

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Armed with Data, Law Enforcement Agencies Should Implement
Compstat to Reduce Crime**

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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October 2020**

ABSTRACT

Over the last twenty-five years, there have been powerful movements in the evolution of policing in the United States. Some of these policing evolutions have aided agencies with their mission of reducing crime and the fear of crime. Whether it was Compstat, community oriented policing, problem oriented policing or intelligence led policing, powerful policing shifts have evolved law enforcement. Despite their importance, there is little known about how to properly implement these programs in a police organization. This paper will focus on what Compstat is, will explain what it is not, as well as discuss the key elements needed to be implemented for success. This paper will highlight how Compstat is an innovative and rational crime control program, but also discuss past failures by agencies who implemented Compstat too quickly without fully understanding its meaning and foundation.

In order for law enforcement agencies to evolve their crime fighting approach, they need to take advantage of tools or strategies available in the fight against crime. The emergence of Compstat was one of the most innovative strategies that aids law enforcement agencies in the fight against crime while also holding personnel accountable for any crime changes in their community.

It is every law enforcement agency's duty to implement any program, strategy or service that's primary purpose is crime reduction. Compstat is an important administrative innovation in policing that holds mid-level managers accountable for controlling crime rates. Armed with data, law enforcement agencies should implement Compstat to reduce crime and hold staff accountable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Position	3
Counter Arguments	8
Recommendation	11
References	14

INTRODUCTION

Compstat, sometimes referred to as computer statistics or comparative statistics, “is an important administrative innovation in policing that provides a much needed instrument for holding mid-level managers accountable for controlling crime rates” (Bond & Braga, 2015, p.1). Compstat was described by Kelling and Sousa (2001), as “perhaps the single most important organizational/administrative innovation in policing during the latter half of the 20th century” (as cited in Weisburd & Braga, 2006, p. 267). Compstat was started by Chief Deputy Jack Maple when he was a New York Transit Police Officer, however, then it was called “Charts of the Future” and was used to track crime by placing pins on a map (Henry, 2002, p. 244). In 1994, William Bratton was appointed Chief of the New York Police Department and implemented Compstat for the entire department as a management/administrative tool to reduce crime and achieve department goals. While the New York Transit Police Chief from 1990-1994, Bratton saw the benefits of crime reduction using “Charts of the Future,” so when he became Chief of the New York Police Department, he brought Jack Maple with him as his Deputy Chief. It was at this time that “Charts of the Future” was rebranded and expanded to fit NYPD as Compstat (Henry, 2011, p. 246).

Compstat is a combination of strategy and management. The four major crime control components of Compstat as designed for the New York Police Department are: accurate and timely intelligence, effective tactics, rapid deployment of personnel and resources, and relentless follow-up and assessment (Shane, 2004).

A comprehensive analysis of the Compstat’s effectiveness in New York City showed a decrease in seven major crime categories: homicide, rape, robbery, assault, burglary,

larceny, and auto theft. New York showed a total crime reduction decline of 63% during the 1990's and 45% during 2000 (Zimring, 2012). After the success of Compstat in New York, it has continued to spread across the United States where it has been adapted by both large and small law enforcement agencies (Hyunseok, Hoover, Hee-Joo, 2010). Law enforcement agencies in Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, New Orleans, Broward, Orange, Citrus and Polk County Florida, Washington, Los Angeles, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Delaware have implemented their versions of Compstat (Vito, Walsh, & Kunselman, 2005). Law Enforcement agencies that have implemented Compstat correctly have seen declines in crime rates and the improvement of the quality of life for their citizens.

Although many departments have tailored Compstat to their own department and community needs, the foundation principles of Compstat have not changed. These principles provide for an understanding and commitment to put law enforcement officers back to proactively combating crime by using data and current/acceptable police tactics rather than just reacting to crime and taking a report. The most important piece of Compstat is holding mid-level managers accountable for crime while giving them the authority and responsibility to achieve results.

For an agency to implement Compstat successfully, it must have six key practices in place: a clear mission and goals, internal accountability, geographic organization of operational command structures (i.e. a precinct model versus traditional policing models), organizational flexibility, data driven analysis and assessment of problem solving efforts and innovative problem solving tactics (Willis, Mastrofski, Weiburd, 2003). By implementing these six key elements, agencies will also be aligning

their agency structure more toward a community oriented policing model instead of the typical bureaucratic police structure.

With effective leadership and accountability, Compstat confirms that law enforcement managers embrace ownership and accountability of crime in their areas and implement community policing, as well as problem oriented policing, as strategies and resources will be effective in reducing crime. Law enforcement agencies have a duty to efficiently reduce crime and improve the quality of life for their citizens. Law enforcement agencies of all sizes should implement Compstat as a way to foster communication and teamwork within the agency and with the public.

