HOW WILL LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES TO ACCEPT CHANGE BY 2006?

Article

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Leading Through Change
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A world without change…definitely not this one. Change is occurring everywhere and law enforcement is no exception. If it is such a common phenomenon, one ought to know a lot about it. Wouldn’t you agree? Furthermore, leading an organization through change ought to be fairly easy as well, since change is so common. Wrong again. According to a recent article in the Harvard Business Review, entitled, “Cracking the Code of Change,” seventy percent of all change initiatives fail.¹ And yet, the ability to implement change is so important. In his book, Managing Transitions – Making the Most of Change, William Bridges says, “Change is the name of the game today, and organizations that can’t deal with it effectively aren’t likely to be around long.”²

Maybe since change isn’t so easy to lead an organization through, perhaps it would be best to start at ground zero. What is change? Well, it depends on whether one uses the word as a verb or a noun. Webster’s defines change when used as a verb as, “…to make different in some particular (way)…to replace with another…to undergo modification…to undergo transformation, transition, or substitution.”³

Change, used as a noun, is defined as, “…the act, process or result of changing…transformation… substitution.”⁴ Webster’s adds this further comment, “Change implies making either an essential difference often amounting to a loss of original identity or a substitution of one thing for another…”⁵ These definitions are important to keep in mind as this article unfolds.
Change involves both the doing of something new or different, as well as a process of getting from the one thing to the other. In fact, one author views the process as involving change and transition. Change being situational, like a new policy, and transition being the “psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation.” Both aspects involve people who may be leaders and/or followers.

Law enforcement, as a profession, is dealing with changes on many fronts. Some change is internal, like changing operating philosophies, service delivery systems, technologies, and worker expectations. On the other hand, some change is external, like community expectations, types of crimes, and laws. An important point to make is that there is change going on both internal and external to a law enforcement organization concurrently, and sometimes those changes compete against one another.

The challenge for a leader today, and in the future, will be how to implement change in an environment where there is a convergence of many other changes. An analogy might be dancing on a floor that is both moving laterally and horizontally as one moves across it. The trick is fluidly moving in sync with your partner in spite of the lateral and horizontal movement around you. As in the dance analogy, a leader getting his/her employees to follow and stay in sync can be challenging.

According to the book, *Enlightened Leadership*, this is where leaders and managers get into trouble. As leaders focus on making changes and involve their employees, empowerment and similar ways of motivating employees can be viewed as soft stuff that is much more difficult to get a handle on than numbers. And “It’s the soft stuff that is the hard stuff, but it’s the soft stuff that makes the difference.” Leaders, in
both the public and private sectors, are challenged to deal effectively with the soft stuff when making changes, and many are not successful.

When one has been affected by change others are trying to implement, or when one is in the role of a change agent, it does not take long to see that things don’t always go as hoped. The plan to be implemented may look easy and be very logical, but then something happens and a leader can find him/herself frustrated, others ready to revolt and the plan scrapped.

How can leaders, especially those in law enforcement, be more successful in implementing change? The key to success lies, in large part, in motivating employees to accept change. Obviously, some leaders are able to do this very successfully, while many others are not.

The very impetus for this project comes from the observation that change can be very difficult for an organization, especially during a time when many organizations are changing from a traditional law enforcement delivery system of rapid response and follow-up investigations to one that embraces the tenets of community policing. The harder part is getting employees to embrace these changes.

From a futures perspective, what kind of changes lie ahead that will impact a leader’s ability to motivate employees to accept change? A survey of the literature and a nominal group technique identified a number of things that will come into play.

- The introduction of the Net Generation, which will mean that there will be at least four generations working in many organizations.
• A continuing increase in the number of older employees who have retired from another career or simply want to continue working within their field beyond the normal retirement age.

• An increasing difficulty in retaining female employees.

• A more rapid rate of change due to technology and other changes in society.

