Overcoming communications barriers in local government: Establishing networks through the public management forum

Anthony Michael Snoodgrass
OVERCOMING COMMUNICATIONS BARRIERS
IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT:
ESTABLISHING NETWORKS THROUGH
THE PUBLIC MANAGEMENT FORUM

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master in Public Administration

by
Anthony Michael Snodgrass
June 1992
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ABSTRACT

Communications problems between local government departments must be addressed because of the indirect costs associated with lack of cooperation and inefficiency. Foremost among communications problems are those between the "civilian" side of government versus the "police" side due to competition for tight budgetary dollars and misperceptions on both sides.

Implementing new strategies in local governments requires that these communications difficulties be addressed. Specifically, in order to start the process of community-oriented policing, which in basic form is the bringing of all community resources to bear on the problem of reducing crime, the first step is to form communications linkages between civilian and police employees. Commonly, employees will not of themselves seek to build communications networks with peers in other departments, but rather will have a tendency to remain insulated within their own spheres.

This research project attempts to identify a method of forming communications networks between the civilian and police public sectors. The analysis involves a case study of recently conducted public management forums. The policy goal is the construction and implementation of a community-oriented policing strategy.
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INTRODUCTION

Scenario: The city manager of a moderate-size Southern California municipality is afraid to enter a certain part of the city. Is this hesitation because it is a gang-controlled neighborhood rife with violence and drug dealers? Is it a part of the city where racial lines are distinct, and members of a different ethnic group are not welcome? Unbelievably, the city manager, who is the chief public executive of that community, is afraid to walk into his own city’s police department.

How does such a situation develop, especially in light of the fact that the city manager is a highly-paid, well-educated individual who is expected to know and supervise the various functions of the many departments under his leadership? The fact is, however, that this was exactly the situation as presented by a participant in a forum for public managers.

The reason given by the city manager for his reticence was that he felt intimidated by the police chief, who was strongly entrenched in this position for many years prior to the city manager’s employment by that city. This particular chief held strong views about what was police business and what was not, and who was and was not to be involved in the operations of the police department. Encouraging this situation were, besides the city manager, elected city officials and most of the other department heads who saw no
need to take responsibility for what was seen as the police mandate, i.e., to control crime.

The foregoing scenario illustrates the primary purpose of this research project: to consider a method of forming communications linkages between members of different operating departments in order to take the initial step to achieve a community-oriented policing strategy for the governmental entity. The method described is a public management forum, or "round-table," which is the subject of this case study.

**HYPOTHESIS**

The hypothesis presented here is that the forum methodology is useful in establishing communications network linkages between municipal employees of different departments in order to effectively begin implementation of a community-oriented policing strategy.

The research is not directed specifically at the merits and drawbacks of community-oriented policing. The purpose of the research is to establish the validity of using the public management forum as a method of forming communications networks between the police and civilian local government personnel. Using community-oriented policing as the vehicle to initiate and propagate discussion was the method decided upon by the facilitators. Although not researched for its own benefits and limitations, discussion of pertinent literature on the topic of community-oriented policing is presented to
furnish the reader with background on the forum topic.

This project is organized by presenting the contents in a sequence that reflects the literature, the discussions that took place in the forums, and the analysis of how the literature relates to the findings of the forums. The main topics included in the research are: (1) organizational communications in general, (2) establishing formal and informal communications networks, (3) the effectiveness of small groups, (4) coalition building, (5) community-oriented policing, and (6) a case study of the public management forum as a method for forming communications linkages through networking.

COMMUNICATIONS PROCESS

The communications process is the cornerstone of community-oriented policing strategies. It defines relationships between individuals, groups, and organizations and includes both verbal and nonverbal components. Generally, problems between individuals, groups, and organizations can often be seen in terms of dysfunctions in the communications process. Language barriers, different connotations, improper grammar and syntax can be problems within the verbal context. Nonverbally, writing difficulties, hidden meanings, perceptions, and nonverbal behavior such as body language can also contribute to misunderstandings. It is therefore necessary that this process be examined and understood, at
least to some degree, by the individuals involved.

The relationship between different departments within local governments is likewise often strained due to problems in interdepartmental communication. Specifically, the relationship between the "civilian" and the "police" or "public safety" sides of the public sector is often seen as an adversarial one by the parties involved.

