The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

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**Major Philosophical Change in
Law Enforcement Organizations:
Officer Receptiveness as it Relates to Tenure**

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**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the affect of police officer tenure on the receptiveness to organizational change. Tenure (the length an officer is employed at their current police agency), is a valid variable to consider since increased exposure to an organizational culture breeds comfort and familiarity. Organizational change, for this study, is defined as a significant shift in the organizational structure, assignment or philosophy of a policing agency. It is anticipated that officer tenure, within an individual's current law enforcement agency has a minimal effect on an officer's ability to accept change. Change is a complex evolution that affects all involved, regardless of tenure. While it is basic human nature to resist new, unfamiliar territory, tenure has a reduced effect on the acceptance of changes being made within an organization.

The findings of this non-scientific research reveal that while respondents to the survey instrument ranked the group with the lowest level of experience as being the most receptive to change, the respondents themselves, with a mean tenure of 16.76, ranked themselves as being positively motivated toward change. Therefore, tenure has little effect on the receptivity to major, philosophical organizational changes.

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INTRODUCTION

Government agencies, like their private sector brethren, share many attributes associated with managing a large number of employees. Often, the government shares trends which are first seen in private sector organizations. Much time and dialogue has been expressed studying the topic of managing organizational change. In fact, organizations that neglect timely change at proper junctions are damaged or seriously wounded as a result of neglecting the need for change. Too much change can be detrimental to performance. Agencies that constantly change, may incur short-term effects or long-term damage as result of relentless changes being made. If these conditions exist, workers often enter into a constant haze due to the cascading, continually changing environment. Efforts must be made to create a stable environment to further the process of change management. The purpose of this research is to determine how the tenure of an officer effects how receptive he or she is to major organizational and philosophical changes within an organization. Various approaches regarding how police agencies can attempt to restore some semblance of stability during a major organizational change will also be considered. Due to the frequency of change constantly underway in law enforcement organizations, establishing stability and exploring tenure (as it relates to change) is a salient issue.

This administrative research was conducted by literary reviews of relevant material, coupled with a research questionnaire (that surveyed and interviewed police supervisors from various law enforcement agencies from across Texas) regarding varied attitudes toward change. It is anticipated that tenure has a minimal effect on the acceptance of major organizational and philosophical change processes. Change is a complex evolution that effects all involved regardless of tenure. While it is basic human nature to resist new, unfamiliar territory, tenure has a reduced effect on the acceptance of changes. Moreover, it is hypothesized that one's

acceptance to change is based on many other factors, which include the progressive attitude and ability to understand the need for constant evolution or change.

It is anticipated that the field of law enforcement will benefit from the research and use the information to enrich their change process. The understanding of how officer tenure relates to the acceptance of change must be considered for change to take place in a police organization.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much has been written regarding organizational change involving police agencies and private sector change initiatives. Many researchers concede that organizational change is a constant reality with a similar hierarchy constantly advancing toward the implementation of changes. The majority of contemporary police literature details change from the traditional policing establishment to community policing. While this research is not intended to discuss the merits of community policing, it is a salient issue. Most contemporary major philosophical organizational changes in law enforcement will involve some form of transformation of community or problem oriented policing. The confusion surrounding the definition of community policing is demonstrated by how the contributing authors defined the term they were studying. This difference should signal that no consensus can be easily identified. Instead, a combination of these definitions should be examined and applied to existing community standards. Lumb and Breazeale (2002) used a broad definition stating that community policing is developing a partnership with the public to solve problems, reducing and preventing crime and improving the quality of life. Allen (2002) noted that the definition of community policing has been expanded from: simply allowing police to become familiar with the community and including almost any program that serves to improve police service and community relations. Cochran, Bromley & Swando (2002) define community policing as a demand for law

enforcement to respond to non-crime related calls for service while partnering with the community to "co-solve" community problems. Toch and Grant (2005) fashion the term (community policing) to include "participatory policing," or as a chief's reliance on officers and citizens to partner together to solve problems. Suggesting the implementation of this method can place the policing profession in an ideal position to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

