforcement. First, the public has a higher expectation that the conduct and performance of officers at all levels be more professional. As noted in trend 3, the public is more aware of the standards to be expected and is demanding through involvement with local government that the standards be met. An unintended consequence is that psychologically and emotionally officers may react by withdrawing from becoming involved in any high profile incident due to these increased expectations coupled with the greater potential for media exposure. This could generate a force countering the trend towards enhanced law enforcement image. Another potential force countering this trend of increasing positive law enforcement image is the lack of funding to meet these higher expectations of the public. Friction could be especially acute when the public's expectation of law enforcement technology, such DNA testing, is unaffordable on all cases. Concerning the media, the NGT panel stated the public is increasingly expecting a more professional performance from the agency's PIO both in terms of appearance and in content of the information delivered. Professional use of the media is obviously the single most powerful mechanism to influence the public's image of law enforcement.

Trend 5 (Fear due to the perception of crime)

The public in general has a fear based on the perception that crime is worsening

Despite the fact that statistically the crime rates have been decreasing in almost all categories, there is an increasing elevation in the level of fear about crime as perceived by the community. Most notable is the perception that violent crime is on the rise. This fear is largely fueled by the constant media coverage of crime stories, especially those involving violence. Much of this coverage is sensationalized, adding to the fear level. The anticipation of the increase in the near future of the teenager male population, which historically has been perceived by the community as being among the top age groups for committing violent crime, is another contributing factor to the fear level. The lack of complete, accurate, and timely information about crime statistics is possibly a contributing factor; this assumes that such information will counterbalance the sensationalism of some media coverage of crime. Reluctance on the part of top law enforcement officials to fully release crime statistics is understandable in that the information could lead to greater fear if not placed in proper context. Supporting this statement by the NGT panel, Slaughter claims that improper framing of crime-related information significantly contributes to widespread fear of crime on a national scale.⁵ There exists a reluctance also on the part of some victims to release crime information. For example, banks, jewelry stores, and high tech firms object to the public disclosure of the amount of their loss as it may indicate a vulnerability for future thefts, and real estate and retail establishments fear potential loss of future business. Reacting to the perception of rising crime, the community is increasingly taking security measures on their own to protect themselves and their property. Another

response by the community has been to become increasingly involved with the police department in an effort to “take back our streets.”

Discussion of events:

Each of the following five top events are discussed here for further clarification:

NOTE: The impact of all five events on the Costa Mesa Police Department is forecasted assuming that the Police Department maintains its current media relations practices unchanged through the year 2002.

Event 1 (Questionable Critical Incident)

A critical incident occurs in Costa Mesa, such as an officer-involved shooting, pursuit, or use of force, that in the public’s eye is considered to be questionable as to the policy, legality, or ethics involved with his conduct

The NGT panel selected this event as the most probable that could occur over the next five years impacting media relations. The panel determined the impact to be significant because such an event could likely result in death or injury, costly litigation, and public outcry with the potential consequences of enormous negative publicity aimed at the City, the police department and the officer through intense media exposure. This event could occur at anytime from today through the year 2002.

This event is impacted by the trends of increased technology of the media to cover the event (trend 1), increased demand by the public and the media for more disclosure of

information (trend 2), increased demand for accountability by an involved community (trend 3), and increased scrutiny of law enforcement's image (trend 4).

Event 2 (Policy of greater restriction on disclosure)

A policy is instituted either by the City Council, City Manager, or Chief of Police mandating tighter restrictions on the type and amount of information allowed to be disclosed to the community via the media

This event was determined to have a high negative impact as the reaction from the media and the community would be very unfavorable. However, the probability of this event is low in that there currently exists an attitude of relative openness with the media from the City Council, City Manager and Chief of Police. A policy of tighter information disclosure is conceivable with a change of top City officials through elections or retirements if the new management adopted a pro-privacy agenda, feared potential litigation, reacted to an overbearing press, or calculatingly responded to mitigate the fear associated with the perception of crime in the community (trend 5). The first time of possible occurrence was set at 1998 as that would be the earliest date for retirements or a new Council through elections.

This event would run counter to the trends of the media's and public's demand for more disclosure of information (trend 2), the increasing demand for information by an increasingly involved community (trend 3), and the efforts by law enforcement to use the media to enhance its professional image (trend 4).

