

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY GROWTH ON THE STAFFING AND
STRUCTURE OF A MID-SIZED POLICE DEPARTMENT

Article

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There are a number of California law enforcement agencies that have experienced significant staffing changes in conjunction with increased community growth over the last two decades.¹ Some California cities are currently facing a crisis in their efforts to provide law enforcement services to their communities because there is a huge demand for thousands of new police officers to meet the needs of a constantly growing population.² It is anticipated that many California law enforcement agencies may be impacted by substantial growth in the future.

Renown futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler suggest that “when agencies begin to focus on the future, some questions naturally arise: . . .What new forms of organization will have to be created? How should forces be deployed?”³ It is with the specific intent of addressing these two questions in the context of increased community growth that two law enforcement administrators from Northern California agencies undertook a futures oriented project under the auspices of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training Command College. Although it was recognized that a number of issues can affect growth in a community and growth can affect a number of other community issues, the scope of their project was limited to the impact of increased community growth on the organizational structure and staffing resources of a medium-sized municipal police department in the future.

¹Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, *Employment Data for California Law Enforcement, 1978-1998*.

²Rob Dailey, “The Competition For Cops,” *Western City* (June 1999), 21.

³Alvin Toffler, Heidi Toffler, “The Future of Law Enforcement: Dangerous and

The Project

A hypothetical model, “Central City,” was created for the project. The model was based upon the police department in Chico, California, where the population has increased an average of nearly 4 percent for each of the last twenty years and where major growth, primarily through annexation, is projected to continue during the next few years.⁴ Aspects of the City of Redding, California and its police department were included in the model as well. Redding is in close proximity to Chico, and the City and its Police Department have also experienced substantial growth in the last twenty five years.

The project included an examination of the issue through a review of the literature and interviews with subject matter experts. Literature reviewed included statistical employment data which helped to identify municipal police departments in California that have experienced substantial growth in short periods of time. It also covered data related to police department staffing levels on the state and national levels, local data that provided a historical perspective on population and police department staffing, sources that discussed future issues in policing, and sources that related to future aspects of the business world and business organizations in general. Interviews with subject matter experts included discussions with representatives of some of the law enforcement agencies that were determined to have experienced significant growth, as well as two city administrators. A futures forecasting exercise, the Nominal Group Technique, was also included and utilized to forecast trends and events that could impact the issue.

Based upon the literature review, the interviews with experts, and the trends and events

Different, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* (January 1990), 5.

⁴City of Chico, General Plan, 1992, 3.1.

identified in the futures forecasting exercise, three scenarios, each reflective of a possible future, were developed. A most probable scenario was selected and became the focus for development of a strategic plan.

The Literature

It was consistently noted that organizations of the future, including police departments, will be flat, lean, flexible, and decentralized, with responsibility and accountability being pushed to the lowest levels.^{5,6,7} With regard to police organizations specifically, in addition to the continued existence of dedicated patrol officers who are recognized as “the backbone of the department,” there will be a continuing need for specialization in assignments to address unique or time consuming police problems.^{8,9,10,11} The integration of the Community Oriented Policing/Problem Solving (COPPS) philosophy into the way police departments conduct business will enhance the overall efficiency of services provided and promote community support of law enforcement, but there will still be a need for law enforcement agencies to engage

⁵Michael L. Birzer, “Police Supervision in the 21st Century,” *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* (June 1996), 1.

⁶Yvonne C. Turner, “Decentralizing the Specialized Unit Function in Small Police Agencies,” *The Police Chief* (February 2000), 50.

⁷Joseph H. Boyett and Henry P. Conn, *Workplace 2000* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 156.

⁸Neil C. Chamelin, Vernon B. Fox and Paul M. Whisenand, *Introduction to Criminal Justice, 2nd Edition* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1979), 95.

⁹*Ibid.*, 122-123.

¹⁰Andrew J. Harvey, “Building An Organizational Foundation For the Future,” *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* (November 1996), 2.

¹¹Turner, 50.

in planning efforts to meet staffing needs.¹²

One issue that may affect staffing needs for police departments is population growth.¹³ It has been concluded that an increase in population will result in additional calls for service, and additional calls for service will result in a need for additional police personnel.¹⁴ Another issue that can affect police staffing levels is the degree to which technology has been integrated into a particular organization. There is one school of thought that technology will assist in making organizations leaner and flatter, while another is that technology will have little influence on staffing levels.^{15,16}

Regardless of the issues that can affect staffing, there must at some point be a decision made relative to how many additional personnel will be added to an organization. It will be necessary to view new and/or existing staff in terms of some unit of measure. The most traditional method is to view staff in relation to community population on a per capita basis.¹⁷ Data from several sources indicates that there a number of different staffing ratios that could be utilized to project future staffing scenarios for a police department.

¹²California Office of the Attorney General, *Violence Prevention: A Vision of Hope* (Sacramento: Office of the Attorney General, 1995), 65.

¹³N.F. Iannone, *Supervision of Police Personnel*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), 128-130.