• Continued growth in the following trends:
  ➢ The role of police is changing as a result of changing public expectations
  ➢ Organizational importance placed on outcomes and values
  ➢ Use of technology to perform the job
  ➢ Competing job availability

• There is a strong probability the following events could occur:
  ➢ Abuse of force occurs in local agency
  ➢ Legislation or mandates for employee standards to maintain employment
  ➢ Change in retirement system to accommodate mobility in and out of government
  ➢ Organization implements support systems to improve performance

These changes will impact the workforce in law enforcement organizations. Unless leaders are able to connect with employees, effective change will become more difficult, especially when remembering that seventy percent of change attempts currently fail.

Net Generation

A new generation of workers is just beginning to enter the work place. They are referred to, generally, as the Net Generation and represent people born between 1977 and
1997, so the oldest members of this group are twenty-three\(^8\) and ready to enter the law enforcement profession. This generation represents some eighty million people and will be the largest generation ever.\(^9\) The reason this group is called the Net Generation is that this is the first generation that has been raised with the Internet.\(^10\)

The Net Generation will be taking positions alongside Generation X employees, Baby Boomers and remaining members of the Veteran Generation. Generation X represents those people born between 1965 and 1976 and number about forty-four million. Baby Boomers represent those people born between 1946 and 1964 and represent some seventy-seven million.\(^11\) The Veteran Generation would take in those born between 1922 and 1943, and represent a sizeable percent of the workforce.\(^12\)

What are some anticipated characteristics about the Net Generation that a leader should know? They:

- Are comfortable with technology and the changes brought about by technology.
- Have a more global orientation, understanding the need for interconnectivity to the worldwide community.
- Have seen their parents cut from organizations due to downsizing, restructuring and the like. Hence, they have witnessed little company loyalty and realize that their training, skills and abilities are key to getting a job and determining a career path.
- Regard change and chaos as normal.\(^13\)

While this group is comfortable with change, companies should place more emphasis on teamwork and group performance. Leaders who act like they are an
authority on everything will turn off these employees. Rather, they respect people who have demonstrated expertise and knowledge. Since they don’t expect to spend a career with any one company, they don’t care about organizational rank, age or tenure. They are interested in participating in decision making, collaborating, and establishing interconnectivity with others. The work environment will be one that “requires flexibility, multitasking, the running of numerous projects or programs concurrently, and working with different people as they enter and leave the company.”14

This group knows more about major communication devices than most of their parents. Consequently, adults aren’t looked upon as the authorities on everything.15 This factor is unique in and of itself.

Charlene Marmer Soloman, in her article entitled, “Ready or not, Here Come the Net Kids,” says, “Trust their capabilities and their commitment; communicate with them; create opportunities for teamwork and entrepreneurship; and approach situations with mutuality.”16 She further adds that this group “would get frustrated by people in bureaucracies going through channels.”17

This generation expects to go through many different job changes, as well as five to eight different careers in their lifetime. Hence, they are attracted to jobs that will provide them training and experiences that will enhance their skills and abilities. They are strong advocates of lifelong learning.18

The leader of 2006 will have to learn to deal effectively with both the Net and X Generations, as well as the Baby Boomers and Veterans who are well entrenched. These four generations interacting in the workplace represent a challenge likened to “…a clash
of the generations, a collision of values, ambitions and mind-sets.” When it comes to change, one generation may be very comfortable, while another may be very resistant.

How a leader goes about motivating employees from each generation will determine in large part whether they are successful in implementing the change. Bob Filipczak, in his article, “It’s Just A Job – Generation X at Work,” makes this comment about Generation Xers, “If you ignore their differences and try to manage them according to your own mind-set, you risk more than constant conflict.” This comment makes a lot of sense when one is working with different people, especially those from four generations.

Older Employees

As the Baby Boomers age, the number of people fifty-five years old or older is increasing dramatically. Two other factors contributing to a larger population over fifty-five include increasing life expectancy and low birth rates during the seventies and eighties. These three factors, combined, have resulted in a population where nearly one-third are over fifty-five, while an estimated thirty-six percent are age thirty-four or younger.

