

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

=====

**Integrating Civilian and Sworn Personnel
in a Police Department Culture**

=====

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

=====

**By
Bryan Leath**

**Austin Police Department
Austin, Texas
November 2005**

ABSTRACT

Police agencies throughout the state of Texas have integrated civilian staff with sworn personnel in a law enforcement culture where the transition has been challenging. With departments utilizing civilian staff in place of sworn staff throughout the state this “we versus them” demeanor is carried over to civilian staff (Kappeler, et al, 1994). On the other side of the coin civilian personnel should have a good understanding of the police culture to effectively relate to police officers.

More specifically, what issues do departments face when integrating civilian staff with sworn officers? Other considerations will include the areas where civilian staff is utilized, the personal views of civilians working in a police culture, whether sworn personnel have experienced problems with civilian staff, and suggestions from both sworn and civilian staff to assist with adapting to each others roles within the police department.

This research paper will assess the integration of civilian and sworn staff and understanding of the police culture. The conducted surveys will gather information from other departments within Texas, including the Austin Police Department. The research paper focuses on what issues departments face, if any, when integrating civilian staff with sworn personnel in a police culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature	3
Methodology	6
Findings	9
Discussions/Conclusions	12
References	14

INTRODUCTION

Police agencies throughout the state of Texas have integrated civilian staff with sworn personnel in a law enforcement culture where the transition has been challenging. Agencies have identified that utilizing civilian staff instead of sworn personnel in certain areas of the department would cut back on the cost of paying officers' salaries and would provide the ability to hire more officers to focus on police related issues in the community. Sworn personnel have had to adjust to civilian staff coming into the organization assuming the responsibilities the sworn officers once held. Alternatively the civilian staff has had to gear their mindset to understanding the culture of police officers. This paramilitary culture can cause civilian personnel to have a difficult time adjusting to this type of environment, which can lead to issues between the two. The law enforcement culture is typically viewed as a distinct subgroup with a particular ethos that strongly influences their daily practices. Some authors suggest that the police feel a rupture between themselves and the general public, lead to a "we versus them" mentality, affecting social networks (Kappeler, Sluder, & Alpert, 1994; Neiderhoffer, 1967; Skolick, 1966; Wesley, 1970). With departments utilizing civilian staff in place of sworn personnel the "we versus them" (Kappeler, et al, 1994) demeanor is carried over to civilian staff. Issues between civilian and sworn personnel appears to occur more often in larger departments around the state than with smaller agencies and this can hamper the departments ability to work closely together and to achieve the common goals of the department. To achieve overall success civilian staff must feel they play a very important role within the organization and must be treated with respect. On the

other hand civilian personnel should have a good understanding of the police culture to be able to effectively relate and understand police officers.

The purpose of this paper is to review the comparison of integrating civilian and sworn staff in a police culture throughout the state and analyze the issues, if any, that each department faces. More specifically, what issues do departments face when integrating civilian staff with sworn officers? Other considerations will include the following: the areas where civilian staff is utilized, the personal views of civilians working in a police culture, whether sworn personnel have experienced problems with civilian staff, and suggestions from both sworn and civilian staff to assist with adapting to each others' responsibilities within the police department.

The research method used to provide the data needed for this research paper will include information from various sources. A survey was given to the participants in LEMIT of Texas that will provide information needed to analyze this issue. Other sources of information to be used during the research will include Internet web sites, journals, interviews with both sworn and civilian personnel, and surveys from various departments.

The anticipated findings from this research will indicate that in much larger agencies more civilian staff are utilized and the transition to the law enforcement culture is a much more difficult process with less acceptance than in smaller agencies.

This research paper will assess the integration of civilian and sworn staff and understanding the police culture. The information learned in these findings could be shared with other police departments to help both civilian and sworn personnel understand the differences we have and to enhance the overall effectiveness of the

organization. This research could also provide departments with information on how to train and assist personnel who encounter issues within the police culture. The surveys conducted will gather information from other departments, including the Austin Police Department. These findings will be applied to the surveys conducted from police departments with varying sizes throughout the state.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The presence of civilian personnel within American police departments no longer seems unusual or novel. Of course, there are several kinds of civilian police employees (Guyot 1979), and not all are being assimilated with equal speed or ease. As might be suspected, the practice of employing civilians is not viewed with universal approval and it seems to inspire a spirited rebuttal (for example, Greisinger, 1976; Polio, 1978), and the debate ranges from the proposal of rational, theoretical points to the discussion of very personal, even emotional, issues.