¹⁴POST Command College, "What Impact Will Rapid Population Influx Have on Rural Law Enforcement Agencies by the Year 2001?" prepared by Robert C. Carden, July 1996, 5-8.

¹⁵Peter S. DeLisi, "Lessons from the Steel Axe: Culture, Technology and Organizational Change," *Sloan Management Review* (Fall 1990), 88.

¹⁶Harvey, 2-3.

¹⁷Edward P. Ammann and Jim Hey, "Establishing Agency Personnel Levels," *FBI Law*

The Experts

The researchers in this futures study spoke informally with three law enforcement administrators and two city administrators regarding community growth and police department staffing issues. It was the perspective of the law enforcement administrators that funding for additional police department positions was difficult to secure, that as departments add personnel it is critical to maintain standards, and most importantly, that staffing levels and goals should be based upon a predetermined and agreed upon officer-per-population ratio. Conversely, it was the perspective of the city administrators that community growth through annexation has great potential to stretch the city's resources, and that staffing increases in police departments should be based upon need, rather than a per population ratio.

Futures Forecasting

A group was convened by the researchers to forecast issues that could potentially impact a police department's response to growth in the area of staffing. Utilizing a formal and directed process known as the Nominal Group Technique, the group was asked to brainstorm and compile lists of trends and events and to pare the lists down to the top six of each. As a result of the process, the following six trends were identified by the group: changing population demographics, cost of technology, global economy, tax revenue, quantity of qualified applicants and quality of life. Also, the following six events were identified: less tax revenue, mandated 3 percent at age 50 retirement package, city council elections, unfunded mandate, the arrival of a large industry in the city, and a large annexation. The top six trends and events were discussed by the group, and eventually the information gathered was used by the researchers in formulating

Enforcement Bulletin (July 1986), 17-20.

possible future scenarios.

The Scenarios

Once the researchers completed their review of the literature, the informal interviews and the futures forecasting exercise, they developed three scenarios, each of which illustrated a possible future that related the potential impact of community growth on the staffing and organizational structure of a police department. One scenario was characterized as a best case scenario, another as a worst case scenario, and the last as the most probable scenario. The most probable scenario is as follows:

Chief Katie Denim is excited about the prospects that the upcoming year might hold for the Central City Police Department. Although she is a young Chief, she has already distinguished herself with her accomplishments. Of particular note is her ability to view circumstances related to her Department with careful and reasoned realism. She had been selected for this position by the new City Council because they believed she would be able to successfully maneuver the Department through a variety of adversities they anticipated would occur in the near future. The City Council trusted her and knew she would do the right thing.

The quality of life in Central City has been consistently good for decades. Community support for the Police Department and local government has been consistently high for years. Like other municipalities, Central City has to very carefully plan its budget each year, but the stable economy makes this relatively easy. The city enjoyed about 25 percent growth during the last five years through a planned balance of annexation and commercial and residential development. There has been a slight increase in sales tax revenues for each of the last five years, and this allowed the City to conservatively expand its services.

As far as the Police Department is concerned, Chief Denim has been able to maintain an acceptable level of service to the public. Although the geographical service area of the Department has grown, the Chief has made adjustments to the beat structure to accommodate the growth. Even though the economy and Central City's overall fiscal picture has been good, the Police Department has been unable to add positions in direct proportion to the population growth in the city. Specialized programs have been maintained, but it has been necessary to justify them every year to the City Manager and the Council. Grant opportunities, however, have allowed the Department to add personnel in some specialized areas. The Department has also been able to acquire a few additional general fund positions, but only enough to provide additional patrol coverage during peak periods. Full integration of the COPPS philosophy and an overall commitment to finding ways to work smarter rather than harder have resulted in a very efficiently run department.

Chief Denim entered her new position faced with, among other things, two unavailable police officer positions: one because an officer would be off work for six months due to a work related injury and the other due to the pregnancy of a police officer. Although the impact of these absences would be felt, temporary staffing adjustments were made to ensure that minimum coverage in patrol was maintained.

The City will make the Public Employee Retirement System 3 percent at age 50 retirement program available to public safety employees at the beginning of the new fiscal year, but the Chief does not anticipate being significantly impacted by the anticipated departure of only three of her officers. An active police officer eligibility list, with several viable experienced candidates, will remain in place through the end of the calendar year.

The new Chief is pleased with the prospects that lie ahead, and with the current personnel she has available for the upcoming tasks. Although she would like to acquire more resources for her Department, she will make the best use of what she has and is ready for the challenge. The City Manager and the Council have committed to a staffing-per-population formula, and, although they cannot guarantee funding for projected positions, they have assured the Chief it is one of their top priorities to stick with the formula.

The Chief is riding a wave of enthusiasm, and there are no sharks visible on the water surface.

The Plan

Following the identification of a hypothetical most probable scenario, or a desired future state, the researchers set out to develop a plan that could be utilized to take a police organization from its current state to that desired future state. The plan included a description of the Central City Police Department's present situation, and analysis of the Department's internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats (SWOT Analysis), an assessment of stakeholders and an overview of specific strategies that would be employed to make the most probable scenario a reality.