One study examined the effects of a sheriff's deputies' socio-demographic characteristics such as: age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, rank, education, tenure, work orientations or the degree of adherence to the subculture of policing, and perceptions of agency readiness/preparedness regarding the receptivity to organizational change (Cochran, Bromley & Swando, 2002). This study contends that the acceptance of the transformation process, the receptivity to change and the examination of deputies' attitudes are vital to the overall success of the change effort. Further, the existing culture or the creation of a new empowering policing environment assists officers in understanding the importance of delivering community service. The new culture can positively affect the likelihood of successful organizational change by influencing officer receptivity. Suggested methods to assist in a shift to an improved policing culture include: creating new organizational goals or principles and then training employees to employ the new mission.

According to Cochran, Bromley & Swando (2002), none of the listed, socio-demographic or work experience variables were "significantly associated with deputies' receptivity to change" (p. 518). In the variable most relevant to this research, "experience" as related to the *receptivity to change,* yielded a negative, eight percent "value in the study's person's product-movement correlation" analysis (p.519).

Allen (2002) points out that most police agencies operate in a closed culture that makes change extremely difficult. This particular study identifies the impediments to organizational change for law enforcement managers who are tasked with transforming their organizations into productive agencies. The dependent variable, *resistance to designated officer assignment for community policing*, was compared to the variables of: complexity, centralization, formalization, pressure, individual attitude, department attitude and communication. The results reveal that street level officers were not convinced that their department would support their decisions if and when something went wrong. As a result, they did not fully embrace the new level of authority and discretion that community policing affords. Further results yielded that internal and external pressures associated with individual attitudes toward change were constant throughout the agencies studied. Allen (2002) summarized that police organizations can further a successful change if the impediments of strong leadership skills exist from command personnel and if there is a balanced communication regarding the need for change between the organization's goals and the needs of the employee.

One important law enforcement paper chronicles the implementation of community oriented organizational change by developing strategies for *durable organizational change*. Consideration was given to multiple internal and external factors of organizational change. According to Lumb & Breazeale (2002), influences such as community pressure for the reduction of crime and disorder, officer beliefs toward the responsibility of contemporary policing, and the lack of commitment and internal resistance had a detrimental effect on successful change. Lumb & Breazeale (2002) studied how an officer's level of cynicism and personality changed over time and how this can damage attitudes toward the implementation of new efforts to make changes within a policing organization. As with other studies, it is reported

that change in a traditional bound agency must be considered thoroughly, and planned and implemented carefully. Additionally, any change produces anxiety for employees and other emotions escalating all the way from curiosity of the unknown to fear and anger. (Lumb & Breazeale, 2002).

The non-law enforcement literature echoes similar lessons. Burke (2002) describes change as a fundamental transformation of culture to support a significantly revised mission. Burke (2002) offers six major tenets concerning organizational change. The first tenet is an analysis of the external environment. Issues that should be considered include: assessing customer input, satisfying their current needs and anticipating their future needs. The second tenet is an analysis of the internal organization. The need for change in the customer or citizen base, and the current relevance of the existing mission should be assessed. The third tenet is gauging the organization for change. The types of change needed should be considered along with the acknowledgement of what to avoid regarding the implementation of organizational changes. If change is needed, an evaluation of the existing culture must be performed and to be successful, a case for change must be made by explaining why a transformation of the organization is warranted. One method offered to assist in the transition is to establish a "burning platform." The last principle concerning the organizational change process is to following the sequence of launch, post-launch and sustaining the change. While Burke (2002) lists these steps as a summary he does not contend that organizational change is a simple step-by-step process. Instead, he declares that his book clearly establishes that organizational change is a complex, non-linear process and the fact that change is so challenging makes exploration meaningful.

