

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

A DECISION-MAKING APPROACH  
FOR THE HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT'S  
CALL MANAGEMENT: A RECOMMENDED APPROACH

A LEARNING CONTRACT  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR MODULE II

BY

ROBERT E. WOODS  
HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT  
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77002

JUNE 1990

#229

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
The Problem.....	2
The Holistic Approach.....	4
Changing Role Of Patrol Supervisors.....	5
Elements Of A Decision-making System.....	7
Preparation Through Pre-decision-making Strategies	8
Analysis For Active Decision-making.....	10
Selection Between Alternatives.....	11
Effective Evaluation Of The Approach.....	12
Implementation Of The P.A.C.E. System.....	13
Conclusion.....	14
Exhibit A.....	17
Notes.....	19

## INTRODUCTION

To prepare for the twenty-first century and modern day policing, a police department must begin by searching for new ways to improve service delivery to the public. In the late 1980's, the Houston Police Department, faced with dwindling resources and an ever-increasing demand for police services, undertook an effort to search for methods which would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the department's call management scheme. The future of the Houston Police Department depends in large measure on the path selected.

The department made an effort to review its system for managing calls-for-service and the responsibilities of the personnel involved. A committee was formed with the original goal of reconstructing the six priority codes of the department's call management system. As a result of the committee's initial review, a new procedure was implemented whereby field supervisors would assume primary responsibility for the management of calls-for-service within their assigned district. While dispatchers will continue their function of receiving calls and dispatching available beats units, the dispatch decisions, what units will be dispatched,

and how calls will be handled, will now be made by the field supervisor.<sup>1</sup> The first learning contract prepared for the Law Enforcement Management Institute raised issues about the need to development a decision-making approach for managing calls-for-service. The previous paper explained the Houston Police Department's new method of placing the call management responsibility with the patrol divisions. This proposal will recommended a decision-making approach that could help field supervisors perform their new roles more effectively.

The approach to be offered in this proposal was prepared from the point of view of the personnel involved in the delivery of services within the police department. The approach offered is designed to benefit the personnel who usually implement the ideas of management and conduct the day-to-day operations of the police department. A brief review of why this proposal is important may be in order.

#### **THE PROBLEM**

In 1989 the Houston Police Department implemented a new procedure which placed the call management responsibility in the hands of patrol operations. As a

result, patrol supervisors assumed full responsibility for the management of calls within their assigned areas. The department chose to continue its scheme of operations for the differential police response (DPR) system which includes various types of police responses and types of calls.<sup>2</sup> The department placed the management of calls in the hands of those primarily responsible for the delivery of service.

The department undertook this new initiative without providing the supervisors training or tools to successfully accomplish their new responsibility. The procedure was implemented by the department with many questions unanswered, such as:

- (1) How does a field supervisor differentiate between calls?
- (2) What alternatives or choices are available?
- (3) How should the choice or alternatives fit within the department's need to accomplish operations and further a "Neighborhood Oriented Policing" philosophy?
- (4) What approach will the field supervisors use in deciding to which call their only available unit will respond?

- (5) What are the important elements involved in the supervisor's decisions?
- (6) Are there different responses requirements by district, beat or shift?<sup>3</sup>

From the point of view of police management these questions may seem trivial, however, supervisors will be faced with these problems daily. Police management is usually concerned with the overall operations; therefore, a field supervisor's decision-making approach must provide for the concerns of these overall operations.

#### A Holistic Approach

Where does a decision-making approach for field supervisors fit within the department's call management system and Managing Patrol Operations (MPO)? In the call management system, an approach is needed which is designed to expedite the delivery of services. The need for such an approach in the Houston Police Department's call management system was established in an earlier learning contract prepared for the Law Enforcement Management Institute.

Managing Patrol Operations involves several functions such as resource allocations management and

call-for-service management; these are the critical link between those responsible for the delivery of services and those responsible for the support functions which expedite the delivery.<sup>4</sup> Many key aspects of a department's MPO system lead to the overall success or failure of the ability to render services. The Houston Police Department's MPO system has various aspects involved in its success such as the call management system, manpower allocation policy, and the department's policing philosophy. The Houston Police Department's MPO system attempts to intertwine all elements for a successfully operating force.<sup>5</sup>

Because a police department must be concerned with the many elements involved in MPO, the development of specific strategies and management approaches are only part of what is necessary to accomplish the department's goals. For the purpose of this proposal, the department's call management system and the role of field supervisors within the call management scheme will be the area of primary focus.

#### Changing Role of Patrol Supervisors

In light of the introduction of a new policing philosophy and the change in call management procedures

within the Houston Police Department, management must be concerned with the ever-expanding responsibility being placed on patrol or field supervisors. The changing role requires supervisors to develop better management skills and techniques to enhance their opportunities for success. Managers must manage their resources: people, equipment, and time-their own time and the time of others. Field supervisors must perform investigations, deal with their administrative assignments, meet with citizens, and monitor activities over the patrol radio. The sheer numbers of duties make it necessary to provide field supervisors with the training, tools, and methodologies to enhance their management potential.

