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Operational Police Planners and Planning Units

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The job of leading a police agency is becoming more complex and demanding. Though chiefs and sheriffs make decisions that affect the quality of life of every member of the community, they are seldom provided with all the resources to do the job effectively. Effective leadership of law enforcement agencies, therefore, requires both day-to-day planning and long range planning with a restricted amount of resources. Management of a police agency without research and planning results in indecision which may be a worse alternative than making a faulty decision. Additionally, effective use of available resources cannot be made without getting facts, analyzing data and other information, considering alternatives and developing plans and procedures. Every head of a police agency should have research and planning capabilities.

The purpose of this paper is to present justification for the inclusion of a planner or planning unit within a police agency. Police executives must be willing to assume this responsibility or delegate it to an individual or a unit depending on the size of the agency. The chief of a very small agency may be the researcher/planner for that agency. In large agencies dozens of officers and/or civilians may constitute the planning staff.

The conclusion of this research will demonstrate the effectiveness of a planning unit and how appropriate application will benefit the long and short term planning process. In addition, it is time police agencies make a firm commitment to research and planning, in part because the soaring costs of government services require that all operations be cost effective and fiscally responsible.

## **Introduction**

Planning is perhaps the most basic of all management functions since it involves selecting from alternative courses of action. Planning is the function by which managers determine, within the constraints of their role, what goals are to be accomplished and how and when they are to be reached (Koontz and O'Donnell 125). While research involves gathering, analyzing, and reporting data, planning is projecting into the future those courses of action designed to reach agency goals. Police administrators sometimes do not appreciate the importance of planning because of their pattern of course development...often (seeing) planning as "clerical" or "not real police work". In short, competent planning is a sure sign of good police administrators and the first step in accurate decision-making (Swanson, Territo and Taylor 446).

Comprehensive planning requires the identification of agency goals and the pursuit of those goals by the most effective means. Police managers' decisions are much more difficult than those in the private sector. They must consider public safety, fear of crime and many other social factors. Their decisions are often subject to public scrutiny and may affect, in one way or another, every member of the community. Almost every decision that the police manager makes involves some level of risk, opportunity and innovation. The manager may take personal risks or those that effect the department. If the police manager attempts to be innovative by introducing something new into the department, he takes the risk of being rejected, laughed at, or if the project fails, of receiving a reputation of incompetence as far as the department is concerned, the risks of innovation include negative public reaction, higher costs, and a decrease in confidence among the personnel (Lynch 120).

While all planning involves the selection of alternative courses of action for the future, long-range planning has an extended time factor. Some police managers incorrectly believe that

long-range planning is planning for future decisions. Actually, long-range planning is planning for the future impact of today's decisions. It is making present decisions with the best possible knowledge of their futurity (Drucker 132). The act of planning is an inseparable part of the administrative process. Successful administrators plan continuously whether they realize it or not since the function is necessary before any new program system or effort can be introduced (Wilson and McLaren 150).

Considering technological advances, police agency planning beyond one or two years may now be considered long-range planning. Three to five years may be the more accepted norm, but plans involving computer assisted dispatching (CAD) and physical facilities are examples of planning that may extend beyond that period. Personnel matters, including career development and retirement, may require decisions that project twenty or even thirty years into the future (ibid. 151).

### **Historical, Legal and Theoretical Context**

Some police administrators hesitate to make decisions that require long-term commitments because of some risks involved which they perceive. It is true that decisions projected far into the future carry greater risks than decisions that are short term. Long range planning does not eliminate risk, but it permits the decision-maker to choose among risk taking courses of action. It also permits decisions with long term impact to be made responsibly. Without long range planning, long-term decisions have a greater chance of failure. The role of the staff planning unit should be carefully described in writing through policy. Idealistically speaking, the planning unit should view its role as carrying out the chief's responsibility for planning ...(Wilson and McLaren, 153).

In a police agency committed to planning, there are seldom enough planning personnel to work on all the required projects (Adams, Buck and Hallstrom, 208). The immediate problems are the ones that get the immediate attention and they are often at the crisis stage when they finally get assigned to the planning staff. To ensure long term planning can be done, it is often maintained separately from current planning projects. Some larger law enforcement agencies have separate sections to perform each function. Smaller agencies may assign one person to day-to-day planning, while another works on long range projects. In agencies too small for specialization, police chiefs should ensure that some of their own efforts, or the efforts of other personnel, are spent on long range projects. For many years police management has defined planning as the writing of a set of procedures and policies. The implication is that there is only one good way to plan (Lynch 126).