All change efforts, as described above, cause a strain on the organization and as a result directly impact the employee. Often change appears out of society's control. Government agencies and private organizations are both faced with the global environment of increasing undesirable chaos. When viewed differently, this chaos can actually be a conduit, which creates order from disorder.

Kiel (1994) simply defined the *chaos theory* as a times-series behavior model or the movement of an organization through the process of stability-to-chaos-to-emergence. This theory presumes that, on occasion, non-linear systems can totally transform themselves into unique more complex forms. To survive under these conditions, an organization must be able to handle the increasing complexity of the resulting change. Further, the organization must establish unique processes for problem solving the *chaos theory*, which can help explain how work processes and technology can create both uncertainty and opportunity for positive change. (Kiel, 1994).

Organizations that thrive in a state of "dynamic instability" stay prepared for change. (Prigogine & Allen, Kiel, 1994). This dynamic instability allows the organization to change its basic structures as it responds to the need for change. The governmental organization is then in a position to radically break from existing composition to achieve new attainment and develop innovative methods in pursuit of their mission. In this pattern, the organization is highly energized. It continuously alternates between order and disorder and seeks new ways of achieving goals. Uncertainty is valued and surprises are welcomed as transformation occurs. (Prigogine & Allen, Kiel, 1994).

Fluctuations, instability and disorder are all critical elements in change. Since the government was founded to stabilize societal structure and must respond to unstable

environmental demands, these organizations must determine what level of instability allows for positive change. (Prigogine & Allen, Kiel,1994).

The ch*aos theory* holds that a larger sense of order must be preserved within the chaos of shifting rules and fields of actions. Overall stability in quality service must be maintained while managers alter and improve operational systems. Thus, stability is needed "within a broader management model, which recognizes that stability can be generated only if management accepts instability and continuous change as a paradigm for action" (Prigogine & Allen, Kiel,1994, p.149). Some organizations, however, cling to the past, argue for abandonment of the change masters, and call for revolutionary adjustment. Macdonald (1998) argues that executives are losing sight of simple truths, and many organizations need a healthy dose of commonsense, deducing that the secret of success is nurtured evolution rather than revolutionary or disruptive, trendy change management. He contends that organizations that have grown and remained successful over the years are a result of adhering to and maintaining defined values. He believes organizations that apply practical experience to changing situations train their employees to recognize circumstances and allow them to react to changes will perform well. He adds that stewardship, the moral responsibility for the careful use of money, time, talents or other resources (especially with respect to the principles or needs of a community or group), be the driving reference force and compass for which decisions are made.

While it may appear insurmountable on the surface, change management is not beyond all control. Several methods can be employed to steer the rudderless organization through a tumultuous change environment. Often the workforce turns to its leaders to be rescued. The reality is that no one person alone can provide stability to an organization in a change episode. Instead, many leaders throughout the organization must adhere to and lead through the change

effort. In fact most of the organizational change literature available has lengthy sections on the importance of leadership for successful changes to be administered within an organization.

There is, however, a cultural glorification of great leadership, which leads to an endless search for a heroic figure who can come in and rescue the organization from institutional decay. This cultural addiction leads to situation where it is easier to opt for the hero leader instead of building institutions that continually adapt to reinvent themselves or fail in developing leadership throughout the organization. (Senge,1999). Leaders must not underestimate their role in the change process. Successful initiations of change depend on leaders' behavior much more than many managers believe. Leaders not only need authorization and provide motivation to originate the change of events, but there must also be an overlap between the changes sought and the beliefs of those on the front line who will implement changes. (Kelman, 2000).