The Houston Police Department's Dispatch office relinquished the call management responsibility to the department's Field Operations Command's patrol divisions. The department's field supervisors were given the responsibility of assuring that a police response will be made to all citizens' requests for service within their assigned districts. Unfortunately, this responsibility was assigned to field supervisors without assuring that they were appropriately equipped



to carry it out. Here lies the critical link between the department's MPO system and the success of the field supervisors' new responsibility for call management.

#### **ELEMENTS OF A DECISION-MAKING SYSTEM**

A decision-making system for supervisors' call management would provide the department with the assurance that management decisions would be made by a logical system assuring that the department's overall goals are bonded successfully with the decisions rendered in the field. The recommended four step decision-making approach Preparation, Analysis, Choices and Evaluation (P.A.C.E. Approach -Exhibit A) would provide the Houston Police Department with the assurance that field supervisors will effectively manage calls-for-service. Such a decision-making system for call management should consist of the following primary elements:

- (1) Adequate preparation through development of personnel and tactical plans to address the call-for-service demand.
- (2) Good analysis of the types of calls and call service demands along with procedural steps to

be used in generating alternatives.

(3) Explanation of alternatives available to field supervisors, so they can select the most appropriate alternative.

(4) Evaluation of effectiveness through documentation.<sup>6</sup>

The key elements within the recommended system are:

- Preparation through pre-decision-making strategies
- Analysis for active decision-making
- Selection between alternatives
- Effective evaluations

#### Preparation Through Pre-decision-making Strategies

There are several stages in the development of the the recommended system, and the department has the experience and capabilities to bring together the needed factors. In some cases, only sharing of existing data will be needed for the preparation stage. In some cases, new ways of gathering the needed information or the capability for obtaining the needed information may be needed. The preparations stage involves:

A review of the statistical data on work demanded

by districts and beats as it affects the field supervisor's shift.

A review of the types of calls occurring within each beat (from a historical perspective as well as how other shift's calls relates within the district).

Development of patrol deployment strategies and the assignment of personnel in line with the department's policing philosophy.

Development of daily work schedules to reflect the necessary adjustments in order to maintain minimum service levels.

Preparation of schedules for out-of-service assignments which includes court assignments, special assignments, meal periods or other non-emergency assignments.

The preparation stage of this system involves providing field supervisors with the information necessary to prepare their patrol deployment plan. Presently, the Houston Police Department's computer capabilities are able to provide the necessary data.

The department's On-line Offense (OLO) reporting system, which is integrated with its Computer-aided Dispatch (CAD) system, provides the type of information on reported incidents which would form the basis of patrol deployment strategies.

#### Analysis For Active Decision-making

The next stage of the system provides for analysis of the immediate problems at hand and active involvement of field supervisors in decision-making.

This stage involves:

Field supervisors remaining aware of the status of their units and the type of calls pending for a police response.

Field supervisors reviewing the time required to adequately complete the assigned calls and the status of beat units. The review of the level of response required to complete each call will be conducted.

Field supervisors reviewing data on unit history, calls pending status and pending calls using the department's Mobile Data Terminals or the substation's CAD computer.<sup>7</sup>

### Selection Between Alternatives

The next step provides for a systematic method for selecting between the choices available to field supervisors. The following would be included:

A review of the status of all units available within the patrol deployment plan for beat units within the sector where the response is required.

An evaluation of the types of calls requiring a appropriate police response where the field supervisor could establish a priority for calls, assigning a different DPR status to the call or selecting the appropriate unit to response.

Within the preparation stage of this proposal, a field supervisor would be aware of the availability of the department's DPR system which could be utilized. A review of the available choices would be considered by the field supervisors; the situation may be subject to only one choice. In other incidents, numerous choices may be available, such as:

- Selection between available units
- Continue pending status of the call

- Assign multiple calls to single units
- Require out of service units to respond
- Reclassify the call to another level of the department's DPR system.

At this point, the field supervisor can select between the available alternatives with the intention of selecting the alternative which would provide a level of response in line with the department's policing philosophy and effectively managing requests for police services.

#### Effective Evaluation Of The Approach

Finally, the system must provide a mechanism for measuring the field supervisor's ability to respond in an effective and efficient manner. The department's CAD system allows for the recording of information regarding the selections of alternatives implemented by field supervisor for managing calls-for-service, for instance:

- Selecting to reassigned beat units
- Selecting to continue pending status
- Have a unit to respond to multiple calls
- Reclassifying call to a different level of DPR

Field supervisors could note the information on their daily work card or in the CAD system as a part of the unit history. Data could then be tallied and entered into the department's computer for future review.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE P.A.C.E. APPROACH**

The Houston Police Department could use the Eastside Patrol Division as the test site for implementing the decision-making system for managing calls with the division's planning committee responsible for administering the implementation. The committee members will gather all the necessary data and evaluate the use of the decision-making system for call management. The committee will be responsible for deciding on an evaluation system to measure the P.A.C.E. system's success or failure.