Completed staff work is defined as the study of a situation and the statement of recommended action in such a form as to allow the administrator to make a prompt and effective decision (Drucker, 140). Actually, completed staff work consists of working out all the details of a problem, consulting with other staff members, but not consulting with the chief or presenting the chief anything short of the completed project. The completed staff report should be in such a form that the chief only has to accept or reject the action recommended. The staff planning process involves a state of mind rather than a rigid set of principles to guide the activity (Wilson and McLaren, 153).

Planners should be knowledgeable in the concept of completed staff work. However, few police planners have the experience and knowledge to actually practice the concept as defined in the previous paragraph. In addition, some chiefs, to minimize wasted efforts on the parts of planners, often want greater hands-on involvement in planning, so the concept, in its entirety is not supported

by the chief. There can, however, be modifications in the concept when chiefs want greater involvement or there is a lack of expertise in the planning staff.

It is clear that the key to successful decision making is planning, and the success of any plan is to approach the task systematically and in steps. Many "steps to proper planning" have been developed for use by managers and planners in government, business and industry, and some of them have been directed specifically toward police planning. Some of the steps for completed staff work are identical with planning steps.

The decision making steps outlined below provide for a systematic approach to problem solving and encompass the entire range of management functions. All the managerial activities of decision making can be summarized into seven major steps:

1. Prepare statement of objectives
2. Consider assumptions
3. Collect and analyze data
4. Identify and evaluate alternatives
5. Make a decision
6. Implement the plan
7. Evaluate the results

Major decision making should include each step to ensure a systemic approach to the problem.

The first step is to refine the problem into a clear and concise objective. A statement of objective must be formulated, reduced to writing, and agreed upon by those that initiate the objective. Once the need for the plan is recognized and the statement of objective is formulated and approved, it must be referred to frequently to keep the planners on the right track.

The second step in decision making is to consider assumptions. Police chiefs and other decision-makers often begin with a belief to be tested against reality. The belief may be called an assumption. Assumptions may be tested in many ways, one of which is to seek the opinions of police officers, other police chiefs, city staffers, private sector employees or even politicians.

The third step is to gather the data and analyze it. If little is known about the topic, a collection of facts is crucial. However, in some cases there may be no requirement to collect data with the exception of gathering opinions to test the assumptions.

The fourth step in decision making is to search for alternative courses of action and evaluate them. In order to be cost effective, planners should estimate the cost for each alternative and also list them in some order of priority with the best alternative recommended for approval.

The plan is adopted at the fifth step, which is actually the core of planning. Not all plans submitted to the chief are ready for decision. Those that are not completed, may be returned to planners for completion, referred to others for additional input or put aside. Planners who seldom see their plans implemented can often trace the fault to their incomplete staff work. This step is also where feedback is of prime importance. Should a chief be uncertain about a staff recommendation, he may require the feedback of those to be affected before making a decision.

Step six, or converting the decision into effective action, calls for further planning and communicating to see that the plan is carried out successfully. Effective plans have failed because planners thought their job was over when the decision was made. To ensure successful implementation, knowledgeable managers have directed planners to work with operations personnel to develop plans, and operations personnel to work with the planners to implement the plans. Participatory management is the key to effectiveness. It should be noted that the police

profession is often slower than most to accept this form of management, arguing that it weakens the decision making role of managers and replaces it with participant control.

The seventh and final step is evaluating the results of the plan. Evaluating the plan involves goal setting, work measurement, data analysis, and comparison of results. Evaluation is the tool used by the decision maker to modify the plan if necessary (Anthony, 60; Cizanckas and Hanna, 37; McDonald and Wasserman, 192; Pitchess, 200; Westfall, 26).

Police chiefs who seek improved decision making and a more effective agency can create a climate for effective planning regardless of the agency size. To create a proper climate for effective planning, one must begin at the top. Police chiefs, who see the need for change, want to sharpen their decisions and those of their subordinates and want to improve the effectiveness of their agencies can create a climate for effective planning. On the other hand, chiefs who see a need to preserve the status quo believe there is no need to improve decisions and think their agencies are doing all they can, will have ineffective planning efforts. Although the planning process is never simple there are concepts and ideas about planning which help the planner. Planning requires development of clearly defined goals and objectives. Simplicity, directness and clarity of concepts and ideas are essential. Flexibility needs to be built into the process and there must be a possibility of achievement.