Leaders, regardless of their place in the organization, must maintain credibility even when s/he does not know the destination or even the route. It is difficult to follow the path or bring the future into focus when the future is increasingly difficult to predict. Employees charged with bringing stability to the organization often fail in the grueling task of change. To add some stability to the organizational volatility stimulated by stress and uncertainty, Wheatley (2001) developed several strategies. The first strategy proposes to nourish a clear organizational identity. As confusion permeates the organization, workers find stability and security in purpose. The organizational identity should define: the organization, the values from which work is completed and who and what the employees and organization desire to become. This identity guides workers to make sound decisions during difficult or confusing times. The second strategy is to focus on the big picture. Overwhelmed people tend to focus on individual responsibilities and are unable to look beyond their present needs. This can result in an inward spiraling of

thought and action that negatively impact performance. The third strategy is to demand honest, forthright communication. Steady, accurate information allows the receiver to respond positively and build trust in the organization and its leaders. Finally, leaders must prepare for the unknown. Processes such as simulation or tabletop exercises (which explore how an organization might respond to complex situations), provide an experience-base for participants to recall during genuine events. This preparation allows personnel to feel more certain in dealing with uncertainty. Other strategies include the use of rituals or symbols and paying attention to individuals.

Another application is that of stability structures, which are organizational arrangements used to create stability and guide an organization as it progresses through change. Offered by Smith-Morgan et al. (2001), four individually defined patterns of practical organizational structure are described to optimize performance while reducing disruption of employee efforts. The organizational patterns, each independent with unique characteristics, are: pyramids, cubes, cylinders and spheres. To help establish a visual description of this premise, the authors encourage the reader to imagine that each structure is made of solid concrete, approximately one foot tall and an individual is attempting to move them along the ground without aid of conveyance. (Smith-Morgan et al., 2001).

The first organizational pattern, the pyramid, is the most difficult to move, as it sits solidly on a broad base. The only way for movement is a nudge that results in resistance, which inhibits quick travel. By allowing for only slow evolution, pyramids minimize feelings of disruption. Formal rules, polices and processes are very clear, providing stability. In pyramids, professionalism equals steady progression with no surprises. (Smith-Morgan et al., 2001).

The cube offered in Smith-Morgan et al's research should be stable, but can be moved with proper positioning and pressure applied in the appropriate place. Primarily keeping the dominant structure of the organization constant, the cube minimizes a workers potential disruption. Most of the important organizational structures before the change, are maintained after the transition. In the cube organizational pattern, professionalism equals effective transition along with efficient consolidation. (Smith-Morgan et al., 2001).

The cylinder, the third organizational pattern, is easy to move as long as it is rolling on its axis. If pushed in any other direction it is as difficult as the pyramid or cube to move. Once the cylinder is rolling, it can be gently steered, but only gradually. For employees working in a cylinder, maintaining continuity across change cycles minimizes potential feelings of disruption. Changes during the transformational cycle are specific to the cycle itself. Thus, power structures and reporting mechanisms remain constant regardless of the cycle. In the cylinder organizational pattern, professionalism equals experience gained by new challenges. (Smith-Morgan et al., 2001).

Contrary to the other three models offered in Smith-Morgan et al's research, the sphere is easy to roll, can be steered in any direction and that direction can be changed as often as needed. For employees working in an organizational sphere, a stimulating work environment of calculated risk taking minimizes feelings of disruption. This structure has few rules. Guidelines allow the freedom of action within accepted risk boundaries. Professionalism equals flexibility plus opportunity. (Smith-Morgan et al., 2001).

Each of these structures minimizes disruption and maximizes stability through their unique characteristics. While no organization is dominant in one structure at the exclusion of the others, this theory confers that each organization needs a portfolio of structures, with their

inherent advantages, to maximize stability and thereby avoid *change fatigue*. (Smith-Morgan et al., 2001).

Managers need not be passive observers or victims of the change process. Instead they can engage in efforts to work with these forces. To bring order to the chaos, effective mangers must possess clear visions that continuously interplay with the dynamic forces operating in the organization. Theses visions must have the power to generate commitment from the masses and they must also create new meanings for events that occur within the organization. (Cavaleri & Obloj, 1993).