In part, this problem can be attributed to the fact that both civilians and police are competing for limited resources, which, in most local governments, are insufficient to fund all requested operations of the departments. However, a proposition of this project is that the civilian and public safety sides of local governments do not communicate well due to poorly developed communications networks between individuals and between departments.

Aspects of communications theory important to this case study concern the pertinent areas of organizational communications theory, including vertical, horizontal, and lateral information flows, formal and informal networking, group processes, and coalition building.

**ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY**

1. Perceptions by members of different municipal departments lead to communication barriers;
2. By understanding these differences, managers can overcome such barriers;
3. Through forming communications linkages, members of different departments will communicate better with their peers;

4. Public sector managers want to eliminate communication barriers.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations of this study were: (1) the participants were specifically invited individuals, not random participants, and (2) a lack of scholarly research into the specific problem of civilian-police communication linkages. The first, lack of random participant selection, raises the issue of generalizability of the findings to other areas. The second limitation is met by the literature available on organizational communications in general.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research for this paper found the greatest amount of literature available in the general area of organizational communications, with a large amount also available in the area of group processes, the latter especially with regard to emphases in psychology and counseling theories. There were somewhat fewer sources in the area of networking, and very few regarding coalition building. This section examines these four aspects: organizational communications, networking, group processes, and coalition building, from available
literature. There is no clear delineation between the different areas, however, due to a great deal of overlapping. For example, discussion of barriers in the organizational environment naturally leads to questions of how to overcome them, which in turn leads to discussions of group processes, networking, and coalition building. Indeed, the group process by definition is networking.

It is important to understand what occurs in an organization with regard to the communications process, because it is often barriers occurring within an organization that cause failure of organizations to interact with each other. This is especially true in organizations that make up the different operating departments in local governments, for reasons indicated prior, such as fights over tight budget allocations. For this reason, literature review of pertinent aspects of organizational communications is included.

Three major organizational theories are classical, human relations, and social systems. Classical theory emphasizes the structure of organizations. Human relations theory refers to the study of people within organizations. Social systems theory says that what affects one part of the organization affects all parts. Examining an organization and its components often requires the integration of these three theories in order to see the whole picture of an organization. Organizational communications are open as opposed to closed
systems, in which communications is a creation and exchange of messages - up, down, and across, through formal and informal networks. (Goldhaber, 1983)

Organizational communications is a dynamic process in which an organization interacts with the environment and in which organizational components interact with each other. An organization is a network of interdependent relationships, and can be viewed as a communications system which can at times be in crisis because of faulty communications systems. (Goldhaber, 1983)

Organizational structure can be examined through communications patterns, beginning with the individual level, and each set of subgroups within the organization. A liaison person within the organization offers several necessary attributes. Organizational structure can be further examined through the effects of interlacing systems of relationships on communications patterns. (Jacobson and Seashore, 1951)

Organizational research on communications patterns finds that as the structure of an organization becomes more complex and diversified and personal specialization increases, the volume of communication increases because of the necessity of coordinating the diverse occupational specialists. Personal specialization and task specialization are directly affected by technology and the environment. (Hage et al., 1971)

The organization can be viewed as process rather than
structure - as a product of the interaction of its components, both objective and subjective. Communications functions are a crucial force in the life of an organization. Organizations can also be seen as adaptive social structures in which communication is an independent and dynamic force. The essential characteristic of an organization is neither its facilities nor its technology but rather the relationships among its personnel. (Koehler et al., 1976)

Communication is the essence of a social system or organization. Accomplishments depend on the communication between people and subsystems, and how these individual communications areas relate to the social system as a whole. (Katz and Kahn, 1978) Human organizations are informational as well as "energic" [sic - undefined, Katz] systems. The importance of information processes therein does not imply a simple relationship between the amount of information and organizational effectiveness. Emphasis is on the kind of information about specific problems inherent in the nature of the communication process between individuals, groups, and subsystems of the organization. The organization must solve the problem of what patterns of communications shall be instituted and what information is directed where, recognizing the continuing danger of information overload. Information exchange is significant for what it implies, triggers, and controls. The closer the exchange is to the center of
organizational control and decision making, the greater will be the emphasis on information exchange and transmittal. In upward, downward, and horizontal communications, there is implied in each a characteristic content in messages. (Katz and Kahn, 1978)