A study of older workers found that they were staying or returning to work for various reasons. The reason most often cited was financial necessity. The second most common reason cited was emotional fulfillment. A survey by the American Association of Retired People (AARP) showed that eighty percent of Baby Boomers expected to work after retirement.
Increasingly, employers will be looking to retain or attract older workers. Deborah Russell, of AARP, is quoted as saying, “Knowing the demographics the way we do, the majority of the pool of workers available to choose from are going to be older workers.”

What are some things a leader should know about older workers? Dayton Fandray in his article entitled, “Gray Matters,” cites the following things leaders should keep in mind about older workers.

- Seventy-five percent of workers would rather reduce hours gradually than the traditional all-or-nothing sort of retirement.
- Flexibility in type of work, work space and work hours.
- Help them feel good about their contribution.
- Training to update skills was viewed as very important.
- Ongoing education and retraining was also cited as important to show them that their years of experience count for something.
- Use them as mentors, which demonstrates that their experience is valued and can be a real asset to younger employees, including those in leadership positions.
- Provide opportunities for older workers to do something meaningful.

These suggestions sound very similar to things that other workers find appealing in the workplace.

Relative to change, Travelers Insurance found that older workers are not resistant to change. Specifically, “they found that many retirees work in temporary positions,
moving from one job to another, from one building to another and from one supervisor to another without displaying problems and inflexibility.”

Retaining Female Employees

Women make up forty-six percent of the U.S. labor force. Today, “…women have more and more opportunities for challenge and mobility to prove and stretch themselves…but when frustrated by inflexible work environments and stubborn barriers to the top echelons…they’re leaving to start their own businesses, to work for smaller firms, and to go to competitors that offer more of what they want.”

This same article quotes a survey that found the third most commonly cited reason women left their jobs was unhappiness with the work environment. While that could be the result of many factors, poorly managed change can create an environment where women, and men, find it untenable and begin to look for other opportunities.

In dot-com companies, for example, there isn’t a hierarchy to work up anymore. In fact, one source says that there are currently more than 350,000 unfilled information technology jobs. Due to the competitive nature of the work environment and opportunities, leaders cannot afford to push change too fast, be poor communicators or be too dictatorial. Some refer to this dynamic as a new employment contract. “Employees coming into our workplace today will not stand for the old order of management. Employees today don’t want to be directed. They want to be encouraged to develop themselves. They say, ‘Don’t tell me what to do. Tell me what you want done, and I’ll figure out the best way to do it.’”
The skills needed in the new economy jobs are skills that women tend to have in abundance: problem solving and the ability to grasp and use information. Because of the economic boom, there are lots of opportunities and women aren’t going to spend years unhappily in any position.\textsuperscript{36}

According to a report by the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, there are 79,770 full-time sworn officers in California.\textsuperscript{37} Of this number, 9,249 are women.\textsuperscript{38} Therefore, in California law enforcement, women make up 11.6\% of the work force, which is considerably behind the work force as a whole. If law enforcement is to attract and retain women, especially in light of change, it is important to keep in mind when implementing changes. Additionally, women have a lot to contribute to the change process.

A Rapid Rate of Change

Change is all around us. Few, if any, would argue that they are not impacted by change in many ways nor that change is occurring at a faster rate. Consider the following comments relevant to information, knowledge and change:

- The total of all printed knowledge is doubling every five years.
- People have produced more information in the last thirty years than in all of the previous five thousand years.
- The daily New York Times now contains more information than the average 17\textsuperscript{th} century person would have encountered in a lifetime.
- About one thousand books are published internationally every day.\textsuperscript{39}
Human knowledge is exploding at an unprecedented rate. In cutting edge fields, such as computer science, the total amount of knowledge doubles approximately every eighteen to twenty-four months, while the whole body of human knowledge doubles every fifteen years.\textsuperscript{40}

One discovery fuels another and another. Things that seemed futuristic a few years ago are real today, especially in the area of technology. For example, with developments in the global positioning satellite system and related technology every square meter of the earth surface could be given a unique address.\textsuperscript{41} Not much more than a dozen years ago a 286 computer was considered fast. Today, 600 MHz computers are common and computers are getting faster, and smaller. In fact, by the time technology is purchased and installed, in many cases, it has been superseded by something else more advanced.

