

**The Bill Blackwood
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Leadership from the Bottom Up

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ABSTRACT

Police departments have evolved over the years due to the demands that citizens placed on them. As a result, police departments are constantly seeking the most updated method to be an efficient and effective department that citizens can be proud of. Police department have adapted technological advances to reach a large number of citizens in the smallest amount of time. However, police departments fail to look at their organization structures to be effective by soliciting input from the front line officer.

Leadership from the bottom up will assist police administrator in moving closer to an efficient, well-managed, and well-led organization. Not only do police departments need to adopt the most-efficient crime fighting model, but they also need to collaborate with the officers in their own agencies to implement it. The front line officers have valuable experiences that will assist police administrators in accomplishing organizational goals. Sadly, police departments are not taking advantage of these types of officers who possess unique skill sets. There are downfalls with leading from the bottom up, due to the inefficiencies associated with it, as well as requiring buy in from all members of the police agency. These downfalls cause police administration to shy away from incorporating this model of hierarchy in the organization. However, the benefits of leading from the bottom up will outweigh the negative stigma associated with it.

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational behaviors are comprised of many different components, ranging from individuals all the way to teams throughout a police department. A police department's culture is a reflection of its policies, structure, and procedures that assist police administration in managing the teams. An administration's choice of leadership style, ability to communicate, and interactions with officers in a positive manner will motivate officers in reaching a department's goal (Perry, 2007, p. 2). Human nature tends to believe a low-ranking officer cannot bring change to a department and only senior officials can bring permanent change.

Police administration does not often listen to lower level officers in reference to the direction of the department. However, history has proven someone can be a leader even if they possess no rank (VanderVeen, 2014). Inside a police organization, officers often feel left out of the decision making process. When this occurs, it sends a message to the lower level officer that their opinions are not valued. Therefore, when it comes to the decisions that are made, officers feel that will have to just live with it.

All police departments should provide motivation to their officers in order to gain the best productivity from them. When officers are afforded the opportunity to have a vested interest in the decision-making process, it enhances their overall job performance. A leading from the bottom-up ideology can assist police departments in obtaining increases in officers' morale, communication, and successful teamwork. Supervision from the bottom up is a key component to the success of a department these days. Law enforcement agencies should manage from the bottom up.

POSITION

The current police command staff hierarchy is ineffective in addressing police officers' concerns and causes reduction in morale. The success of a law enforcement organization is driven by officers who are the most valuable assets of the department (Phibbs, 2011). Therefore, police administration needs to address the current model of supervision. They must be open-minded and conscious of the obstacles the officers face in today's society.

With consideration to all factors, a department should use a hybrid of multiple models in order to produce greatest opportunities. Once police administration has established behavioral cohesion and transparency, the process can begin. Moreover, there will need to be several questions of who, what, when and how, which must then be communicated in a clear and positive manner to the officers. These are important questions in understanding police officers and in finding a model that fits the agency.

An effective model that police administration should use is the MARS Model. It consists of four factors: motivation, ability, role perceptions, and, situational factors (McShane & Von Glinow, 2014). All these factors have critical influences on an officer's behavior and performance; therefore, a single low factor will result in poor performance. Police administration usually determines officer productivity and motivation level by reviewing their self-initiated activity.

With the use of this model, all levels of the agency are included as part of the process and success of department goals. This, in turn, improves morale and productivity. Individuals will be more receptive to additional work and contribute individually specific efforts to ensure objectives and goals are successful. The model

has been best described as a way to obtain the full potential from officers. A frontline officer often has a unique insight on solutions to department wide issues. This model allows an officer's solutions to be shared with fellow officers and command staff. With this style of teamwork, a department would be able to create new and more efficient processes.

The old saying "Happy spouse, happy house" has a corollary in all aspect of business (Economy, 2014). When officers are enthusiastic about coming to work on a daily basis, there will be a positive work place and enhancement in citizen interactions. An officer having the opportunity to have a positive work environment is perhaps one of the most important aspects in law enforcement. Officers need to know that their well-being is just as important as the communities they serve.

