

How can Forecasting Groups Benefit Organizational Planning?

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So...what is your game plan, Chief?

This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future, but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

You've arrived to work early, and finally have some "quiet time" to yourself. You're feeling energetic this morning, with a fresh cup of coffee in hand. You sit down at your desk with the promise of a new day. While shuffling through your in-basket, you're quickly reminded that a new budget year is approaching. You've decided it is time to assess your department's direction, and to set some new goals. So you start by asking yourself "As a Chief, what are the real issues I need to consider to put together a game plan for the upcoming year?"

The law enforcement executive of the future must have a plan to stay on top of organizational change and ahead of the issues constantly emerging on the horizon. This article will discuss the development of such plans, and the use of forecasting groups in short-term goal setting and strategic planning. This just may be the most effective tool to identify the "real issues" impacting your city and your police department.

Background

It's no secret effective planning (or a lack of it) can make or break a police department. The importance of planning to successfully address organizational concerns cannot be overstated. It has been said without direction and purpose people are like sheep without a shepherd. People must clearly understand their role to function as an effective team.

The Police Chief of the future will particularly need to be on the cutting edge of effective planning. Jim Carroll, a leading international futurist, estimates the world's knowledge is doubling at a rate of every 7 years¹. So how does this impact the future of your organization?

¹ Helping Members in a Knowledge Dependent World (2006), [online] accessed October 29th 2006, available: <http://www.jacc.com/articles/assoc-2.htm>

Planning

Let's begin by clarifying what strategic planning is, and then continue by discussing some parameters that may provide you with a more effective way to plan your department's future.

The first question is; what exactly is strategic planning? The U.S. Government of Accountability Office defines it as "A systematic method used by an organization to anticipate and adapt to expected changes."² Strategic planning is essentially just what it says. It is a strategy; it's smart, and perhaps most importantly, *it's a plan*. It is developing a proactive response that will drive us to a future ideal. And we all know in developing a sound response plan, we must have all available information to make the best possible choices.

Strategic planning is normally viewed as setting a long-term plan. There are many ways to accomplish this, and strategic planning models do not all look the same. What a strategic plan does do is provide a step-by-step structure of how the organization will accomplish key goals and objectives to reach a desired end state. This is not to be confused with a vision or mission statement, which generally outlines a purpose. The Alliance for Nonprofit Management³ cites strategic planning as being tied to long-term planning, "while remaining open to a continually changing environment." Implementing long-term plans provides us a steady path to follow, especially if it has the flexibility to deal with a reallocation of effort or resources to mitigate unforeseen issues in conflict with the original plan.

² U.S. Government Accountability Office- 2007 [on-line] accessed May 23, 2007, available: <http://www.gao.gov/policy/itguide/glossary.htm>

³ The Alliance for Nonprofit Management- 2007 [on-line] accessed July 2, 2007, available: http://www.allianceonline.org/FAQ/strategic_planning/what_are_key_concepts.faq

Carter McNamara of Authenticity Consulting LLC has published several examples of strategic plans in the on-line Free Management Library⁴. One plan that can be utilized by law enforcement agencies is what McNamara identifies as “Model Two” of five models. This is an issue or “goal-based” plan that involves both an internal and external assessment of the organization in gathering initial information. The model employs the use of select groups of people from both inside and outside of the department to identify the “real issues” that affect them; or to develop plans to properly address their needs.

How should it look?

One of the first steps in a planning process should be to obtain the most current data regarding the existing environment. So, where should this information come from? In developing a comprehensive plan within a police department, we would probably ask ourselves two important questions:

1. What are the real issues that need to be addressed within the community we serve?
2. What are the real issues and needs within our department that will help us to better serve our community?

The answers to these questions can perhaps be best acquired by directly asking input from the stakeholders involved. By forming two select “forecasting groups” of individuals who represent both the community and the police department, we can use this forum as our knowledge base.