Of necessity, planning requires consideration of economic feasibility and due consideration of whether a need exists or not, and consideration of constraints (Kenney, 136).

### **Review of Practice**

Planning must start with the chief and must permeate the entire agency. Police chiefs who establish agency goals should ask their division commanders for division objectives. Chiefs who look to improve decisions will ask subordinates to recommend alternative solutions. Chiefs

who wish to have improved efficiency will search the entire agency for ways to improve productivity. When subordinates begin developing unit objectives, looking for alternate solutions and finding ways to improve productivity, decision making will improve and subordinates will begin bringing the chief solutions, rather than problems without solutions. When that happens, then real planning is taking place. It is the responsibility of management planning to plan an integrated planning system that will enhance organizational performance. In other words, the planning of planning (Whisenhand and Ferguson 95).

Police agencies that are committed to planning and are large enough to specialize will place the planning unit high in the organization, staff it with talented people, and involve it in significant administrative decision making (O' Neill, Bykowski and Blair, 17). A few police agencies will bury the planning unit somewhere in the department's hierarchy, place several layers of supervisors between the planners and the chief, and put a low ranking person in charge or even assign unqualified people to the unit. This can be fatal to an effective organization.

The planning unit should be placed in a prominent position in the agency to show that it serves the chief law enforcement administrator. There should be no more than one level of supervision between the administrator and the planning unit head. In agencies with more than one thousand personnel, the head of the planning unit should report to a deputy chief or assistant chief and should maintain a close relationship with the chief or sheriff on planning matters. Planning units in smaller agencies report directly to the chief or sheriff. The success of the planning unit, even in a small department will be dependent on the qualifications of its staff members. They must have a sound knowledge of police administration, bolstered by good judgement, initiative, enthusiasm, and persuasiveness. They must have imagination in order to conceive fresh solutions to problems, which may have their roots in traditional stultified

practices (Wilson and McLaren 156).

To ensure a position of influence in the agency, the planning unit head should hold the rank or classification equal to that of other major unit heads. Agencies with captains in charge of such functions as training, personnel, records, and communications, should not have a sergeant or patrolman in charge of planning. In regard to planning, the manager must refrain from treating it as an entity in itself. Planning should be geared to obtaining, translating, understanding, and communicating information that will improve the rationality of current decisions that are based upon future expectations (and) expectations are developed upon forecasting and predicting the future (Whisenhand and Ferguson 96).

The classical model of planning includes four basic steps (Munro, 164):

1. Perception, identification and analysis of the problem
2. Search of solutions
3. Anticipation of the consequences of alternate solutions
4. Selection of solutions, implementation and feedback

The planning function is no less important in a small agency than in a large agency. Some smaller agency chiefs believe that they cannot afford to gather data, conduct research and plan. Some expect to rely on neighboring police agencies that have planning capabilities. Although the sharing of information is vital, much of the planning is one agency has no application in another. A police agency serving an industrial area has different needs from one serving a bedroom community like Alamo Heights. Plans formulated in a rapidly growing city like New Braunfels may be of no use or little use to a city with a declining population such as Pearsall, and urban centers like San Antonio have different needs from rural areas served by departments like Seguin. The administrative planning function needs to be performed in every

city, regardless of size.

Agencies with less than seventy-five personnel may not require a full time planning staff unless considerable change is anticipated. An agency undergoing change will need greater planning effort than a stable agency. Many police agencies with fewer than fifty employees have a full time planner.

In the remaining agencies that make up the bulk of police departments in the United States, either some personnel devote a portion of their time to planning or the chief performs the administrative planning (National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals 124).

The lack of qualified planning personnel may make it impractical to use an in-house, part time planner. Therefore the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals proposed that arrangements should be made with another agency, governmental agency, or private consultant if planning needs cannot be satisfied with agency personnel (ibid. 125).