Tonita Murray in her article, entitled, “Police and the Challenge of the Twenty-first Century, puts it well:

It is not time that is bringing change but the evolution of our global society. We are building faster and faster on earlier basic discoveries, so that we have little time to absorb one change before another is upon us. We do not have the luxury to absorb a new technique or a new approach before we must adopt another.\textsuperscript{42}

Change upon change. It seems to be occurring in every facet of our lives.

Arun Maira and Peter Scott-Morgan in their book, \textit{The Accelerating Organization}, note that the pace of change is accelerating. They add, “Organizations everywhere…are starting to compete on their ability to change faster and more effectively than their rivals.”\textsuperscript{43} This, however, doesn’t appear to be a short-term trend. John Kotter in his book, \textit{Leading Change}, adds “Powerful macroeconomics are at work here, and these forces may grow even stronger over the next few decades. As a result, more and more
organizations will be pushed to reduce costs, improve the quality of products and services, locate new opportunities for growth, and increase productivity."

With all this change, how about the human side of it? Are people capable of continuous change? Is there a limit to the amount of change that people can handle? This is a valid concern.

According to one source, “…controlling the pace of change can be as vital as instigating it…Each person has a certain capacity for change, a rate at which they can do it…In the past you could convey a decision or change like a train making a slow turn. Disseminate. Await assimilation…Today, you change direction like a racecar driver. I must ensure each passenger remains onboard, that each not only heard but can absorb the message, or I will lose some.”

Each of us has a limited capacity to deal with an astonishingly limited number of ideas in our mind at any given time. This is called “channel capacity” and is limited in the average person to between five and ten ideas at a time. This capacity has changed little over time.

When too much change occurs or change is not implemented properly, employees are impacted adversely resulting in stress. Stress in the human body is linked to illness and disease, and can be a trigger for raising blood pressure, weakening resistance to viral infections, increasing risk to heart attacks and hastening the spread of cancer.

According to George Abood, who has a dual Ph.D. in Organizational and Clinical Psychology, “Workplace stress is a trend of growing concern. Increasingly, stress is being linked to illness and disease. This linking has begun to result in compensable awards by juries where it can be shown that a condition, or illness, is linked to stress in
the workplace. Stress associated with organizational change can be significant, especially where change has been poorly handled resulting in what might be called a toxic work environment.”

Like the human body, stress can affect an organization as well. Communication can break down. Dips can occur in quality, service and productivity. Trust and credibility can diminish. One consultant observed, “I repeatedly encountered more and more ‘permafrost’ organizations, where change-fatigued middle managers froze out initiatives introduced by the 20-somethings below them and the senior managers above them who were hot for change.” As noted previously, most change initiatives fail or fall short of the intended goals. The result is a weakened organization that may not survive.

Many people are fearful of change. There is a word for it…misonephobia, which is defined as the inherent fear of change. This fear exists because when change occurs, people are moved out of their comfort zone. People prefer to stay where they are emotionally stable and comfortable, even if the change could improve their situation.

Trends

The trends were developed through a nominal group exercise brainstorming session. The participants were professionals who are change agents in their respective disciplines, most of which were outside of law enforcement. The following four trends were taken from among many the panel identified.