Basic organizational components such as organizational charts, routine schedules and clearly established procedures not only maintain internal equilibrium of the organizational system; they can also contribute to a sense of stability. (Cavaleri & Obloj, 1993).

Marks (2003) provides some basic orientations commonly shared by leaders who operate in the aftermath of changes made in the workplace. Executives who lead employees out of transition do not assume to know what their employees are thinking. They create an environment that allows for open communication and work is organized around the new organizational order. Leaders are keenly aware that actions speak louder than words and act accordingly. They search for high quality answers, set clear expectations for fundamental work completion, focus on the work itself, allow local managers to emphasize local design adjustments and provide needed resources. (Marks, 2003).

A more intellectual view, presented by Kaufman (1991), suggests that with the passage of time, the force of stability gains strength. Time locks organizations into established modes of behavior. If the behavior is validated the organization, the executive or in the case of a police

organization the chief, will survive. Ultimately, survival is often the final arbitrator of success. (Kaufman ,1991).

METHODOLGY

Research was conducted to determine how officer tenure influences receptivity to organizational change. Change is continual process that effects all law enforcement organizations. It is anticipated that tenure or officer experience level has a minimal impact on acceptance of major organizational philosophical change process due to the complex evolution of change. It is further hypothesized that one's acceptance to change is based on many other factors such as individual assessment, organizational leadership, the method of change implementation and the perceived need for change.

The research was conducted with a simple non-scientific survey consisting of nine questions and concluded with a tenth open-ended question for collection of unstructured responses. Five questions gathered demographic information and four assessed receptiveness to change. Fifty-one surveys were distributed and forty-nine were returned for a completion rate of ninety-six percent. This return rate is a direct result of the survey delivery method and captive audience in which it was distributed. Peers from the Leadership Command College of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Institute of Texas were the respondents. The classes consist of police supervisors and commanders from various size communities and multiple functions throughout the State of Texas.

The demographics of the class and thus the sample are listed in table 1. The majority of the respondents, fifty-nine percent, were from local police agencies. Most of the respondent's agencies (seventy-five percent) were not the largest in their county. The majority of respondents (sixty-seven percent or thirty-three) were from agencies with less than one-hundred-fifty total

employees. There were three women and forty-six male respondents. The mean tenure or years

in law enforcement was 16.75 with a range of five to thirty years of service.

Table1- Demographics				
Agency Type:	Local = **29**	County = **11**	School = **8**	State = **1**
Agency Staff Size	1-50 = **18**	51-150 = **15**	151-250 = **8**	250+ = **8**
Largest agency in County	**12**			
Not largest agency in County	**37**			
Gender	Men **46**	Women **3**		
Sample mean tenure - "Years in Law Enforcement"	**16.76**			
Mean years of "How long has the change agent (Chief/Sheriff) been at the organization"	**11.4**			
Sample size (*n)*	**49**			

The survey questions gauged the respondent's receptiveness to change and examined

their perception on how officers in their agencies were receptive to change (see table 2).

Respondents were not provided with definitions for major philosophical organizational change

initiatives, full implementation of the change episode , success or failure of the change initiative

and thus these variables were self-defined by the surveyed officers. .

Table 2- Receptiveness to change
In your opinion was your last major philosophical organizational change initiative: successful, unsuccessful or incomplete?
How long did your last successful last major philosophical organizational change initiative take to fully implement from initiation to completion?
Which officer group is the most receptive to change?
Rank **your** receptiveness to major philosophical organizational change initiatives at your agency. 1 is most 5 is least.

The information obtained from the surveys will be analyzed to determine if the

hypothesis is correct. The respondent's demographics will be compared to: their reported

receptiveness to change and their perception of overall officer receptiveness to change based on

tenure.