Informal communication supplements the formal pattern. Research has established that the more communication occurs of a formal type, the more informal communication will also take place. In the normal organizational pattern, there is a positive correlation between the amount of activity in formal and informal networks. Formal communication and information subsystems are often located disadvantageously in organizations, both in terms of accessibility to top leaders and contamination of the information-getting process. In this latter situation, increased informal networks are needed to streamline the information flow. (Katz and Kahn, 1978)

There are four levels of communication: intrapersonal (within oneself, or self-talk), interpersonal (between individuals), group-individual, and group-group. Organizations are substantially information processing systems, with different levels of information passing through the system. These information levels are operational, regulatory, and maintenance and development of information. Information travels through upward, downward, and horizontal links. (Lewis, 1980)
Macrobarriers and microbarriers to communication are found in the organizational environment. Macrobarriers involve the need for more information, the number of messages, the complexity of the subject matter, time pressures, etc. Microbarriers involve problems with individuals, such as from sender to receiver, the medium used, interference, and feedback (or lack thereof). (Lewis, 1980)

Organizational barriers can also be examined from a management perspective. Some managers do not understand the communicative process. Solutions to organizational communications problems focus on areas like increasing openness, credibility, listening, and feedback. (Lewis, 1980)

A misconception in some theories of communications problems in organizations is that the main problem is restricted information flows. Rogers and Rogers (1976), however, developed research that postulated it is the opposite - information overload - that is the problem. The solution to this is less, not more, communication, but the techniques to limit communication, such as queuing, gatekeeping, and filtering, lead to other problems, such as distortion and omission.

Some studies cite findings in which the organizational structure determines communication behavior, and other studies in which communication behavior was found to determine the organizational structure. Another observation was that
individuals communicate more openly and effectively with their peers than with their superiors; hence, horizontal communication flows in an organization are more frequent than vertical flows. Also, upward negative feedback is often scarce in an organization, because upward messages from subordinates tend to be positive rather than realistic, because no individual wants to be the bearer of bad tidings. Therefore, officials near the top of an organization may possess less operational information than do individuals nearer the operational level. In these studies, networks in organizational communications were analyzed using the individual as a unit of analysis. (Rogers and Rogers, 1976)

Using the group as a unit of analysis, Ancona (1987) focused on task groups in organizations, taking an external perspective in which the group is seen as influenced by the organization rather than the group as influencing individuals. Group dynamics can be viewed differently. One perspective, in addition to the group being the level of analysis, explains behavior in terms of the social context of the group. Another examines the existence and purpose of the group apart from the setting and individuals who compose it.

Another study of relations in networks concluded that when analyzing networks, there is no appropriate unit of analysis, which conflicts with the research of both Maier and Rogers and Rogers, but which agrees with the later work of
Ancona and Rogers and Kincaid. (Markovsky et al., 1988)

Networks exist to foster self-help, to exchange information, to change society, to improve productivity and work life, and to share resources. Although sharing information and contacts is their main purpose, networks can go far beyond the mere transfer of data to the creation and exchange of knowledge. Author Marilyn Ferguson is noted in Naisbitt’s work as saying networking is done by "conferences, phone calls, books, phantom organizations, papers, pamphleteering, photocopying, lectures, workshops, parties, grapevines, mutual friends, summit meetings, coalitions, tapes, newsletters." (Naisbitt, 1982, p. 192)

Networks can be examined in terms of role relationships of the individuals in the networks, and their interdependence upon one another. Groups are collections of individuals whose relationships with one another make them interdependent to some degree. Organized groups are either a formal network for activities like problem solving, decision making, meetings, conferences, councils, etc., or an informal network for activities such as social events, the "grapevine", or retreats. Organizational communications can also be served by mechanisms like social functions, suggestion boxes, and union meetings. (Goldhaber, 1983)

Group members assume one of three functional roles: task, maintenance, or self-serving. Most groups normally
have two leaders, one of whom fulfills task functions while the other meets the socioemotional needs of the group. Most groups are more productive than individuals working alone, depending on the assigned task or problem. For managing conflict, a good workable group size is five. (Goldhaber, 1983)

Centrality as an issue in networks was originally raised in 1954, and refers to the minimum number of links needed to communicate with every person in the group structure. Centrality correlates with problem solving behavior because of the greater amount of information available to the individual in that position. (Shaw, 1954)