The Situation

The Central City Police Department (CCPD,) an imaginary department in the most likely scenario, is located in Central City is a city of approximately 55,000 which is situated in an urban area of approximately 95,000 in the middle of California's Northern Sacramento Valley. It is the largest city in the county, which has a population of approximately 202,000. The City is home to a California State University campus which has approximately 15,000 students, and

many of the 14,000 students from a nearby community college also reside in the city. Central City is considered by many to be a liberal community, and it is very diverse socio-economically speaking. The City is a charter city, and is governed by a seven member city council under the council/city manger form of government.

The Central City Police Department has been in existence since 1923. It is a full service law enforcement agency that subscribes to the COPPS philosophy, and is structured in a conventional bureaucratic hierarchy. The Department has 116 full-time employees, 75 of whom are sworn peace officers and 41 of whom are non-sworn, as well as a complement of nearly 200 part-time volunteers. The Department is organized into two divisions, Operations and Support, each of which are managed by a captain under the Office of the Chief of Police. The Operations Division consists of the Patrol, Traffic, and Community Outreach Sections. The Support Division consists of the Communications, Records, Animal Control, and Criminal Investigations Sections. Under the Criminal Investigations Section are the Detective and Youth Services Bureaus.

SWOT Analysis

The intent of the SWOT analysis was to identify internal strengths and weaknesses of and external threats and opportunities for the Central City Police Department that could impact the development of specific strategies. It was noted that the Department's strengths were primarily related to its high quality of personnel and services provided; it's weaknesses related generally to the inexperience of staff and employees in particular areas; opportunities related primarily to technology, grant and other funding, and potential community partnerships; and threats related to competition for grant funds, politics, and unfavorable views and attitudes toward law

enforcement.

Stakeholders

A number of individuals and groups were identified as stakeholders with regard to the issue. The researchers chose to view them from two different perspectives relative to the Police Department: internal and external. Internally, six groups were identified: administration/middle management, supervisors, officers, non-sworn personnel, the Peace Officer's Association, and volunteers. Externally, five individuals/groups were identified: city manager, city council, business community, citizens, and special interest groups. Of the identified stakeholders, the city manager, the chief of police and the peace officer's association were later identified as being most necessary for the strategic plan to be successful. This small group came to be known as the critical mass.

The Strategies

With consideration for the situation description, the SWOT analysis, and the stakeholder analysis, the researchers developed four specific strategies. When employed collectively, not only would they serve to help achieve the desired future state, but they would also help the Central City Police Department to keep its head above water should it find itself unable to keep up with population growth by increasing Department staffing. The strategies are: 1) Promote working smarter rather than harder as members of the Central City Police Department are called upon to do more with proportionately less resources. 2) Continue to encourage and reinforce the integration of the COPPS philosophy into the way business is conducted by the Central City Police Department. 3) Actively cultivate community support of the Police Department through community enhancement strategies, police-community partnerships, as well as COPPS related

activities. 4) Develop and promote the support of a Department staffing growth plan, which balances identified minimum acceptable staffing levels and a standard for increasing personnel based on a per-thousand population ratio with the demonstrated needs of the community.

The Transition

The researchers posited that of those in the critical mass, the chief of police would be most essential to the successful implementation of the identified strategies, and should assume the lead role in the transition of the hypothetical organization from the current state to the desired future state. As essentially the middleman between the city manager and the peace officer's association, the chief is in the perfect position to influence both. Through communication of the vision of the desired state and other educational efforts, through role modeling at various levels, and through recognizing and rewarding performance that reinforces aspects of the specific strategies and the desired future state, the hypothetical police organization would enjoy a successful transition.

The Conclusions

The short answer to the question about what impact community growth will have on the staffing resources and organizational structure of a medium-sized municipal police department in the future is that the department will have to add personnel and the impact on the structure will be minimal. However, almost immediately upon considering these answers, a number of other questions come to mind. How will the police department pay for additional staffing? What are the alternatives to traditional police department organizational structures? What other issues can impact the staffing levels and organizational structures of police departments? Although these questions are obviously not addressed in this article, they are certainly worthy of consideration.

It will be incumbent upon law enforcement leadership to ensure that law enforcement interests are addressed in the future. Through continued scanning of the environment, law enforcement leaders should recognize trends and anticipate events which could potentially influence the future of policing. Visionary leaders should develop alternative scenarios with consideration for the trend and event information. A most probable scenario should be selected, strategies for assisting an organization in reaching a beneficial result should be developed, and a plan to manage the transition of the organization from its present state to its desired state should be implemented.

Law enforcement leaders have a choice about the future of their profession. Leaders can wait for the future to happen, or they can make it happen. This project allowed the researchers to construct an outline of a growth plan for the future regarding the staffing and organizational structure of a medium-sized municipal police department, yet also has built in flexibility. Either way, there is a high level of confidence that if circumstances prove to be different than forecasted, law enforcement leaders will be better equipped to develop, propose, and implement an alternative response as a result of the Command College experience.

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