FINDINGS

Survey results yielded interesting insight into how change is perceived. A majority of the respondents, fifty-one percent or twenty-five, categorized their last major philosophical organizational change initiative as successful. Some of the respondents, (twenty or forty-one percent) defined their agencies last major change as incomplete. Three respondents did not answer and only one respondent reported that their last change initiative did not succeed. Unfortunately, it is not feasible to define success or failure since the complexity and dynamics of change are difficult to categorize and assess in this limited forum. Thus, each respondent defined and assessed their individual situation. Further, their direct role in the rated change effort was not assessed. Next, the duration of implementation was evaluated. Respondents to the receptiveness to the *major philosophical organizational change initiatives* question reported a mean of 1.58 years for full implementation (see chart 1). A lesser amount of respondents, fourteen or twenty-nine percent, reported that the change was not successful or incomplete at time of the survey. Seven respondents did not answer the question.

Chart 1- Time for successful change implementation
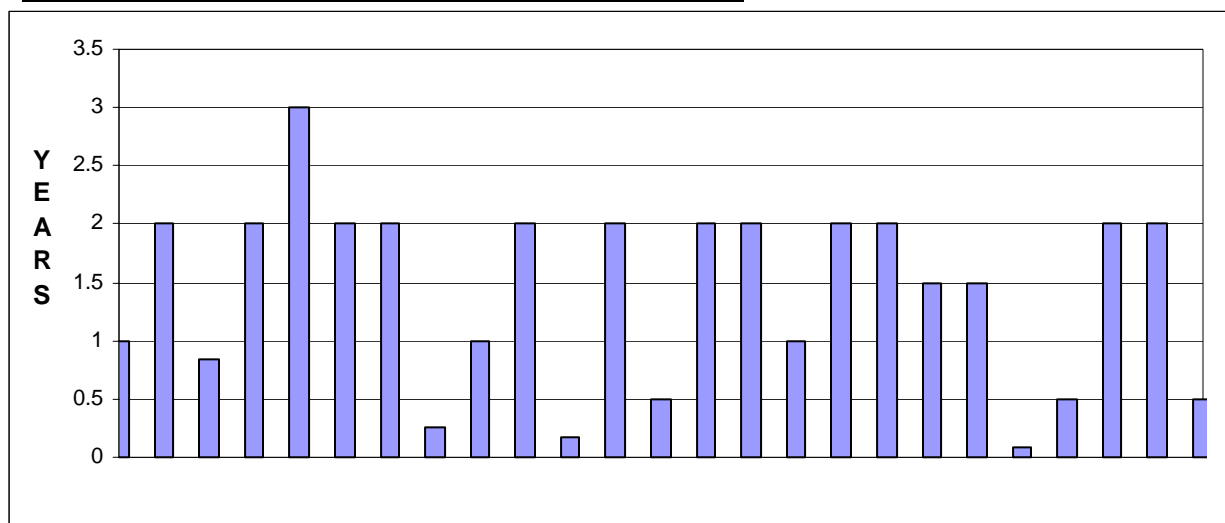
Respondents were asked to assess which officer group, in their opinion, was the most receptive change. The original question requested a rank for each category. However, respondents were inconsistent in their response and marked the surveys in multiple fashions. The results for this category were converted to record the officer group ranked first. A majority of the respondents (seventy-three percent) perceived the officer group that had less than one year experience was the most receptive to change (see chart 2).