Later examination of the issues of centrality and power in networks found that intraorganizational and interorganizational networks differ in two ways. The first is that in intraorganizational settings, group and organizational networks are imposed consciously. Interorganizational networks, by contrast, are emergent in nature. While some relationships are mandated, most arise spontaneously from the needs of network participants. For example, in community-oriented policing closer police relations with a welfare department might emerge in such a fashion. The second principal difference is visibility, denoting the physical and structural location of departments, most frequently seen in intraorganizational hierarchical diagrams (organization
charts). In the interorganizational setting, participants in the network must construct their own design. A relationship between any two organizations is strongly influenced by network context. (Boje and Whetten, 1981)

In one body of research into communications patterns in small group dynamics, the conclusions were that: (1) communications patterns within groups affect the behavior of the group; (2) the positions that individuals occupy in a communications pattern affected their behavior while occupying that particular position; (3) the most important aspect of communications patterns related to behavior differences was centrality; and, (4) centrality affects behavior within the limits that centrality imposes upon independent action. This research found where centrality and independence are evenly distributed, there will be no leader. (Leavitt, 1951)

Other research into group processes found that problems in communications occur even though the language used is clear. There is considerable evidence of miscommunication due to squabbles between factions. Terms of a common theme such as the "group mind", "group atmosphere", personality of the group, and group cohesiveness can be used to describe the phenomenon of bonding between group members. Also, individuals in the group have different emotional needs, but members of a group are primarily concerned with content. (Luft, 1970)
Experiments in the late 1960's involving individual versus group effectiveness in problem solving failed to resolve questions of which was in fact the more effective, and several variables in these experiments were identified (e.g., type of communications taking place - verbal versus nonverbal, etc.). Problems in interpersonal communications include impressions versus intentions, real or imagined threats to members (which are normally related to questions of power and/or influence), and the ceasing of communications when a member or members become distanced from the group in terms of outlook. Formal communications may be blocked or distorted depending upon the needs and problems of the informal communications system. For heterogeneous groups in unstructured settings, leadership and power are common problems. Research has determined that authority has a corrosive effect on human relations, and people learn to induce behavior, both positive and negative, in others. (Luft, 1970)

Both assets and liabilities were discovered in a study of group problem solving. The assets included greater than the sum total of knowledge and information, a greater number of approaches to a problem, the participation in problem solving increases the participants' acceptance of solutions and a better comprehension of the decision by the participants. Liabilities listed were social pressure, group manipulation,
individual domination, and conflicting goals. Factors cited as either assets or liabilities, depending on context and viewpoint, were disagreement, conflicting versus mutual interests, risk taking, and time constraints. (Maier, 1988)

A comparison of the merits of group as opposed to individual problem solving found the preference depends on the nature of the problem and the goal(s) to be achieved (i.e., high quality solution, highly accepted solution, effective communication and understanding of the solution, innovation, a quickly reached solution, or satisfaction). The role of the group leader is emphasized as separate from that of the members as necessary in order to lead to the integrative effort. (Maier, 1988)

Following Maier, another study delineated group tasks as decision making, problem solving, education and information exchange, and conflict resolution. Communications roles found to be essential for task accomplishment are (without further definition) initiator, information giver, information seeker, opinion giver, opinion seeker, elaborator, integrator, orienter, and energizer. Another finding was that individuals in a group assume more than one of the roles above, and at different times in the process. (Burgoon et al., 1988)

A communications dilemma exists when members of a network have incentives not to share, but to accumulate more knowledge than other network members even though such behavior delays
the achievement of network goals. For example, many police agencies try to maintain their own personnel files, separate and apart from the general personnel department. This research builds on earlier investigations but adds competitiveness and conflict to the study, which are often ignored, especially with regard to studies involving the sharing of scientific research. (Bonacich, 1990)

In organizational communications at the interpersonal level, studies show relationships in organizations can be discovered through network analysis. Experiments with small groups indicate such groups are useful for a variety of tasks, especially when structured to accomplish specific tasks. Group structure for solving more complex issues was found more effective with a decentralized network, which is also less prone to error than centralized groups, although centralized groups are faster. (Gortner et al., 1989)

In analyzing the different types of networks, it was found that radial networks, although the links may be relatively weak, pass a great deal of information between the members, as opposed to closed, interlocking personal networks. (Gortner et al., 1989)

Analysis of networks was likewise the subject of a study by Nelson (1988), who was building on earlier work by White, Boorman, and Breiger (1976). In this case study, blockmodeling techniques were utilized, where a search was
made for individuals with similar networks, to identify social links. Through the use of blockmodeling, organizational diagnoses were found that identified structure, coalitions, and intergroup relations. (Nelson, 1988)

Sonnenberg (1990) found the key to effective networking was spending significant time developing new contacts and managing old ones. The usefulness of networks included providing knowledge, providing resources, creating opportunities, providing referrals, and solidifying relationships. He also established that networking is a long-term strategy, that the network must be maintained by keeping it active, and that it must continually be nourished by its members.