Precisely because these issues surrounding civilization have potentially serious ramifications for many aspects of police work; because these issues tend to generate deep convictions and strong feelings; and because quantitative documentation is relatively scarce, the need for further study in this area became increasingly obvious.

Civilians were asked what they did not especially like about their job. Of 55 responses, almost a third cited low pay. About 10 percent were in personality conflicts between officers and civilians; understaffing (workload too heavy); lack of interest by administrators; and limited opportunities for promotion and advancement.

As a whole, police managers and officers were favorably impressed with the use of civilians because they relieved officers for more critical duties, cut costs and improved

service to the public. Some problems exist, but most are related to police management practices and can be alleviated by improved training and supervision of civilians. Other problems, described as “personality conflicts” by both officers and civilians, result from knowledge and communication, which may be overcome with the passage of time.

A positive aspect reported by survey respondents was that it is often easier to deal administratively with non-sworn employee than with one protected by complex civil service rules and regulations. This would apply to positive incentives (pay, benefits, etc.) as well as negative incentives (disciplinary action).

A negative aspect of non-sworn personnel in management positions would be resented by sworn personnel. Sworn officers do not trust civilians to make appropriate decisions regarding police matters and the use of civilians limits the opportunities for advancement in the sworn ranks.

The Austin Police Department has progressed toward replacing sworn personnel in certain job functions with civilians. The reasoning was simple: there are certain tasks that are not directly law enforcement related. Therefore, it was logical to move officers and supervisors into positions where their specialized training would be the most effective, and backfill with civilian personnel in administrative and technical positions. In making this transition civilian staff can specialize and train in these areas to provide a better service to the department. These positions ranged from simple administrative functions such as answering phones, processing finance and personnel paperwork to the more technical and complex areas of crime scene processing and crime data analysis.

The trend throughout law enforcement agencies has been to assign more tasks to civilian personnel in order to free up sworn resources to handle more police related

functions. Agencies throughout Texas utilize civilian staff and regardless of the size of the agency issues exist between the two groups. Agencies have discovered that a lot of these areas require specialized training in order to maintain the level of expertise to get the job accomplished. The cost to train all officers to handle certain functions is not cost effective to the department and therefore these responsibilities are being limited to civilian personnel.

The trend is moving toward allowing civilian personnel to handle assignments that do not require police training in order to increase the number of police resources to the field to respond to and handle emergency type calls. Officers were assigned to specialized units within the departments and this seriously impacted the number of officers available to handle incoming calls for service. Officer's spent a great deal of their time processing scenes and handling other tasks that could be done by civilian personnel.

Officers have started to accept this transition over the years and have discovered the necessity to incorporate civilian personnel into their organization. It has always been much easier to justify and increase the officer versus the citizen ratio rather than civilian staff so most agencies continued to just request additional officers in the budget. The citizens have demanded more officers in their neighborhoods and with the media attention of forensics and other specialized areas they have accepted that departments will require more personnel in civilian positions to accomplish the mission of each department.

The public safety profession has risen over the years to a level that is much more appreciated for their role in society. Law enforcement agencies are employing more

civilian staff to minimize the budget. The expense of hiring officers is much higher than employing civilian staff.

Departments have recognized that the costs for training technical personnel has increased dramatically and with the state regulations governing these technical areas more training is being mandated to stay proficient. This has led the trend to employ more civilian personnel. The tenure in these specialized civilian roles cuts back on the reduction for turnover within the agencies. Again, with the high turnover rate in these types of positions the budget costs rise due to training of new personnel. Civilian personnel are staying in these positions and achieving the specialized training necessary to effectively perform the duties assigned.

METHODOLOGY

The research paper focuses on what issues department face, if any, when integrating civilian staff with sworn personnel in a police culture. Other areas addressed will include where civilian staff is used; problems sworn personnel have experienced with civilian staff and suggestions on how to effectively adapt to the police culture. It is believed that civilian staff is utilized throughout departments in the state and when utilizing civilians what suggestions can we provide to them in order to help make the transition to the police culture.