Chart 2- Officer group most receptive to change implementation
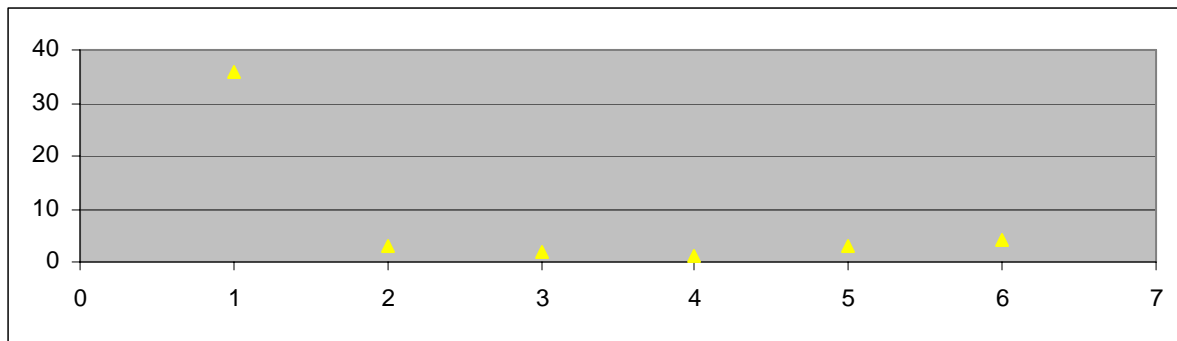
The last research question appraised how the respondent reported their personal

receptivity to change. Recall that the mean experience for this sample of forty-nine was 16.76

with a range of five to thirty years of service. However, on a scale of one to five with one being

most receptive and five being least receptive, this sample had a mean score of 2.46. While the

respondents rank the most junior officer group as the most receptive to change, they rank

themselves as positively disposed to change. Thus, the results of the survey support the

hypothesis that officer tenure has little effect on the receptivity to change.   Chart 3 displays the

relationship between experience or tenure and further illustrates the respondents *change*

receptiveness score.

Chart 3- Tenure of sample

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49
■ Tenure	5	6	7	8	8	10	11	11	12	12	12	12	13	13	13	13	13	13	14	15	15	15	15	15	16	17	17	18	19	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	21	21	23	24	24	25	25	25	26	28	29	30	
◆ Change Score	1	2	3	2	1	3	3	1	3	2	2	5	2	3	2	3	1	2	2	3	1	5	1	5	3	4	1	3	3	2	1	4	4	3	2	4	2	2	2	2	3	1	1	4	1	4	3	2	2

CONCLUSIONS

This administrative research project was initiated to fulfill the requirements for graduation from the Leadership Command College of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Institute of Texas. The research was designed to investigate the affect of police officer tenure on the receptiveness to change within a policing organization. It is anticipated that tenure has a minimal effect on the acceptance of the major organizational, philosophical change process. Change is a complex evolution that affects all involved, regardless of tenure. While it is basic human nature to resist new, unfamiliar territory, tenure has a reduced effect on acceptance. It was hypothesized that officer tenure or experience level had little effect on the receptiveness to a major organizational, philosophical change effort. The findings reveal that respondents ranked the group with the lowest level of experience as being most receptive to change, however the respondents themselves, with a mean tenure of 16.76, ranked themselves as being positively biased toward change. As chart 3 displays, one's tenure had little effect on change.

The perceptions of the more receptive respondents (regarding their receptiveness to change) was countered by their own responses. The answers to the open question support the anticipated results, proposing one's acceptance to change is based on many other factors which include: the involvement in the *change* event, the placement in the organization, the attitude and current personal feelings toward the organization or it's leaders. One limitation of this study, other than the non-scientific research model, is the diversity of position held by each respondent. It is a logical conclusion that individuals most responsible for change, those in high command positions, would view their change program as positive. However, as one moves down in an organization, their view regarding the relevancy of the new initiatives changes. Unfortunately, the data to categorize the position held and role in the change effort was not captured in this study. Therefore, future studies could perform further analysis to capture data related to status in the organization and responsibility in the change process for comparison to tenure.

Understanding that tenure alone is not a predictor of change acceptance can be helpful to future change agents as they set to reform their organizations. The review of past studies and identified literature can also be a beneficial read for future drivers of law enforcement change efforts. Themes including: open communication, the transparency of the change effort, employee involvement, team building and strong leadership are constant throughout the relevant literature. These sound principles should be followed and it is far better to learn from others mistakes, as no change effort will be completely satisfied. However, law enforcement leaders must constantly be in pursuit of organizational refinement and improved communications within law enforcement organizations.

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