When evaluating a police department current culture, simple standardized procedures can be utilized to evaluate and analyze the values and norms of an agency. High officer performance will also result in lower crime levels and increase citizens' trust in the police which, in turn, will improve the citizen's quality of life (Phibbs, 2011). An agency with high performance levels will be able to reduce administrative and operational costs; thus, improving its' short and long term budget goals.

Patrol officers are in the largest division in police departments and have the most experiences with the public. Front line officers are the ones who face the most challenges due to interactions with the public, outside agencies, and with members of the criminal element. As a result of this, front line officers acquire leadership skills that encompass persuasion, communication, and management techniques. These

leadership skills improve the ability of these law enforcement officers to perform their difficult assignments.

In addition, there have been several high profile and publicized events that have impacted police departments, and front line officers are the one that face them head on. These officers have a lot of experience that can benefit police administration decision making. Consistently, all police departments promote from within and usually from the lowest rank. It is from the lower ranks that police administration promote first line supervisor and to the highest rank a police department has.

By collaborating with lower-level officers, police leaders can see their perspective, while lower-level officers can understand the challenges faced by the administration (Tona, n.d.). These front line officers have consistently shown that they have the knowledge, education, and, experience to offer different viewpoints on the issues affecting their communities and profession. In addition, the officers also have educational and training backgrounds to qualify their opinions. With the model of leading from the bottom up and with police officers evolving, effective communication and problem-solving can replace a policy-driven statistical approach to the way policing is being performed.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

One downfall of bottom-up management is that it is time consuming. With so many individual officers involved in the decision making process, it can potentially bottleneck ideas, leading to missed opportunities or unrealistic ideas being suggested. With too much information, administration would potentially have a tougher time reaching an effective solution for goal success. This may result in an incapability to

select a single plan of action and implement it or continuously needing alteration of procedures.

Additionally, too many ideas will diminish the ability for administration to find effective plans for obtaining the department goals (Harper, 2015). This type of management requires the employee to conduct research as to the suggestion that they might bring to the management's attention. Employees can often find themselves competing for the best ideas to take to management which would continue to slow down the process of productivity.

While this may be a downfall, a poll of 675 workers from the U.S and Canada revealed 64% believes leaders making decisions without seeking input was the largest problem (Smith, 2012). Smith (2012) stated, "When decisions are made without getting input from people, they tend to hold back their ideas and take less initiative to make improvement" (p. 4). The poll also found that 38% of respondents believe "leaders dismissing ideas without exploring these ideas" is the next largest reason initiative declines in the workforce (Smith, 2012, p. 5).

Law enforcement agencies may focus on a specific style of policing to ensure the best results for the community in which they serve; some agencies will focus more on crime fighting as opposed to prevention (Phibbs, 2011). Administration can then communicate goals via forecasting, and individual officers and teams are encouraged to come up innovative solutions in order to obtain department and individual goals. How goals are to be accomplished is decided on by the teams, thus allowing officer ownership in project development. It provides the lower level officer with a vested interest into the department.

An agency's success will be impacted by the selected officer's ability to fit within the operation structure. Often, once hired, an individual's expectations greatly differ from reality thus impacting the aura surrounding officers' association with the agency. This will affect the officer's career-long commitment. When an officer's desires and expectations become reality, the officer's performance will be greater. Officers will expend energy, effort and enthusiasm when an agency's mission, vision, and priorities align with the officer's beliefs.

Another downfall of the bottom-up method of supervision is that it may not be as effective if the current top-down management administrators are not on board with the idea. Bottom-up management positions are created so that they have opportunity as well as clout within an organization. Bottom-up management challenges the role of a manager. With the implementation of the bottom-up approach, managers may feel that their status or power has been taken away. It also could make the implementation process of the new management style difficult to deploy if managers are not on board with the idea.

To counter this downfall, an agency must ensure that when giving an individual officer a voice, the agency actively listens to the officer. An agency should not solicit suggestions if it is not prepared to implement at least some of the suggestions (de Vries, Jehn, & Terwel, 2011). If it appears to the officer that administration is only trying to win points to improve morale and never intend to implement the individual's ideas, input from officers will come to a stop. In a worst case scenario, an officer will become frustrated, hostile, and uncooperative with fellow officers. Allowing officers the opportunity to voice their opinions can be a positive initiator for change.