Event 3 (New Law Restricting Disclosure)

New legislation or landmark case decisions mandate the tighter restrictions of the disclosure of information to the public via the media

This event is similar in its negative impact as event 2 only this is externally driven and largely outside the ability of the City of Costa Mesa to influence. The panel assigned a relatively low probability for occurrence as the trend nationwide is decidedly towards greater disclosure of information. Backlash to the increasing intrusiveness of the press and modern technology (trend 1) could conceivably drive this event. The earliest this event could occur is in 1998 given the duration of time required to enact new legislation.

As noted in event 2, this event is impacted by trends 2,3, and 4.

Event 4 (CMPD Electronic Record Management System)

The Costa Mesa Police Department implements electronic records management technology greatly expediting the time for disseminating information to the media and the community

The records management system envisioned in this event entails existing and emerging commercial technology to greatly accelerate the gathering, reporting and subsequent disseminating of information to the media and community. The technology could include voice recognition dictation systems and lap top personal computers for use by field

officers. The PC's could have pre-formatted crime report forms and grammar / spelling check features to expedite report writing in the field. The report could then be electronically transferred to the supervisor's PC for immediate correction. Upon approval, the program would redact or eliminate confidential information (e.g. name of rape victim or juvenile subject) and then at the discretion of the supervisor the report could be instantaneously transferred to the CMPD media web site for access by the media and community. Not only does this system expedite the report writing and approval process, but it also reduces the delay in releasing the information to the media by eliminating the involvement of the PIO on routine press matters.

Studies presently underway to assess the information management needs City-wide project an implementation date for this or similar technology as early as the year 2000. The impact of this event was rated as being positive because it significantly meets the information needs of the media and community in an accurate, complete and timely manner.

This event has a cross impact with the increasing technology of the media to be able to interface with this law enforcement technology (trend 1), the increasing demand of disclosure by the media (trend 2), the increasing demand of necessary information for an involved community (trend 3), and the increasingly positive image of the CMPD as a progressive and open law enforcement agency (trend 4).

Event 5 (CMPD Implements Encryption Technology)

For security reasons the Costa Mesa Police Department implements technology which encrypts or encodes radio transmissions, and as a consequence the media is unable to monitor in-progress incidents

This event is predicated on the county-wide plan to switch public safety radio frequencies to the 800 MHz bandwidth within next 1 to 1 and 1/2 years. A component of this plan is the potential to encrypt police radio transmissions. The media would lose one of their primary sources of becoming aware of in-progress incidents, reducing the ability to obtain live coverage. The NGT panel assessed the probability of encryption at about 65%. This reflects an uncertainty of several factors. First, the 800 MHz plan is contingent on funding and county-wide agreement. Second, the plan may opt against the encryption feature. Third, as with all technology, it is possible new technology may be developed to thwart the encryption allowing media to continue scanning police radio traffic. The NGT panel perceived both positive and negative impacts if encryption became a reality. From the standpoint of the media and to a lesser extent the community, encryption would have a negative impact with the reduction in live coverage of sensational and often entertaining incidents. The assertion by the NGT panel that these incidents are often entertaining is reflected in the remarks by Greenfield stating that all too often entertainment is the only value derived by the public, with no regard to any important underlying societal issues.⁶ From the law enforcement viewpoint, encryption is positive in that live coverage often poses tactical hazards to officers and possibly victims as in the case of hostages. The contention from law enforcement is that the information needs of the community are adequately served by disseminating the information about the incident once it is safely resolved.

This event is cross impacted by the trends of more new technology available to the media which could potentially decode the encrypted transmissions (trend 1), of the increasing demand of information, especially the gripping visual images of live coverage (trend 2),

and of the increasing demand for more accountability by the involved community of its officers in high profile incidents (trend 3).

SCENARIO:

The five events discussed above forecasted potential negative impacts on the Costa Mesa Police Department assuming that no change was made in the current status of media relations. The following scenario describes a desired and attainable future that could be realized through proper strategic planning and transition management:

Sgt. Jones listened as the juvenile arrestee explained how he always carried his miniaturized TV and police scanner whenever he committed robberies in case he was interrupted in progress. That way he could listen in on the officers as they coordinated their response over the radio. Or if the press started broadcasting the situation live, he could anticipate the cops' actions and hopefully avoid detection and escape. The juvenile had just robbed an all night convenience store, but crashed while attempting to evade officers in a stolen car. When he tried to run away on foot, patrol officers quickly established a perimeter and apprehended him. Sgt. Jones remarked to himself how easy the perimeter had been to control. "Ah, yes," Sgt. Jones thought, "no press- that's why it had been easy." With the newly implemented technology of radio encryption, the media had never become aware of the in-progress robbery, the pursuit, the crash, and the search. "No one distracting me by asking endless questions or risking my officers' lives by televising our tactics live. This technology is worth its weight in gold." Now that the incident was safely resolved, Sgt. Jones turned his attention to Officer Brown who was assigned to take the preliminary report. Officer Brown said "This shouldn't take long, Sarge," as he sat down with his lap top PC with the pre-formatted word processing program and grammar /