POSITION

Compstat is a strategic answer to solving crime problems within an agency's area of responsibility. It is designed to hold law enforcement agencies accountable and allow them to proactively become problem solvers. In order for a law enforcement agency to be successful in implementing Compstat, certain agency leadership cultures and mindsets must be in place to ensure success.

Departments of all sizes have a duty to reduce crime in the jurisdiction they are responsible for. Over the years, very few policing strategies or programs have been as effective in accomplishing major changes to crime reduction as Compstat. Compstat can make a difference in how agencies lower crime, but as implementation of Compstat has shown, other factors including agency structure, agency culture, and top-to-bottom leadership must be in place to ensure success.

In order to implement Compstat at an organization, an agency will need to have an effective and efficient way of gathering intelligence and data in a timely and accurate

manner. Accurate and timely intelligence is the core of Compstat. This is usually done through an agency's Records Management System (RMS) or Uniformed Crime Reporting (UCR). An agency will be required to review measurable data such as crimes that occurred, dates and times of those crimes, as well as arrests and suspects. Organizations can then plot these crimes in an attempt to recognize clusters, suspects, patterns, hotspots, or even common modus operandi (the way of doing something in regards to committing a crime).

Research shows since Compstat's implementation in New York, large and small police agencies have implemented various Compstat-like programs all over the country and even globally (Vito, Walsh, & Kunselman, 2005). These Compstat-like programs were made for a specific agency, however in order for them to succeed in lowering crime, the four main principles must remain intact. If implemented correctly, Compstat proves over and over again that it does reduce crime.

Statistics from New York from 1993-1999 show that that murder dropped 66%, robbery dropped 58%, auto theft 65%, and burglary also dropped 59% (Hoover, 2004). Some might say that New York "cooked the books" or "padded the numbers" but it is hard to argue with those numbers when there are clear homicide victims. Additional data from NYPD shows that between 1990 and 2008, major crimes declined over 76% while homicide also declined nearly 77% (Eterno & Silvermann, 2010). When introduced in New Orleans, there was a decline in murders from 421 in 1994, to 162 in 1999, a total of 55% (Anderson, 2001, p.4). According to Anderson (2001), "Compstat in Minneapolis saw a double-digit decrease in homicides, aggravated assaults, robberies, burglaries and auto thefts between 1998 and 1999" (p.4). In 2000, Baltimore

implemented Compstat and by the end of the year the city had less than 300 homicides for the first time in 20 years, while overall crime dropped by 25% (Anderson, 2001, p. 4). As Baltimore's Compstat program continued in 1999 and 2001, violent crime including homicides, shootings, robberies, rapes, and assaults declined by 24%, 25%, 34%, 28%, 20% and 21% respectively. (Henry, 2002, p. 307).

In order for law enforcement agencies to make a difference in their community they must embrace Compstat, community oriented policing, or problem oriented policing. Embracing and instituting these policing models will challenge the current social norms of policing. As a society we must change or adapt to address social, economic, and technological conditions in order to stay relevant and continue with our public safety mandate. According to Vito, Walsh and Kunselman (2005), "Compstat is a management and service delivery system that is capable of delivering community or problem solving initiatives to its citizens" (p.195).

There are six essential elements needed for an agency to successfully implement these programs (Willis, Mastrofski and Weisburd, 2007). The first of these key elements is mission clarification. All law enforcement agencies must have a clear mission that defines its organization and its purpose. The mission for most law enforcement, whether written or understood, is the reduction or prevention of crime in areas they service and improvement of quality of life for their citizens. In order for law enforcement officers to buy into this mission it must be clearly stated and all personnel within the law enforcement agency must believe in it.

The second of these key elements is internal accountability. Accountability is vital within a law enforcement organization, it holds personnel responsible for the

organizations mission, goals, and ideas. As with Compstat, mid-level managers are held responsible for crime in their areas as well as accountable for knowing how to address the crime in order to make a meaningful impact. As described by Weisburd, Mastrofski and McNally, (2003), "Nobody ever got in trouble because crime numbers on their watch went up. I designed the process knowing that an organization as large as the NYPD never get to Nirvana" (p. 428). As stated by Maple in 1999, "trouble arose only if the commanders didn't know why the numbers were up and or didn't have a plan to address the problem" (Weisburd et al, 2003, p.428). To hold mid-level managers responsible and accountable to crime and the Compstat mission means that law enforcement executives must also give those mid-level managers authority to control their own destiny and make decisions using the information they have.