So what is a forecasting group?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary⁵ literally defines forecasting as a way “to calculate or predict (some future event or condition) usually as a result of study and analysis of available pertinent

⁴ Free Management Library- 2007 [on-line] accessed July 1, 2007, available: http://www.managementhelp.org/plan_dec/str_plan/models.htm

⁵ Merriam-Webster Dictionary- 2007 [on-line] accessed on July 19, 2007, available: <http://www.m-w.com/>

data.” This is exactly what can occur when subject matter experts are asked for their opinions in a group setting. A forecasting group is a carefully selected group of people who can offer a wide-variety of expert opinions on a specific topic. Expertise may exist through personal knowledge and experience, or it may be through education relative to a particular subject matter. Through their collective input they will identify important and emergent issues.

One example of a successful forecasting group is used by the automotive industry. The Center for Automotive Research⁶ (CAR) a non-profit forecasting group, is utilized to provide automotive manufacturers with information and recommendations on trends that ultimately produce safer and more efficient vehicles for the public. The CAR forecasting group is comprised of people from three different areas in the automotive industry. Those are the Economics and Business group; the Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology group; and the Transportation and Information Systems Planning group. In creating these groups, people with different expertise were selected to provide a broad perspective. These people forecast trends in the industry and then suggest changes so that manufacturers can make educated adjustments, much like you can do from the information obtained from your two forecasting groups.

Two examples of research projects conducted by CAR for the automotive industry include “The California Greenhouse Initiative and its Implications to the Automotive Industry” (June 2005); and “The Advanced Technology Dilemma: From Hydrocarbons to Hydrogen” (March 2004). The greenhouse gas initiative project provided research information that forecasted impact on the industry into the year 2009. This project was prepared for the United States Department of Energy to help them assess future direction and need. The advanced technology dilemma project

⁶ Center for Automotive Research-2007 [on-line] accessed on February 27 2007, available: <http://www.cargroup.org/forecasting.asp>

was supplied to the automotive industry in helping them as manufacturers to project where the market was heading. This was centered around the pros and cons of the industry's varied attempts to produce alternative fuel sourcing. Experts from the Honda, Toyota, General Motors and Chrysler corporations were all consulted and contributed to the assessment project which was then provided back to the industry for practical use in future planning.

There is no reason why municipal law enforcement cannot engage our stakeholders and benefit from utilizing the same type of innovative methods. Modified for policing, two groups to serve the future of public safety can accomplish many of the same purposes. The first group would be from personnel within the department. The second group would consist of people representing the community. Before discussing the makeup of these groups, an example of the desired outcomes may be useful.

The Cypress Experience

The Cypress Police Department in Orange County, California gathered a cross-section of our community to help evaluate and develop new boundaries for assigned call response areas or "beats" within their city. Talking with the community, the Department learned there were some shared issues in neighboring beats, such as motel narcotic problems that actually involved the same transient people. Because different officers were responding to different motels on opposite sides of the street, they did not realize the same people were repeating offenses on the other side of the street. By reconfiguring our beat boundaries to encompass all motels in a certain geographical area, we were able to tie the same issues and people into the same areas and problems, so they could then be addressed by the same officers. Absent that input, those issues were not being recognized.

Forecasting Group- composition and focus

The interior forecasting group can be comprised of a cross-section of the department. The group can analyze trends and events affecting the department and make recommendations to the command staff that can be incorporated into an annual plan. By involving representatives from various employee groups and units within the department, the result will be a broad perspective from within. Likewise, the exterior forecasting group will be comprised of a cross-section of the community.

The forecasting groups should be led by an experienced facilitator who can remain unbiased during the process. This is an important process and the quality of the results will likely reflect the competence of the facilitator. So, what other criteria can you use to choose an effective facilitator in your department? Michael Wilson of Leadership Strategies⁷ identifies three common traits in the development of successful facilitators who separate themselves from their peers. Those are:

1. Enjoyment in working with people;
2. The ability to think quickly and logically in analyzing dialogue and developing appropriate responses; and
3. The ability to communicate clearly and expressively

Now let's discuss some parameters and guidelines that our facilitator can operate within.