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spelling check features. In a matter of minutes Ofc Brown completed his report and electronically transferred it to Sgt. Jones' PC for approval. Sgt. Jones made a few minor corrections, then activated the software to format the information for the media. This program automatically removed all confidential information, such as the name of the juvenile arrestee. When he was confident that the information was ready to be released, Sgt. Jones sent the information via satellite to all the local media for their instant access. Sgt. Jones decided to send it to the CMPD information release web page on the Internet as well so that community members could be informed directly. Sgt. Jones remembered how it used to be just a short while ago before the department implemented this paperless records management technology. Before, friction always arose due to the delays in handwriting or typing reports, approving them, and submitting them to the Records Bureau to eventually arrive on the desk of the PIO one, or two, or even three days later; at which point the media could receive the basic story. He recalled the hard feelings when one news agency got more information earlier than another and would pitch a beef to the Chief. Sgt. Jones remembered his own bad experiences when he had been misquoted; in fact, he started telling the press "nothing going on - it's been a quiet night," in spite of the occurrence of some interesting and newsworthy incidents. Even a salty veteran like Sgt. Jones now had some sympathy for reporters after the mutual "writealong / ridealong" training with a reporter from the daily paper. He had to admit that he better understood the pressures created by the intense competition among the multitude of different news sources. Sgt. Jones also finally understood the pressures placed on reporters to get scoops and meet deadlines when his "writealong / ridealong" reporter explained that editors are just like lieutenants- they've been out of the field too long and don't realize they are always demanding the impossible.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

The strategic planning consists of WOTS-UP analysis, stakeholder identification, and strategy development.

WOTS UP Analysis

In this first segment of the WOTS UP (Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats, and Strengths) analysis, the threats and opportunities posed to the CMPD regarding media relations are examined.

Trend 1 (Media Technology)

The media will have an increasing level of technology available to cover news events faster and to greater audiences.

Opportunities:

- community's demand for timely information met
- assistance in emergency broadcast or assistance requests to community
- live coverage of good police work to enhance image
- education of community to difficulties, complexities, limitations facing police
- reduction of labor involved through mass dissemination of information

Threats:

- live coverage of embarrassing conduct, increased liability exposure
- overly cautious officers avoiding high liability incidents
- officer safety / victim safety at risk in live coverage

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- control of media is labor intensive during in-progress incident
- exposure of sensitive information jeopardizing investigation
- rush by audiences to pass judgment of guilt based on sensational coverage
- poor PIO showing if not prepared for live unrehearsed interview
- poor showing if officer refuses to give interview
- poor showing if officer illegally restricts the media from disaster scene

Trend 2 (Disclosure of Information)

The demand for disclosure of information related to law enforcement and public safety will continue to increase

Opportunities:

- receptive audience for crime warnings, prevention tips
- community takes some responsibility to protect selves such as Megan's Law
- education of community as to concerns of CMPD
- sense of accountability instilled by officers due to exposure

Threats:

- friction created when CMPD won't release information
- sensitive information may get discovered and released against desires of CMPD
- in progress call creates safety risks for officers and victims
- in progress call creates crowd / media control problem
- costly litigation over disclosure issues
- risk avoidance by officers due to high exposure

Trend 3 (Community Involvement in Local Government / Law Enforcement)

The community is demanding a greater voice in all aspects of local government including law enforcement

Opportunities:

- greater education potential concerning CMPD issues
- greater support financially for programs
- community takes steps to help solve common issues POP/COP partnership

Threats:

- greater demands for accountability creates conflict
- risk avoidance by officer worsens morale, crime problems
- special interest groups push forward political agendas
- embarrassment of CMPD in poorly handled incident

Trend 4 (Law Enforcement Image)

The image of law enforcement is steadily increasing in a positive direction.

Opportunities:

- use media to market good police work
- use media to market officers as human beings to develop rapport
- build morale of officers, instill sense of pride to combat risk avoidance
- build partnership for POP /COP

Threats:

- greater expectations, more demands on CMPD resources
- viewed as self serving , undermines trust
- media becomes suspicious of losing unbiased, watchdog perspective
- greater amount of exposure provides greater chance of mishap
- CMPD too concerned about appearances, no real substance to changes

Trend 5 (Fear due to the perception of crime)

The public in general has a fear based on the perception that crime is worsening.