The third of these elements is geographic organization of command. Much like Compstat holding mid-level managers accountable to carry out the agency mission, police executives must give operational power, authority, and flexibility to mid-level managers to execute the mission. Additionally, specialized units outside of patrol, such as traffic, narcotics, vice, and detectives must also be placed under the mid-level manager. This must happen in order for them to have the resources, tools and personnel available to carry out the mission to reduce crime that the mid-level manager is accountable for. Law enforcement agencies are traditionally a bureaucratic silo design, where structure is built on a paramilitary style with strong upper leadership involvement. Under a silo style structure, certain units or departments do not wish to share information with other units or departments within the same agency. Furthermore, the level of cooperation between the two departments or units is not

cohesive for an agency who is committed to Compstat or to community or problem oriented policing strategies. Unfortunately, the silo, bureaucratic style is the current model for almost all modern law enforcement agencies in the United States. This style also traditionally focused on rapid response, random patrols, reactive investigations, charted response times, and arrest or clearance rates as successful crime control numbers. The authoritative influence asserted by the paramilitary structure and its discipline led to those being awarded for arrests rather than crime prevention. The outcome was the failure to reduce crime for any significant period or prevent crime from continuing after law enforcement saturation ended.

The fourth key element, as listed, is organizational flexibility. Organizational flexibility is more than just empowering mid-level managers with the authority needed, but it is also making sure they are given the resources needed to accomplish the mission of the agency. This element enables the mid-level manager with the power to direct resources, of any kind, to successfully complete the mission they are being held accountable for. This is a drastic shift in the current organizational mandates, but nonetheless it must be allowed in order for resources to be directed to where they are needed concerning the strategic application of Compstat.

The fifth key element recognized is data-driven problem identification and assessment. Remember, it is imperative in Compstat that accurate and timely information and intelligence be gathered, analyzed and sent to appropriate personnel for review. As described by Weisburd et al, (2003), "We needed to gather crime numbers from every precinct daily, not once every 6 months, to spot problems early" (p. 429). According to, Jack Maple, *The Crime Fighter* (1999) crimes must be mapped

daily too, so we could identify hot spots, patterns, and trends and analyze their underlying causes (Willis, et. al, 2007). With this idea, crime data must quickly and efficiently be analyzed and then disseminated daily to staff.

The sixth and final element for a successful Compstat program is innovative problem solving tactics. Mid-level managers are expected to develop problem-solving techniques to crime problems. These solutions should be innovative, critical, and methodical as well as in line with the data provided from Compstat or other intelligence information. This information should be more than the old adage, “this is what we have always done,” or the typical police response to flood an area with cops so as to disperse crime rather than solve crime. Compstat is not about how many officers are deployed to an area, but what they are doing. The end result of Compstat is what matters.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Some critics of Compstat believe since accountability is one of the main core functions, mid-level managers falsify numbers to show the crime numbers they want. Some would argue that Compstat is ineffective and is nothing more than “cooking the books” by those who are being held accountable. There have been numerous documented incidents of this occurring, as stated by Kelling & Sousa (2001). Although, there are some documented cases of this occurring, this is mostly due to the confrontational nature of how Compstat was implemented in New York and the fact the agencies are built on a bureaucratic, professional police hierarchy. The ineffectiveness of Compstat in each of these failures can be directly correlated to one of the six key elements not being successfully implemented. It is possible to be firm and hold personnel accountable without being critical, crude, or demeaning. Numbers in

Compstat should only be used as a management tool to help run a department while measurable performance runs the agency. The focus of an agency needs to be on its overall goals of the law enforcement community.

There is strong evidence showing that Compstat, if implemented correctly, can accomplish crime reduction. A summary of crime from 1993-1999 in New York compared to other U.S. citizens of 100,000 in population shows that serious crime reduced 66% for murder, 58% for robbery, 65% for auto theft and 59% for burglary. This represents a total decrease of crime by 50% (Hoover, 2004, p.5). Additionally, it is difficult to accuse an agency of cooking the books when murder is the measured crime and it fell by 66% in New York and 37% nationally.

Due to the successful implementation of Compstat by the New York Police Department, agencies across the United States were quick to implement Compstat or their version of Compstat without truly understanding the organizational principles needed to ensure its success. The success of Compstat coupled with “war stories” created a buzz in law enforcement that made Compstat the next big thing in policing without correctly understanding its principles. As a result of the success, a Police Foundation Survey found that one-third of the country’s 515 largest police departments had implemented a Compstat-like program by the year 2000 (Weisburd et al. 2007). Historically, most law enforcement agencies are resistant to change or any type of innovation and it usually takes years for it to become practice, as it requires a top down philosophy change and organizational change to make it effective.

Another common argument against Compstat is that law enforcement agencies and administrators lack understanding and commitment to the foundation of Compstat,

and therefore some agencies begin to see complaints when implementing it. Furthermore, research groups and academic studies across the country began researching and analyzing the phenomenon of Compstat to see if it could scientifically be proven as an effective, relative, and innovative shift in policing philosophy.