Communications network analysis is a valuable approach to social researchers because it allows comparison of the communications structure of a system with the social structure of the system. The essence of much human behavior is the interaction through which one individual exchanges information with one or more other individuals. (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981) This work, in part, critiques earlier communications research for its sole use of individuals as the units of analysis, and the hypothesis is offered that it is not always appropriate. Four other main units of analysis are suggested: (1) personal communications networks (individuals linked by patterned communications flows to a focal individual), (2) dyads (two
individuals connected by a communications link), (3) cliques
(subsystems whose elements interact with each other relatively
more frequently than with other members of the communications
system), and (4) systems, or networks (all the individuals and
other units). (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981) Individuals form and
maintain network links that require the least effort and that
are the most rewarding. A paradox in human communications is
that more informationally valuable links require more effort
to form and maintain. (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981)

Personality factors are not the sole determinant of group
performance; that is, it is not only the characteristics
brought to the group by its members but also those that emerge
out of group interaction. These include coalition formation,
communications structures (linkages), task performance
strategies, and tendencies toward polarization. Group
interaction sometimes produces performance beyond that which
might be expected, and such phenomena are sometimes referred
to as "assembly bonus effects." (Driskell et al., 1987)

Coalition building by organizations themselves is
addressed where a core group of organizations is used to build
the coalition. To determine the scope of the coalition, there
are three patterns of exchange relationships identified: (1)
an organization-set as a unit of analysis to trace the
interaction of an organization with others; (2) an
organizational network, which is all of the groups and
organizations associated with a particular production or service system; and, (3) an action-set, in which an interacting group of organizations coordinate their actions to achieve a particular goal. (Roberts-DeGennaro, 1987)

**SUMMARY**

There is an abundance of literature on the topic of organizational communications research, with scholarly works normally emphasizing different aspects of the communications process itself. These studies clearly emphasize the upward, downward, and horizontal nature of communications in organizations. The value of horizontal networking can likewise be taken from the research, and the value of both formal and informal networks is well documented.

Two of the aspects of the literature reviewed are especially applicable to the scope of this case study. These are the effectiveness of formal and informal networks and the usefulness of the group process.

Clearly, the research indicates that formal and informal networks are useful methods for establishing and maintaining communication linkages. There is no consensus as to how much networking is desirable, and it appears that many variables come into play in this area, such as the purpose of formal networking (i.e., problem solving, etc.). It is equally clear that informal networking will occur to fill in gaps left by formal networks, and that informal networks can, and often do,
evolve into formal networks.

A majority of earlier research uses the individual as a unit of measure, with later studies tending toward other units of analysis. It is noteworthy, however, that even when other units of measure are utilized, the basic focus reverts to the individual.

Most studies into group processes come from the human relations school. It is difficult, however, to find literature on how organizations actually learn. The main problem is translating research involving individuals and groups into workable theories about larger entities and organizations. It may be said, however, that communications, whether individual, group, or organizational, involves individuals, which leads to the premise that communications studies focusing on individuals would be applicable, at least in part, to larger entities.

With regard to the other research into group effectiveness, conclusions differ. Some groups formed for purposes such as mental health therapy may in fact be dysfunctional, depending of the individuals in the group. What is apparent, however, is that groups are seemingly most effective when structured to perform certain tasks. In terms of this case study, there are two tasks of the forum group. These are (1) education and information sharing between members, and (2) problem solving. For these tasks, the
research indicates that group processes are more beneficial than individual endeavors.

METHODOLOGY

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT FORUM OVERVIEW

The research in this study is directed at briefly examining: (1) why communications linkages between civilian and police in local governments fail to emerge, and, (2) in depth, examining the effectiveness of a methodology for establishing such communications linkages. The method utilized is a forum that gathers together individuals from both the civilian and police arenas of local governments. The forum consists of a small group of approximately twenty individuals.

The civilians invited to the forum, known as the "Public Management Forum," were above the supervisor/foreman level up to and including department heads and a city manager. On the police side, individuals from the rank of sergeant and above participated. These persons were specifically invited by the facilitators of the program, who are associate professors of public administration at California State University, San Bernardino.