The role of police is changing as a result of changing public expectations: The role of police is changing as a result of an evolution of public expectations. Many
agencies have shifted to community policing where more emphasis is place on partnerships, collaboration, problem solving, and attention is given to issues of concern to the community that previously may have been ignored. As the private sector has worked toward niche marketing and emphasized customer service, an expectation has carried over resulting in increased public expectations of law enforcement and other government services.

Organizational importance placed on outcomes and values: The panel felt that traditional management must give way to a more outcome and value based focus. Outcome and value based management are ways to operate more effectively. While the private sector has started initiatives in this area, many government agencies have seen the benefit of these models. Furthermore, communities want to see their tax dollars go further and to be used more effectively.

Use of technology to perform the job: Technology has had a profound impact on law enforcement and will continue to do so. However, that impact has not been all positive. While much benefit has been derived from computer aided dispatch, record management systems, department web sites, and more, new technology has not always been dependable, employees haven’t necessarily been excited to embrace its use and it hasn’t always delivered anticipated results. While the use of technology will expand, it will take a considerable toll on employees if not properly introduced.

Competing job availability: There are a lot of jobs available, so potential employees can be selective. Signing bonuses are not uncommon even in the public sector. The dot.com experience has given many young workers opportunities, like participative decision making, that were generally reserved for more senior personnel.
Many of these young workers don’t plan to stay with a job for the long term, so they are interested in skill and experience building. Traditional, bureaucratic organizations like law enforcement are competing with other jobs that may fit better with new generation workers.

Events

During the nominal group exercise referenced above a number of events were also discussed. Unlike trends, which have a past, present and future, events occur at a specific point in time and may not have a past or future. However, events can impact trends positively or negatively. Four events will be presented that were viewed as having the potential to impact a leader’s ability to motivate employees to accept change.

Abuse of force occurs in local agency: If such an event were to occur in one’s own agency it would be viewed, at least initially, as having a very negative effect on the agency. Shock waves would reverberate through the organization and the community it serves, as well as others. Morale can suffer, public oversight or scrutiny tends to be elevated, everyone in the organization tends to be viewed negatively. Further, in an effort to deal with and correct the situation many other good employees will be impacted in some way. When this occurs, change initiatives can sometimes come to the forefront or be put off. In either case, it tends not be an environment conducive to change initiatives.

Legislation or mandates for employee standards to maintain employment: This event pertains to the passage of law that would require peace officers to meet various standards in order to maintain their employment, rather than only in order to obtain a job.
Such standards might relate to physical fitness, psychological fitness and/or conduct. The panel recognized this would be a major issue with some employees and labor organizations. However, the panel also felt this would have a very positive impact on the work environment and change initiatives.

Change in retirement system to accommodate mobility in and out of government:
The retirement systems available to government employees are generally very different from that of an employee in the private sector. As a result, there is little movement back and forth between the private and public sectors. If there were more compatibility between retirement systems, an employee would be able to move back and forth more easily. The panel felt this would result in employees learning more and providing a greater level of infusion of ideas and perspectives that could benefit both the private and public sectors. This was viewed as having a very positive effect on implementing change.

Organization implements support systems to improve performance: The panel felt there needed to be a better support system for employees, one that would focus on both the poor performer and the high performer. With a trend of increasing movement toward outcome based management, organizations must look for ways to deal with sub-standard employees to bring them up to at a minimally acceptable level of performance.

Conversely, organizations also need to look for ways to help high performers or those in the middle, to do even better. Additionally, change creates stress and can lead to grieving as employees are asked to let go of old ways of doing things. Support can play an important role in helping people to move forward.
These trends and events have the potential of impacting a leader’s ability to motivate employees to accept change. So who has done a good job an implementing change. The next section will provide some insights.

Who is good at change?

Ross Hutchings, California Peace Officers’ Association Executive Director, was asked which California law enforcement agencies are doing a good job at implementing change. Leading the half dozen agencies he mentioned was Fremont Police Department. Hutchings said, “You hear a lot of good things about Fremont Police Department. They are out front.”

