

**COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
AND THE
PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATION**

ARTICLE

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Sir Robert Peel wrote, “The police is the public and the public is the police.”¹ Since 1829, “Peel’s Principles” have been a guide for the organizational structure of the municipal law enforcement agency. From a historical perspective, law enforcement has been evolving while continuously striving to meet the expectations of the society in which it functions. However, fundamentally, the goal of the municipal police agency has remained constant; that is to deliver services to its community.

This article will study the effects of community partnerships on the paramilitary model of the municipal police organization. First, a brief historical overview will be offered covering the adoption of different strategies of community services over the last decade. Second, the article will present the influences of the formation of partnerships between the police organization and their community, special interest groups, business/commerce and other municipal departments from within the jurisdiction. Third, future forecasting will be submitted to examine possible directions police agencies may consider as they continue to audit their services as needs, expectations and variables evolve.

Historical Overview

Sir Robert Peel’s reforms did not take hold in the United States until the post-industrialized era of the late 1880s. Prior to this period, professional policing was not

perceived as necessary. However, the industrialized society brought with it crime and violence that created attention to Peel's ideals. "An unprecedented wave of civil disorders swept the United States from the 1840s until the 1870s. Few cities escaped serious rioting, which was caused by ethnic and racial conflicts, economic disorder and public outrage."²

In the mid-twentieth century, police organizations continued to evolve based on societal expectations and needs. Automobiles took officers off the foot beat and increased the ability to handle more service calls without increasing staffing and portraying a perception of omnipresence. Public expectations revolved around speedy and short-term problem solving. Police management was focused on managerial efficiency, and administrators sought to improve public service through controlling rank and file personnel.

The post World War II era strengthened the paramilitary organizational structure. Officers wore uniforms, functioned within a bureaucratic chain of command that encouraged a small span of control. Ranks were held rather than management titles popular within the private sector and training was regimented with an emphasis on military drills as a form of team building. The importance of the individual within the trainee was reduced in favor of the team or organization.

In the 1960s, cultural norms within the American – and ultimately world wide – society were challenged. "A revolution in social thinking was afoot in the U.S. during the 1960s, that shifted the balance among individual rights and freedoms, personal responsibilities and community interests."³ The baby boomer generation rejected

standards of previous post-industrial societies. Police agencies were forced to evaluate their service to the communities and organizational values.

In the late 1980s, Herman Goldstein, began espousing a “whole new way of thinking about policing that would allow the police to focus directly on the problems that constitute their business.”⁴ Under this model, police and the community became partners in developing long-term solutions to problems identified by the public in order to improve the quality of life. Community policing, directed policing, problem oriented policing are all synonyms for fundamentally the same ideal. Community policing was not introduced as a new technique but rather a philosophy. The creation of partnerships is a fundamental component of the community-policing model. Embracing the philosophy meant to significantly change the traditional methodologies and structures of policing.

Organizationally, the creation of partnerships has brought officers back to the community. Quality of life improvement becomes the responsibility of all the stakeholders within the jurisdiction. This has placed greater decision making responsibilities on the line personnel and line supervisors. Where the paramilitary structure encouraged more of a pyramid model, the creation of partnerships in community based policing is flattening the organization. Communication, empowerment, officer accessibility to the public, and greater job satisfaction are some of the effects of direct involvement of the agency stakeholders with the community policing philosophy.

The Influence of Partnerships

In discussing the community oriented policing philosophy, it is important to clarify that partnerships are encouraged, if not focused on all the community stakeholders.

Stakeholders, identified as having some interest in the quality of life of the community, would include residents, community service/interest groups, business and commerce interests, tourism industry and other city or county public sector departments. The law enforcement agency creates a positive working environment possibly as a facilitator. The impacts are greater than the results of the individual problem-solving target. Each entity may evolve based on learning the values and operation methodology of the other.

The quasi-military organization centralized its services from a police headquarters that limited access by the community. Buildings were secured and uninviting creating an atmosphere that operations were equally closed with public exposure minimized. In order for a member of the community to talk to their police manager, it was first necessary to travel through an extensive chain of command.

Police services were handled with assembly line, unemotional speed; consistent with post-industrial thinking. Short-term solutions were rewarded so more service calls could be handled, more tickets written, more arrests. Productivity was measured in quantifiable measurements.

Officers were trained in “police academies” and the importance of military experience was encouraged for applicants while formal education was minimized. Specialized assignments were viewed as elite positions and training for these positions was held as a higher priority than formal education.