To provide some answers to these questions a survey was conducted at Module I of the Law Enforcement Management Institute in February 2003. Offices who returned the survey represented a diverse composition of agencies throughout the state.

It is hypothesized that the departments, which do utilize civilian personnel, primarily use them in the role of communications staff. There were 24 agencies surveyed

in Module I. Agencies that were surveyed ranged in size and included municipalities, counties, school districts and university police agencies. All personnel surveyed were sworn staff.

The survey in Module I addressed the following areas:

- 1.) What areas do you utilize civilian personnel?
- 2.) What suggestions can you provide civilian staff with adapting to the police culture?

The information from this survey was evaluated by reviewing the areas which civilian staff is allocated and to identify ways to enhance civilians in adapting to this everyday changing police culture.

A second survey was conducted in Module II using 18 participants in the LEMIT program. Again the agencies used ranged of sizes and were located in various places throughout the state.

In this survey the following questions were used:

- 1) What are the top three areas where your department utilizes civilian staff?
- 2) Have you or your department experienced any of the following issues with civilian staff working in the police culture?

Participants were asked to circle the areas listed that applied. The choices were:

Resistance

“we vs. them”

Limited opportunities for advancement

Demeanor (adapting to the police culture) and

List three suggestions you can offer civilian staff to assist them in adapting to the police culture.

A third survey was conducted at the Austin Police Department. Civilian staff in supervisory positions was included in this survey. The questions asked on this survey were:

What do you feel would help improve the relationship between civilian and sworn personnel at the Austin Police Department?

What are the primary reasons you think we have a “we vs. them” culture at the Austin Police Department?

What suggestions would you offer new civilian employees with how to adapt to the police culture here at the Austin Police Department?

The law enforcement culture trend has changed over the years from a paramilitary structure to a more business professional working environment. With this transition it has made the adjustment much more adaptable for civilian personnel in a dominate police culture. Officers are experiencing the benefit of having very highly trained civilian staff to support their roles as police officers. Officers are not spending the excessive long hours handling tasks that civilian personnel are doing.

Officers have stepped back and are now looking at various situations from a totally new perspective. It was the tendency to view things from the laws enforcement culture rather than thinking outside of the box and experiment with other ideas and methods of problem solving in today’s society.

As we forward and understand the different roles in our professions and continue to support our law enforcement professionals, we will all see the benefits of working together to accomplish the same goal.

FINDINGS

Regarding the survey that was conducted in Module I, 24 participants responded to the survey. All (100%) of the agencies reported they use civilian personnel in a range of assignments. The agencies surveyed listed communications, administrative staff, and crime scene personnel as the top three areas where civilian staff are utilized.

The complaints reported by sworn personnel about civilian staff working in the police culture included lack of information and understanding the police culture.

A participant with Dallas Police Department stated in his survey that he felt the biggest problem with civilian staff adapting to the police culture was a “we vs. them” mentality.

The survey offered suggestions to assist civilian personnel with adjusting to the police culture. Departments surveyed indicated that civilian staff should attend training in areas including, but not limited to: orientation, a citizen police academy, briefings, and sworn staff meetings.

Another suggestion offered by sworn personnel was for civilian staff to try and understand the police culture by talking with officers regularly and getting a better understanding of their thought processes and why they handle situations a certain way.

It was also pointed out that civilians typically have their own sub-culture within the agency and they need to ensure officers understand what makes them tick. The

survey conducted at Module II was used to gather more research pertaining to civilian personnel. Again, the size and geographical location varied. The three top areas listed where agencies surveyed they utilized civilian staff included communications, administrative staff, and corrections officers. Of the 22 agencies surveyed 18 responded to the questionnaire.

Ten of the respondents listed the issues that civilians are faced with while working in a police culture are the limited opportunities for advancement and the “we vs. them” mentality.

The survey given at the Austin Police Department had 15 respondents out of 30 who were surveyed. The responses to the questions asked of the personnel surveyed varied widely. Some felt that mutual respect for the importance of each other’s jobs was important. Some felt the sworn personnel needed to be more educated on the fact that we civilians are here to support them to make their jobs a little easier.

Civilian employees who understand the law enforcement culture (its fears, pressures, liabilities, pleasures, and gratifications) are in the best position to improve the relationship. Officer’s who respect the work that civilians do and actively show it, are in the best position to improve the relationship.