According to Hutchings, the agencies that are most successful at change have several things in common. “First, they generally have a tradition of doing well. Second, they would be characterized as learning agencies in that they encourage their people to get outside training and look at what others are doing. Third, they encourage their people to get involved outside the organization, like in professional associations. When people get involved outside of their organization and give something back to the profession, they grow through the experience and they are exposed to new ideas.”

Chief Craig Steckler, of Fremont Police Department, was interviewed regarding the implementation of change. He commented, “In 1993, we decided to implement community oriented policing. I knew it would take everyone in the department to accomplish this. I knew this would be a long-term project taking eight to ten years to implement. At this point, we are a little ahead of schedule. The process has worked well. This year we received the ITT Night Vision/International Association of Chiefs of Police
Community Policing Award for police departments serving communities with populations between 100,000 and 250,000.53

Chief Steckler went into more detail about the change process. The following are some key points taken from the experience at Fremont Police Department:

- Established a vision
- Informed employees and others of the vision and asked who wanted to be involved
- Allowed everyone who expressed an interest be involved in the working group
- Working group did literature review to identify successful practices
- Sent working group teams to visit most successful agencies
- Working group developed list of strategies, including mission and values
- Five year strategic plan was developed that included key landmarks, timeline and assigned responsibility
- Full-time captain assigned to oversee implementation of the plan and make sure it kept on track
- Team Building Workshop was held that all department employees attended, as well as other stakeholders.
- Well respected trainers were brought in
- Realized this process was a long-term commitment
- Department recognition and promotion tied to community policing vision
- Demonstrated commitment throughout the process by the Chief
Successful change efforts involve the development of strategic and transition management plans. The strategic plan develops the vision and accompanying details of where it is that one wants to go. The transition management plan details the transition, or process, of how one moves the organization from where it is today to where the vision beckons.

The transition management plan must include attention to the transition employees must make. Some will not want to let go of the old way of doing things. Failure to recognize this can lead to disaster. It no longer works to take a dictatorial approach to forcing change, especially with a workforce made up of four generations and at a time when there is an abundance of job opportunities. Besides that, the environment in which we find ourselves demands that we recognize and include our staffs, and other stakeholders, to harness the synergic benefits of a greater number of participants in order to get the buy-in and support from a broad range of people.

The key theme to implementing change successfully is that leaders must be attuned to working effectively with people. People need to know a leader is interested in what they think and how they feel, especially during times of change. People want to know they matter, that they have been heard and that their input is valued. Failure to recognize this is often at the heart of failed change initiatives. Again, it’s the soft stuff that’s the hard stuff. However, the leader who is effective at motivating employees to accept change will take the time to deal with the soft stuff, because he/she understands that people are the key to success.

One thing is certain, change is coming and leaders will have to decide how to deal with it. The decision a leader makes will impact employees, other stakeholders and
himself. Better understanding changes in the workforce and how to implement change more effectively will increase the chances of being successful when implementing change. In the current environment, this isn’t optional.

ENDNOTES


2 William Bridges, Managing Transitions – Making the Most of Change, (Reading: Perseus Books, 1999), ix.


4 Ibid., 226.

5 Ibid.

6 Bridges, 3.


9 Ibid.


11 Alch, 3.


14 Ibid., 33.

15 Solomon, 63.
16 Ibid., 64.
17 Ibid., 67.
19 Zemke, 48.
22 Ibid., 247.
24 Crampton, 247.
25 Fandray, 28.
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27 Ibid., 30, 32.
28 Crampton, 251.
30 Solomon, 87-88.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 92.
33 Michele Fitzpatrick, “Web work forces leaders to adapt at warp speed,” Sacramento Bee, 2 October 2000, D5.
34 Ibid.
36 Solomon, 88.

38 Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, POST Peace Officer Data Base – Current Sworn Female Personnel, Special run, 19 May 2000.


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53 Craig Steckler, telephone interview by author, 21 December 2000.