Research found that organizations need to be extremely cautious and careful when implementing certain aspects of Compstat within an agency. The agencies with the most difficult time implementing Compstat usually suffered from their failure to implement key elements of Compstat. The key elements most commonly failed to be implemented were mission clarification, internal accountability and a data-driven approach to decision making (Weisburd et al, 2003).

Failures or shortfalls in Compstat can be directly attributed to the failure of an organization to communicate, realign, endorse and hold all levels of management accountable for its success. Compstat has to become a top-down, buy-in philosophy and culture (Dabney, 2010, p.3). Furthermore, countless errors in implementing Compstat can be directly correlated and traced to the failure of agencies and executives to implement the six key principles before instituting the Compstat model.

Additionally, there have been numerous research articles completed on the successful implementation of Compstat that show “the key role that communication, buy in and steady reengineering of the command structure played in the first successful implementation of the model; the structure and culture of the organization evolved and crime rates decreased” (Dabney, 2010, p.6). Another study conducted looked at the struggles endured by the implementation of Compstat within the New York Police Department. It was discovered that communication, buy in, and realignment of the

command structure played a huge role in the success and culture of Compstat (Weisburd et. al, 2003).

Additionally, it was shown most officers misunderstood the goal, mission, or direction of Compstat and the set of four management principles that guide it. Due to a failure to explain, train, and communicate the purpose, most saw the computer-generated statistics and crime analysis function as an auditing or micro managing tool rather than that of crime patterns, trends or intelligence (Dabney, 2010, p.3).

RECOMMENDATION

As stated by Vito, Walsh and Kunselman (2004), "Compstat is changing police organizations into strategically managed, open system learning organizations, not reintroducing a more centralized isolated bureaucratic-control process as the critics would have us believe" (p. 66).

While some would say that Compstat is used incorrectly by those who manipulate the numbers, a summary of crime from 1993-1999 in New York compared to other U.S. citizens of 100,000 in population shows that serious crime reduced 66% for murder, 58% for robbery, 65% for auto theft and 59% for burglary. This represents a total decrease of crime by 50%. Additionally, it is difficult to accuse an agency of cooking the books when murder is the crime and it fell by 66% in New York and 37% nationally (Hoover, 2004, p.5).

Compstat, just like community oriented policing and problem oriented policing, is a huge shift in current policing philosophy. Before Compstat can be successfully implemented, an agency must commit to the six key elements of Compstat. An agency

must be willing to switch from its bureaucratic police structure to one that embraces Compstat, community policing and problem oriented policing in order to be successful.

Critics to the Compstat philosophy do very little to add alternative policing models that will promote accountability while evolving policing into what society needs and what law enforcement agencies should do. The intent of Compstat is to hold those accountable that have been tasked with improving policing, controlling crime, and reducing crime.

There are six key elements that must be successfully implemented by an organization seeking to institute Compstat (Willis, Mastrofski and Weisburd, 2007). The first of these key elements is mission clarification. All law enforcement agencies must have a mission that defines its organization and its purpose. In order for law enforcement officers to buy-into this mission it must be clearly stated and all personnel within the law enforcement agency must be held accountable. The second of these key elements is internal accountability. Accountability within a law enforcement organization must be from the top down and all personnel should be responsible for furthering the organizations mission, goals, and ideas. To hold mid-level managers responsible and accountable to crime and the Compstat mission means that law enforcement executives must also give those mid-level managers authority to control their own destiny. The third of these elements is geographic organization of command. Much like Compstat holding mid-level managers accountability to carry out the agency mission, police executives must give operational power, authority, and flexibility to mid-level managers to execute the mission. The fourth key element as listed was organizational flexibility. Organizational flexibility is more than just empowering mid-level managers with the

authority needed but they are also given the resources needed to accomplish the mission of the agency. The fifth key element recognized is data-driven problem identification and assessment. Remember, it is imperative in Compstat that accurate and timely information and intelligence be gathered and analyzed and sent to appropriate personnel for review. To this idea, crime data, must be quickly and efficiently analyzed and then disseminated daily to staff. The sixth and final element for a successful Compstat program is innovative problem solving tactics. Mid-level managers are expected to develop problem solving techniques to crime problems. Compstat is not about how many officers are deployed to an area, but what are they doing.

Compstat is a process, not a computer system. Compstat is about using intelligence led policing to reduce crime and the fear of crime in a community. Compstat is about fostering teamwork, innovation, and accountability within a law enforcement agency. It is about working, "smarter, not harder". If cops were told through intelligence that a serial bank robber was going to strike a particular bank at a particular time, they would use that information to form a plan and strategy to prevent the event from ever happening. Compstat can be a way to foster communication and teamwork within the agency and also with the public. Armed with data, law enforcement agencies should implement Compstat to reduce crime and hold staff accountable.

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