In addition, police work has become largely focused on community and crime-prevention. This has placed a greater demand on selective activity and a higher commitment of police officers (Steinheider, & Wuestewald, 2008). Police officers involvement in decision-making process for the department has shown to increase commitment to the department; however, this has not been adopted within most law enforcement organizations.

Police officers in many departments are simply deployed to sectors or beats without any direction or research-based applications in the ways to reduce crime. Police departments should seek out qualified officers within their agency who can offer them the unique perspectives they can bring. Agencies rely on the opinions and experience of the administration-level officers without allowing the valuable input from lower-level employees, some of whom have similar training and skill-sets. By having their input, agencies can have the best of both worlds. The department's administration should find these officers within their department and stop relying solely on the opinions of their administration staff.

RECOMMENDATION

Law enforcement agencies should implement leadership from the bottom up. Law enforcement organizations are challenged to identify factors impacting an officer's initiative, performance, and proactive problem solving, and these should be used to identify solutions to problems affecting the individual, team, and agency's organizational effectiveness (Phibbs, 2011). An administration's ability to effectively communicate affirms an officer's commitment to the agency and supports the link between efficient operation and an officer's initiative in performance. A two-way flow of communication is

crucial in preserving an agency's health and moving everyone toward shared goals. In addition, police senior administration can assist by providing clear and transparent communications. The purpose of this is to ensure that the department's expectations and directions are filtered to the front line officers.

Furthermore, communication from the bottom of the agency provides critical information regarding issues and assist in projecting and formulating solutions for the evolving environment of the community. A breakdown of communication in either direction will result in officers and teams losing focus on short- and long-term individual and departmental goals. Moreover, personnel within a police organization will develop frustration with policy makers and administrators.

Every police agency strives to obtain high performing officers who consistently engage in the department's success, thus creating a highly-motivated culture. As the agency institutes new innovative ideology at the highest ranks, the departmental culture will begin to change at the officer level (Phibbs, 2011). In addition, instant results are not realistic and systematic changes will result in improved effectiveness and changes in organization's culture. The change needs to start with senior leaders introducing action-oriented goals and identifying milestones along with metrics to measure both short- and long-term successes.

A front-line officer's perception of the department will transform into reality over time. Therefore, the goal of increasing performance and creating a professional culture with high morale is a worthy challenge for any police agency (Phibbs, 2011). Officer motivation is the level of intensity, commitment, and innovative level that an agency's

personnel will apply to their careers. In addition, discovering new and unique ways to motivate officers has become an urgent challenge for many leaders.

Several emerging theories and methods for officer motivation range from monetary incentives to increasing an officer's involvement and ownership in the agency's success. The most successful officer motivation efforts should concentrate on the officer beliefs regarding what is valuable to them. A large amount of organizations have found success by allowing flexibility in job design and reward systems resulting in lower attrition rates, improved morale, and increased performance.

Selecting the best leadership style for an agency is its own challenge. After accepting a leadership position, an individual accepts partial responsibility in guiding the agency with their best ability. By nature, that responsibility is a top-down style of leadership, which includes identifying goals and maintaining officer focus on the department goals. Therefore, a leader should not direct or dictate every detail to the officer assigned the accomplishment of the goal.

Micromanaging is very harmful to a team's success. Often the greatest position for the leader will prevent them from seeing all aspect through on the ground level. Therefore, police leaders should provide the best parameters for their agency such as purpose, goals, and the preferred culture. Moreover, police leaders should allow their officers to work within those parameters to make decisions and accomplish the mission (Lukens, 2016).

If an administration could look at the advantages as well as the disadvantages of supervision from the bottom up, they would see a definite advantage in this way of management. With the recent events that are occurring all over the United States with

police officer deaths, it is paramount that a police administration do everything in its power to create a positive working environment within its department.

The reality of finding citizens who want to work in this profession is becoming very difficult nationwide. Dangers that pose a threat to an officer every day they walk out their front door seems to not be decreasing anytime soon. It is paramount that departments continue to do whatever it takes to provide officers with positive motivation to continue their professional work. With bottom-up supervision, it will not only provide the officer with a more vested opinion into the department, it will also provide them with a feeling that what they feel and think will be heard and looked at by their administration.

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