Opportunities:

- use media to educate community to actual crime problem
- build POP/ COP partnership to reduce fear
- crime analysis technology allows specific information release
- build support for programs, financial backing

Threats:

- disparate information releases among different police departments
- hurts businesses, real estate values
- creates hysteria when high profile case occurs
- creates distrust in ability of police to combat crime

The second segment of the WOTS UP analysis is the evaluation of strengths and weaknesses within the CMPD to implement a media relations strategy. The methodology used was brainstorming sessions with a diagonal cross section of the organization including rank and file, management, sworn and non-sworn personnel from all divisions within the department.

Strengths:

- financial status for the City of Costa Mesa is well funded
- feasibility studies of record management technology currently underway
- Chief of Police / City Manager support open media relations policy
- single source PIO to coordinate, build rapport with media

Weaknesses:

- new technology untested
- prevailing distrust or disinterest in media by many supervisors
- inconsistent history of strategic planning, transition management in general

The third segment of the strategic planning was to identify the stakeholders. Stakeholders are defined as any person or organization that can influence or will be influenced by the issue. The following stakeholders were identified with a brief explanation of the issues surrounding each:

Stakeholders Identification:

Chief

- support from top necessary for success of any program or change
- sets tone for a policy of open media relations
- political nature of position requires good press to survive
- main actor in gaining financial support from City

Local Media

- cooperative effort helps get daily stories more easily
- watchdog, unbiased, balanced reporting
- driven by public thirst for crime-related information
- conduit of important information to community
- can impact image of law enforcement
- concerned about encryption technology
- concerned about legislation or policy restricting disclosure
- timeliness of information is critical
- competitiveness with other news agencies

Field Supervisors / Watch Commanders

- concerned about officer safety risk in live coverage
- labor intensive to handle press during in progress incident
- afraid of repercussions for giving out wrong information
- often have incomplete information to disclose

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- not being aware of incident when inquiry is made
- embraced single source PIO to reduce workload

PIO

- will be responsible for majority of media relations policy writing
- will be responsible for majority of implementation of strategy
- rapport building with media rests mainly with PIO
- key actor in any mutual training
- participates in resolution of any dispute with media

Line officers

- distrust media, resentful of exposure
- appreciate positive media coverage about good police work
- defer press inquiries to supervisors

Civil libertarians

- fight for privacy issues against disclosure
- fight against restrictions to access to information
- use media against law enforcement to further their cause

Records Management

- research, procure, implement paperless technology

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- welcome any change in expediting information flow
- eager to reduce labor costs involved with processing reports

Community

- appreciate strategy that increases information dissemination
- favor methods giving greater accountability of CMPD
- rely heavily on media to learn about CMPD
- want to be able to trust CMPD, assurance of competence
- need information for effective POP / COP quality of life issues

City Manager / City Council /City Attorney

- want good media relations to promote image of City
as desirable, economically viable
- desire to avoid litigation resulting from disclosure of confidential
information, privacy challenges
- concerned about negative exposure for poor performance or
misconduct by officers

Police Officers Association

- could oppose any strategy which puts membership officers at
greater safety risk due to live coverage of in progress incidents
- could oppose any strategy which puts membership officers at greater
exposure to litigation for questionable performance or misconduct

The fourth segment of strategic planning is to develop strategies for implementation.

Strategies:

1. Implement paperless technology as part of planned computer upgrade
2. Develop and present training:
 - “Write along / ridealong” mutual training
 - field supervisors / Watch Commanders / detective supervisors
 - field officers
3. Develop policy with input from:
 - media
 - City Attorney
 - Chief
 - Records Management
 - POA
 - Watch Commanders / field supervisors
 - PIO
4. Create CMPD home page on City Internet web site for:
 - proactive unedited disclosures
 - opinion pieces
 - crime prevention and safety tips
 - requests for public assistance
 - crime warnings and crime statistics

5. Develop format with local access TV to provide same information as in strategy 4.

TRANSITION MANAGEMENT PLAN:

The purpose of the transition management plan is to facilitate the implementation of the strategic plan. A crucial component of the transition management plan is to identify and analyze the critical mass involved with the issue.

Critical mass is a term used to indicate those stakeholders whose active support is necessary to ensure successful implementation of the strategic plan. Regarding the strategic implementation of technology, the following stakeholders must be analyzed as to their commitment and responsibility in fulfilling the strategic plan:

Chief:

The Chief is a key actor in that his active support is important in securing the necessary funds for the software and hardware, and political support needed to ensure that the concept is carried out.