The creation of partnerships is a fundamental component of the community oriented policing philosophy. It empowers the community by creating a sense of ownership and responsibility for the quality of life of their neighborhoods. By embracing this model, the municipal law enforcement agency becomes more open and available to

the community and encourages officers to transition their efforts to long-term, innovative problem solving. Thus, by its very nature, the formation of partnerships alters the traditional, paramilitary police organizational model.

The centralized police building is giving way to a decentralized system of satellite or sub-stations placed strategically through a jurisdiction for ease of community identification and accessibility. Philosophically, the organization has opened itself for close inspection and public scrutiny through such programs as civilian police academies and community advisory groups. Management staff is more available to neighborhood members and police officers. As officers are placed more in the role of facilitators for problem solving, they are trained as generalists rather than specialists. Line personnel are charged with greater decision making responsibilities and are enabled to act outside the formal chain of command. The flattening of the agency command structure departs from the traditional paramilitary model. Officers and line supervisors migrate toward becoming generalists rather than specialists; sociologists rather than crime fighters exclusively. Formal education becomes a higher priority than police specific training.

Future Considerations

It is recognized that the nature of law enforcement services is unique in either the public or private sectors. Enforcing the law, by definition, is the fundamental responsibility. Historically, as discussed earlier in this paper, the primary function of policing has been served well in the paramilitary, bureaucratic organizational model. “Effective law enforcement demands compliance with rules, regulations, policies, professional guidelines, and, of course, the law. Quasi-military, bureaucratic

organizational arrangements with their focus on rule and procedure, are well suited to the law enforcement mission and promote the efficient execution of routine police tasks. Police work begins with law enforcement but it does not end there. Police are called on to provide a growing number of other services...community oriented policing expands the roles and responsibilities of police officers to the extent that there remains virtually no public concern that the police can ignore.”⁵

There are variables into the future effects of partnerships on police structure which have not been discussed here. For example the changing labor market has shifted to the Generation X population. Experts have identified characteristics of this group as self oriented rather than committed to any one organization, technology driven, reluctant to blindly follow and motivated to work in those areas that serve individual rather than collective needs. Organizations will need to anticipate how to adapt to this market while maintaining missions and goals.

Public sector agencies have embraced many of the organizational philosophies of the private sector. Through the encouragement of formal education, there has been increased exposure to theories of employee satisfaction, management from the bottom of the organization up rather than the bureaucratic models, typical in the traditional police structure. Partnerships police agencies have formed with the business and tourist communities have and will continue to strengthen some of the values of the private sector.

The size of the police agency and the jurisdictional demographics will impact the organization's evolution. Available resources, political and social values of the community leaders, may also affect police agency changes. Admittedly there are also

specialized incidents which police encounter which by their violent level of threat, require a more military oriented response. Heavily armed and barricaded suspect situations or certain civil unrest situations dictate a police action to minimize risk to the community, the police or the suspects. These are a small percentage of services expected of police.

The future impacts of community partnerships on the paramilitary organizational structure can be argued from two positions. First, that organizations need only change philosophically, incorporating the positive ideals of the community-policing model without changing structurally. Second, that the impacts of the partnership model will encourage a more substantial physical evolution away from the paramilitary organization.

In the first scenario, the organizational values would adopt communication dynamics more consistently found in flatter organizations, encourage more decision making by line personnel and embrace the community within the more controlled configuration. Transitioning would depend to some degree in educating stakeholders to the values of the agency which may seem to conflict philosophically with the paramilitary system.

In the second scenario, the organization would transition to a more “user friendly” organizational environment. Uniforms would be softened, a neighborhood would be able to identify their officers and stakeholders would see consistency between the spoken values and the implementation of the agency value system. Although communication and the risk of conflicting statements – what is practiced vs. what is preached – would not be the same priority as in the first scenario, the agency would need to address those police service functions which have been better handled with paramilitary responses.

In both possible scenarios, history has shown that it is society, the public, which dictates to the police the type of service and method of delivery they value. By not looking to the future, the municipal agency risks not serving their customers and that has been the highest priority since law enforcement became recognized as a profession. Each organization must look to the future, analyze and assess needs, create a plan, implement it and continuously evaluate its effectiveness. “Complex organisms, and indeed, organizations, simply cannot afford to let the future take care of itself.”⁶

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2. Ibid., 5.
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4. Ibid., 40.
5. Paul Selan, Ph.d., “The Organizational Context of Effective Policing”, Police Chief, (February, 2001) 39.
6. Richard Slaughter, The Foresight Principle, (Connecticut: Praeger, 1995) 49

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