When a contractor builds a house, everything begins with a solid foundation and a sturdy frame.

And a good architect will design a plan taking into consideration things like the appearance of

⁷ The facilitator.com- 2007 [on-line] accessed on July 5, 2007, available:
http://www.thefacilitator.com/htdocs/394_wilk.html

the house in fitting into its intended environment, the technology that may need to be incorporated into the design, budgetary limits, and the particular needs of those who will occupy the home. In other words, social, technological, environmental, economical, and political considerations are all used to determine how the final product will turn out. This method of consideration in planning is known to many as “STEEP”.⁸

STEEP

The STEEP Model is used to provide a basic framework from which to consider issues that influence and create trends in a particular environment. If these five factors (social, technological, environmental, economical, and political) are framed as a guideline to facilitate group input, chances are high that recommendations produced from this process will be well-rounded and well thought-out. These are the issues that affect how cities and police departments operate. These are also the issues that produce obstacles and shape trends that would affect our environment relative to future planning.

As an example of how STEEP might be used, let’s consider planning for the impact of a terrorist suicide bombing at a local shopping mall. If we have identified the issue ahead of time through forecasting groups and have implemented the recommendations to minimize that threat, we would be much better prepared for the impact of the possible event. The social impact may be fear and panic, but if we have educated the public ahead of time, it may instead result in identification and recognition. The technological impact may be that cameras and facial or license plate recognition software have been implemented within this community in order to

⁸ Research Center for Environment and Sustainability [on-line] accessed June 26, 2007, available: <http://ewindows.eu.org/research/>

prevent such incidents. If the environment has been altered to deter attacks such as the implementation of concrete barriers in disallowing close access to storefronts, the impact may be much less severe. The economic impact would naturally be lessened by prevention of the incident. The political implications of stemming an attack by being prepared ahead of time would be quite positive for both the police department, and the city. Extending STEEP to the full array of issues facing an organization can net similar high-quality outcomes.

Facilitating in STEEP

The facilitator can use the STEEP model as the basis to analyze what is going on within the city dynamics relative to these five factors. These issues would be individually “brainstormed” within the groups for emerging or existing ideas relative to each factor. Brainstorming of course, is a process where the facilitator throws out a subject matter and the group responds with ideas without inhibition. No idea in this process is a bad idea, and responses are random. In fact, “out-of-the-box” thinking is encouraged, no matter how outrageous the idea may seem at the time. As the process continues, other ideas may be tied together or borne from the original “outrageous” one. These ideas can be narrowed later on in the process.

After the facilitator explains the STEEP model and brainstorming to the group, concerns relative to each specific category of the model likely to occur within the next planning cycle are brainstormed individually. After a list of concerns are placed where they can be viewed by all, the 3-5 issues likely to be the highest concern one year from now in each category are voted on by the group and identified.

The issues that arise from the five categories may of course vary dramatically in number. The facilitator should have direction from the Chief of Police as to how many issues he or she may

want to tackle in a year's time. That way the process can move forward with a manageable number in mind. As an example, the top three issues identified from each of the five categories would be ranked relative to their likelihood of occurrence in impacting the community or the department. These resulting issues would then be presented in their five respective categories to the command staff as community issues and concerns.

The same operational exercise can be conducted with the internal forecasting group as with the external, or community forecasting group. The resulting information will be supplied back to the Chief of Police and the command staff in written form to be used in developing a new fiscal-year plan, ideally in alliance with the overall strategic plan.

Benefits of STEEP Planning

By implementing both internal and external forecasting groups, we are reaping several benefits that could be tied to other successes in our departments. First, we engage our employees so they can have a say in our goal setting and processes. Second, we involve the community to prevent issues of public mistrust. Among the many benefits that this process could offer, it helps our agency appear as transparent as possible to the community.