Management Information Systems personnel

The Records management and technical support personnel are needed to make sure that conceptually compatible hardware and software are

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properly acquired and installed. Also, due to the technological nature, the records management personnel will be needed for the initial training concerning the gathering, approving and dissemination of information. Personnel to be trained include the reporting field personnel, Records Bureau personnel, field supervisors / Watch Commanders and the PIO.

Media

The media need to understand and be willing to utilize the available technology to interface with the police department's new technology. This will require some very basic training, probably conducted by the PIO, to show the media how to access the information as well as the advantages for them to use this vehicle to obtain information.

PIO

The PIO must be committed to the entire concept as he is the most direct link to the media on a constant basis. He also is the liaison to the supervisors and Watch commanders to negotiate any conflicts or friction that may develop with the media during the transition.

BUDGETARY / FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS:

The element of the strategy plan requiring the greatest budgetary consideration is the expense of the technology for a paperless records management system. Fortunately for the CMPD, the City Manager has shown the foresight to institute a master plan to assess and develop a strategy to provide in the near future to upgrade the telecommunications and computer information systems City-wide. Funding has been allocated for this major

project. It is imperative that the technical needs for this media strategy are presented and incorporated at the ground floor of the master plan.

Funding needs for the remaining objectives in the strategy are minimal. The mutual training between the media and the appropriate police personnel is essentially on-the-job training. The content of the training can be very effectively delivered by facilitated exchanges of ideas and concerns between police and local media personnel.

Funding for the Internet home page is minimal (nominal monthly charge to service provider) as the intent is to use the existing City of Costa Mesa web site. The local access TV is employed by the City and therefore any information programming is on-duty time for both TV and police personnel.

FOLLOW UP EVALUATIONS:

To ensure that the strategic plan and transition management plan are being effectively implemented, it is important to evaluate the process at crucial checkpoints. The ultimate indicator of viability is whether or not the media is delivering sufficient and timely information to the community. One measurement tool is the monitoring of the media's product to assess the content, volume, and timeliness of their broadcasts and newspapers. Another meaningful evaluative process is to conduct periodic meetings with representatives of the various local media to discuss in an open dialogue the successes, failures, and possible corrective measures to ensure the strategic plan is on track.

LEADERSHIP IMPLICATIONS:

The first and foremost implication for leadership is to embrace the concept of being futuristic in thinking. To be futuristic, one must start in the present by being willing to realistically and honestly assess the current status. The “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” paradigm must be broken. Courage and determination are required anytime the organizational culture is challenged. Trailblazing into new territories of technology and of social and political interaction necessitates the ability and strength to work in an atmosphere of turbulence. The critical role for leadership is envisioning what the future could be and then enthusiastically conveying that vision to the organization as a desirable and attainable future. Leadership must clearly communicate that striving for this future is founded in the values of the organization and is in the spirit of the department’s mission statement.

Here the vision is not just improving the current media relations practices, but taking media relations to a entirely new level. The fundamental belief is that to sustain mutual vitality the police department and the community must create open lines of communication in the sharing of information .

Third, leadership should perceive its role as a facilitator, fostering a sense of teamwork and inclusiveness from the beginning conceptualization stages through the planning and implementation stages. A willingness to take risks and a tolerance of failures must pervade the entire process to stimulate and maximize the innovative and creative talents of the teams. The celebration of small wins early in the process will champion the commitment to this cause by all hands. Finally, once the media relations reaches the desired level of

success, leadership must take up the duty to commence the entire process all over again to strive for yet a higher level.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Concluding this futures study are two recommendations for the leadership of the CMPD:

In light of the trends and events forecasting and scenario developing of this futures study, the CMPD needs to acknowledge that simply maintaining the status quo for media relations will not adequately meet the demands of the future. This first recommendation, then, is for the CMPD to formally recognize that the accurate, complete, and timely sharing of information with the community through the media is an imperative.

Based on the WOTS UP analysis, the stakeholders analysis, and the budgetary considerations, the CMPD leadership should recognize the unique ability at this point in the department's history to capitalize on the present opportunities to effect a significant change in media relations. The second recommendation therefore is that CMPD actively move forward now as prescribed under the strategic plan and transition management plan to achieve the desired future of the next level of media relations to meet the information needs of the community.

ENDNOTES

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6. Greenfield, Meg. "Real-Life Mini-Series." Newsweek, June 2, 1997, p. 84.

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