No additional personnel will be required for implementing, monitoring or evaluating this system although some additional responsibility may be assigned to some personnel. The crime analysis section will be required to provide the necessary data for the preparation stage of this proposal as well as the updates needed for evaluation. The crime analysis

section would retrieve the necessary data from the CAD system and from field supervisors' daily work cards. The information provided by crime analysis would be use in the preparation of the field supervisor's deployment strategies and daily patrol plans. The division's planning committee would be able to evaluate the performance of the decision-making system through the review of the retrieved data.

The administrative cost of the proposal will be relatively low compared to other programs. There may be some overtime expense during the preparation stage of the program, and there will be some additional cost to cover the necessary written reports (historical data for each beat and continuous updated reports for patrol deployment plans).

Presently, the department has the capability to generate the types of reports needed by retrieving the necessary data from its OLO computer system and CAD computer system. Some of this data are already received by patrol division commanders.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Implementation of the recommended P.A.C.E. system would provide a systematic tool for field



supervisors faced with difficult decisions of call management. The recommended approach was developed with an awareness of the important elements which must be considered by the personnel responsible for the service delivery of the police department, in this case, the field supervisors.

The decision was made by the Houston Police Department to have field supervisors assume responsibility for managing calls in their district. The tools and knowledge necessary to fulfill this responsibility are easily attainable since the department has only to provide the mechanism for the field supervisors to develop the P.A.C.E. system.

How does a field supervisor differentiate between calls? What alternatives or choices are available to field supervisors?<sup>8</sup> What are the important elements involved in call management? The recommend P.A.C.E. system has the capability to begin addressing these questions.

It is recommended that the P.A.C.E. system be implemented by the Houston Police Department as one step in fulfilling the department's mission. A decision-making system, such as P.A.C.E., offers the

police department the assurance that field supervisors will consider the goals and values of the department. The approach offers a basis for training supervisors to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency level of police services. To assign the responsibility for call management to field supervisors, without providing a mechanism to assure how this responsibility will be accomplished is taking a chance on failure. The P.A.C.E. system would act as one assurance for police administrators that field supervisors are more than adequately equipped to address the problems of call management. Implementing the P.A.C.E. system should be an asset to the Houston Police Department's call management system.

**E X H I B I T    A**  
**THE P.A.C.E. APPROACH**

**Preparation:**

- Provide data on work demands by district, beat, and shift.
- Provide information on types of calls
- Provide field supervisors with information on the available DPR system within the department
- Develop personnel deployment strategies and assignment of beat units.
- Develop daily work schedules reflecting necessary adjustments including out-of-service assignment to court and meal periods.

**Analyses:**

- Periodic review of units' status and pending call status by field supervisors.
  - Review of time frame
  - Review of call types
  - Use of MDT or CAD computers to obtain updates on call history, calls pending status and review of pending calls.

**CHOICES:**

- Evaluation of the types of calls and the assignment of appropriate means of
  - +Implementation
  - +Reprioritization
  - +Reclassification for DPR priority
- Review of unit status for selection to respond
- Prior knowledge of the department's DPR system aids in the review of alternatives available to field supervisors

- Select between units
- Continue pending status of calls
- Assign multiple calls to single units
- Return to service a unit to respond
- Reclassify calls for a different DPR

**EVALUATION:**

- Use of the CAD system to document approaches implemented by field supervisors. Information regarding:
  - +Selecting to reassigned units
  - +Selecting to continue pending status
  - +Selecting units for multiple response
  - +Reclassifying call for another level of DPR system response
- Document incidents placed on the field supervisor's daily work card and unit history.
- Retrieve information from computer and work cards records for review of the types and number of decisions made by field supervisors.

## NOTES

1. Houston Police Department, "Computer Aided Dispatch / Neighborhood Oriented Policing Interim Report," August 29, 1989 (Houston, Texas: The Houston Police Department), 3-14.

2. Ibid., 10-14.

3. Robert Woods, "A Proposal To Develop A Decision-Making Approach For The Houston Police Department's Call Management" Prepared for the Law Enforcement Management Institute, January 1990 (Houston, Texas: The Houston Police Department), 11.

4. Donald F. Crawley, H. Jerome Miron, Fred Newton, and Victor Strencher, "Managing Patrol Operations - Participants Handbook," (University Research Corporation), 1977, 20-24.

5. Ibid., 21.

6. Woods, "A Proposal To Develop A Decision-Making Approach For The Houston Police Department's Call Management," 11-12.

7. (Houston Police Department August 1989, 14)

8. Woods, "A Proposal To Develop A Decision-Making Approach For The Houston Police Department's Call Management," 9.