Perhaps the most important element in managing personnel is to place them where their strengths can become productive (Drucker 307). In order to match qualified personnel with a planning assignment, it would help to prepare a job description, based on task analysis, listing the duties performed, desired qualifications, and a minimum standard to fill the position. Wilson and McLaren suggest qualifications of planning staff members as follows:

The success of the planning...unit, even in a small department will be dependent on the qualifications of its staff members. They must have sound knowledge of police administration bolstered by good judgement, initiative, enthusiasm, and persuasiveness. They must use imagination in order to conceive fresh solutions to problems which may have their roots in traditional stultified practices. Since a part of their task consists of

gaining concurrence on plans, they must be personable and work well with other people (63).

### **Discussion of Relevant Issues**

Planning assignments in some police agencies are sought after and attract promotable people. For example, according to an informal survey conducted in 1974, more than 90 percent of command officers above the rank of captain in the Los Angeles police department had served in planning divisions at some time in their career (Garmire 307). In contrast, some agencies without a commitment to planning attract only the sick, lame, and lazy to planning assignments. The sloppy work that results from this is of no value to the police chief. Far too often police administrators assume that the continuing series of crises within their organization is simply a consequence of the fact that police deal with crime and emergency situations. The truth of the matter, however, is that police organizations are notoriously deficient in their planning operations. This is just as true for those departments with sizable planning units as it is for the smaller departments with no planning units at all. This rather severe indictment arises because of the kind of planning that goes on in police departments and the kind of planners doing the work (Munro 163).

The demand for high quality personnel for staffing is recognized universally by police administrators as it is common sense that both police agencies and the public they serve are generally more tolerant of an occasional false or erroneous arrest and even an accidental shooting of a citizen than they are of sloppy administrative work by the department. This problem arises because planning is one of the specialized units that have a tendency to draw off high-quality manpower from the patrol division, a problem that no police agency has adequately solved. In selecting planning personnel, it must be understood that not every police officer has the

capability to be a planning officer. Planning cannot be effective if staffed only with light duty personnel recovering from injury. Planning personnel must as a minimum, have above average abilities...(Garmire 373).

Some agencies test potential planners for intelligence, reading, comprehension, analytical abilities, creativity, or oral and written expression. Other agencies, believing that the best example is demonstrated performance, may temporarily assign a candidate for a short tenure of 30 to 90 days to observe their ability. The candidates can also judge their own suitability for the position before a long-term commitment is made. Education, training, and experience are also very valuable. A good academic background, including a minimum of a baccalaureate degree coupled with specialized training offered through the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas, the Southwestern Law Enforcement Institute, the Southern Police Institute, or the National Academy of the Federal Bureau of Investigations may be required, but also of importance, candidates for the position should have several years of experience in a variety of police assignments.

### **Conclusion**

The police planner does not necessarily have to be from the ranks of the sworn personnel but must have a thorough understanding of the agency organization, its components and interrelationships, and the functions and responsibilities of each (Police 120). As a practical balance, a planning unit staffed with one half sworn personnel and one half civilian planners also works well. Sworn officers provide a practical viewpoint, because they know the problems of field officers. Civilian planners often bring a fresh perspective to planning and add stability to the unit by remaining in the assignment while officers rotate in and out. The use of civilians also alleviates the problem of drawing off high quality manpower from the patrol division when it

also needs talented police officers.

Analytical ability is a proven asset in police agencies. The use of analysts in specialized police service fields is growing. Narcotics, intelligence, and crime analysts process bits of data to reveal trends and ties that are pursued by officers. Supervisors, managers, and planners who lack analytical ability are at a serious disadvantage and promotional tests and selection procedures should screen them out. Once a candidate is selected for a planning position, he or she should attend a training course specifically for planners and be given on the job training. A two-year (minimum) commitment to the planning assignment should be made mandatory.

It should be understood that planning and research are essential to improve decision making in police agencies. Improved planning capability at any level of the department from chief to patrol officer will lead to better and more effective decision making. Planning involves recognizing the need for information, organizing research, projecting the future, establishing goals, and involving others in decision making. Drawing on police experience at all levels, advisement from other practitioners and the published literature in planning and decision making can help all police administrators and planners improve their decision-making capabilities.

It is probably best to recall Gresham's Law of Planning; the explication of the obvious and the elaboration of the simple, drive out the research and analysis of social trends which is necessary for effective planning (Munro 163). Planning can be a convoluted and involved process to the point where frustrations, anxiety, a lack sleep, and stress drive the planner to the point of wanting to quit. But in the end, as Whisenhand and Ferguson aptly commented "good planning is a part of good management" (98).

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