This method of utilizing forecasting groups can be used to formulate both the strategic, or long-term plan, and also to develop the shorter annual plan. The only difference that separates how these two planning processes operate is when it is time to evaluate the brainstorming information. In the long-term strategic plan, the group would rate the likelihood of each idea occurring in the STEEP model within a pre-designated time frame of say, 5 years. If the group is participating in an exercise that is geared toward the annual plan, they will be evaluating the

likelihood of ideas occurring within the next year. The planning therefore is much more immediate and based closer to what is occurring now.

Now that we have a simple model in place that will provide the structure and the format for assessing your department's future, the next step is to identify who should participate in this group.

Selecting the group

One of the main considerations in selecting community members to sit on this board is that we must have a fair representation of the community. If there are two or more distinct levels of either income or racial representation in the city, then a member representing each of those groups should be present. One should also consider the desire to hear the voices of both residential and business communities. They both draw heavily on our services for quite different reasons. They both have a strong stake in our community, and rely upon one another for survival. Several other considerations may include local church representatives, social service organizations, and school district representatives.

Theft is a prime example of how community and business may be tied together with the same issues. A problem house in a neighborhood may likely be tied to theft and burglary issues occurring at a nearby retail center. Communication and cross-over issues may be occurring of which beat officers are unaware. It is also important for businesses as well as citizens to feel the police department cares about their needs and concerns. After all, they are the primary tax base in our cities and deserve our attention so they remain.

The other half of the process is seeking out the changes and issues emerging within our police departments. To fully understand what the issues are within our agencies, we cannot solely rely on ourselves as managers to have all of the answers. If we do, we may find ourselves again *assuming* that we have the right answers. The simple fact is that in most departments, management is separated from the line-level personnel by at least one, and sometimes two ranks. Our line-level personnel have to live with our decisions and direction day-in and day-out. We owe it to them to at least ask for their opinions. The internal forecasting group should be comprised of both line-level and first-line supervisors. This approach is congruent with contemporary leadership theories where employee involvement is paramount in the acceptance of change. In his book entitled “Leadership and Futuring”⁹ John Hoyle notes the importance of “inclusion” by those affected when selling change. People are more likely to buy into the process when they feel that they own part of it.

What do we do with the information?

Once the forecasting groups have completed their planning exercises, the facilitator(s) will provide written conclusions and recommendations to the Chief of Police and the executive team. The Chief of Police would then hold an executive staff meeting in order to analyze the information gathered, and to consider recommendations in putting together the annual plan. In a small to mid-sized police agency the Chief of Police may want to strongly consider involving the first-line supervision in this process to encourage buy-in.

In this staff meeting the Chief would introduce information from three different sources to the executive management team in developing a plan for the upcoming fiscal year. Those sources of information are;

⁹ Leadership and Futuring- John R. Hoyle-1995 chapter 2, page 26

1. The results from the Community Forecasting Group;
2. The results from the Police Department Forecasting Group;
3. The Department's long-term, or strategic plan.

By incorporating these three resources to develop an annual or "short-term" plan, any future actions in accordance with this plan are justified by relevant, real-time issues. These are results and recommendations produced by members of our department, and by members of the community we serve. Short-term plans through department and community groups are in alliance with contemporary theories of employee involvement in decision making, in creating closer community ties, and in acceptance and adapting to change.

Conclusion

The future of our departments may likely be driven by the need to stay up with the latest in technology. But at the end of the day, the measurement of our department's success should be how well we have involved and engaged our employees¹⁰. According to the American Psychological Association this is the number one issue relative to employee retention. We must draw upon their creativity and involvement in both developing and carrying out, *our* plans.

¹⁰ American Psychology Association- 2007 [on-line] accessed on June 26, 2007, available: <http://www.apa.org/monitor/mar07/whole.html>