It is believed that more emphasis should be applied during training on the integral nature of the civilian jobs. More opportunities should be made for civilian and sworn personnel to interact on a personal level. “It seems like every time you ask a question about an employment rule you get the “it’s this way for civilians and this way for sworn.” Departments should ensure civilians and sworn personnel are allowed and encouraged to attend training together. It will take a culture change with the sworn mentality and

attitude to help civilian staff feel more comfortable working in a law enforcement culture. There are some negative feelings from civilian employees towards sworn staff because they believe sworn personnel don't understand what they do and do not support the efforts to use civilian staff effectively. With all of the budget issues impacting us, civilian staff feels they have taken the brunt of the cutbacks. The management needs to be as open as they can about what is occurring and why, so that people with misperceptions can be better informed on why these decisions are made.

Some of the reasons civilian personnel listed for having the "we vs. them" culture is: Law Enforcement personnel have traditionally viewed themselves as belonging to a brotherhood, or fraternal order, and civilians who don't belong to the order can tend to see themselves as outsiders. The same holds true for law enforcement. That sworn and civilians have different jobs is a statement of fact. The real issue is how much effort is devoted to highlighting those differences. The sense of entitlement seems to be the most divisive manifestation of the differences between officers and civilian employees.

Officers seem to have a sense of entitlement and "me first". Training does not seem to give a complete picture of what it takes "off the street" to have a functioning police department. There is a cultural aspect to being an Officer- a shared experience of the danger of the job, the way the public views them and the idea that civilians can not experience it and will not be able to completely understand. The department having a leader from the senior executive staff that promotes the welfare of all the civilians at the executive level would help with checks and balances of the system. This is an old paradigm that must be broken. Sworn personnel must realize that we are all in this together to meet our goals and objectives from a department standpoint.

Civilian employees offered several suggestions to others on how to adapt to a police culture. Stay professional and focused, but do not allow blatant rudeness and mistreatment to go unreported. New employees need to be informed about the culture of the police department. To break the old paradigm, everyone must begin making efforts to change.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research paper was to look at law enforcement agencies with different sizes to determine if they utilized civilian staff and if so if they experienced any issues with either civilian or sworn staff adapting to the police culture.

It is hypothesized that larger departments experience more issues with civilian staff than much smaller agencies. After gathering all the data it is my conclusion that every agency regardless of the size experiences issues between civilian and sworn staff. This study impacted every agency that was surveyed and has the potential to cause some major problems within an organization if both sworn and civilian staff does not understand each other's responsibilities and the importance of their roles within the organization. Law enforcement agencies throughout the state have experienced these issues and will continue to have these problems if they avoid them and do not take a more proactive approach as the suggestions given by the research that was conducted.

Police departments across the United States are noticing the decline in resources allocated to the law enforcement profession. Organizations are doing more with fewer personnel to perform all the tasks assigned. Our government has cut back on the grant funding that has assisted agencies with additional resources throughout the state.

Agencies are experiencing the increase in the workload due to inadequate staffing not being funded by departments. Departments will see the inability to received additional positions with the justification of proving the officer versus the population ratio. With this change in sight it demonstrates how important it is to ensure civilian and sworn personnel understand their roles and respect the job they were hired to perform.

The outcome of this research clearly identifies that agencies have issues within one another regardless of the size of the agency, but we must be able to recognize our differences and not let it hamper our ability to focus on jobs. We have no other choice, but to accept the fact that we are all working together within our own organizations to meet the goals of the department.

References

- Ashe, Richard C., (July 2001). The Use of Civilians in Traditional Law Enforcement Roles. LEMI Paper: Author
- Bittner, E. (1967). The policemen on skid-row: A study in peacekeeping. *American Sociological Review*, 32, 699-715.
- Brockman, John, (1990). Employment of Non-Sworn Personnel in the Management of Police Agencies: A Comparative Perspective. LEMI Paper: Author
- Crank, John P. Cincinnati, Oh: Anderson Publishing, 1998. Understanding Police Culture. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol. 24 No. 1, 1999
- Kappeler, V., Sluder, R., & Alpert, G. (1994). *Forces of deviance: Understanding the dark* York: Russell Sage.
- Wilkerson, Bruce D., (2003, January, 30). Civilian Services. Retrieved January 30, 2003, from <http://www.weblinks2.epnet.com/citation.asp>