The facilitators constructed a scenario of a hypothetical city, including specific demographics and problems, in order to provide a dialogue among the participants. Originally, the forum was structured so the participants would meet for three
sessions, once per month, over a three month period. Structurally, the participants were in a round-table setting, which encouraged free-wheeling individual contributions. The facilitators’ roles were to present the problems and keep up the dialogue.

The forums were held at various locations in Southern California during the first quarter of 1991. The results of the forums are presented below, and were taken from notes and interviews of participants by the author after each session.

**WHAT IS COMMUNITY-ORIENTED POLICING?**

This section deals with the various aspects of community-oriented policing, including definitions, concepts, history, and purpose. Additionally, specific methods, cost, performance measurement, and the different roles politics, networking, and conferencing are examined.

Community-oriented policing is variously described as "community policing," "community-linked policing," "neighborhood-oriented policing," "problem-solving policing," and "strategic policing." The term "community-oriented policing" will be used primarily throughout this paper.

Meese and Carrico feel community-oriented policing focuses on a function of police work that has often been neglected in recent years: maintaining public order. This was the primary activity of the police until foot patrols were replaced by squad cars and high-technology crime-fighting.
Strategic policing, although closer to traditional police methods "back to the future," still requires new techniques and close knowledge of a community. This method involves learning the patterns of crime in an area and deploying resources to directly combat them. (Meese, 1990)

The basis of this concept is that local communities are the first line of defense against crime, being the most useful source of information about criminals, patterns of crime, and how criminal activity may be fought. Community-oriented policing strategies encourage close contacts between individual officers and individual citizens, through such programs as Neighborhood Watch, to strengthen a community's ability to resist crime. Community-oriented policing is not limited to the traditional role of the police officer. Rather, it includes building the relationships and sense of responsibility among community members to reduce and prevent criminal activity. (Meese, 1990)

More than 300 cities and towns nationwide are adopting the community-oriented policing concept, in which municipalities work to build rapport between police officers and the neighborhoods they patrol. The theory holds that when police officers and the citizens of a neighborhood know and communicate freely with each other, it is more difficult for both criminals and cops to break the law. (Locayo, 1991)

The history of the beat cop has traveled full circle -
police were all purpose keepers of the peace until early this century. They ran lodging houses for the homeless, tracked down offensive smells, rounded up stray animals, and even kept the streetlamps supplied with oil. While meting out curbside justice, the beat cop at the same time gained a reputation for taking payoffs. By the late 1940’s, the police had "professionalized" their services and narrowed their responsibility to apprehending criminals. Other functions were handed off to other departments and agencies. (Locayo, 1991)

Many analysts believe modernization, including automobile patrols and the 911 emergency call system, fostered conditions that contributed to the sharply higher crime rates of the past three decades. Scholarly studies indicate that the police now routinely overlook relatively minor offenses such as loud radios, graffiti, and aggressive panhandling, which creates a permissive atmosphere in which more serious crime is likely to occur. Community-oriented policing tries to discourage crimes before they happen by maintaining or creating stable neighborhoods in which the police and residents define those local problems which are of greatest concern to the community. Some police academies are revamping their curricula to train cadets in social service skills. (Locayo, 1991)

Many police chiefs now believe that crime is not just a police matter but a question of human relations, and that
understanding people and communities is just as important for effective police work as knowing how to use a gun or computer. The human relations side of police work has always involved the ability of individual officers to communicate with those he or she is contacting. The officer must have the ability to relate to the many different types of people of varying backgrounds. This boils down to the officer, as the representative of the department and government, communicating with both the public and other governmental employees in a two-way exchange, whether arresting an offender, interacting with a local community group, or reporting upwards through the chain of command. The emphasis of police work is expanding from the crime lab and squad car to include foot patrol and the strengthening of communities against criminal activity. (Meese, 1990)

The suggestion has been made that the police take measures to maintain minimum standards of public orderliness to prevent escalation of crimes; for example, from simple panhandling to more violent crimes. In addition to their own patrol activity, police seek assistance from other city departments in attacking signs of "abandonment" in a neighborhood - litter, vacant buildings, and utility problems - and draw upon other community resources to deal with problems related to crime. (Meese, 1990)

Community-oriented policing methods aim to reduce crime
and determine what will make citizens feel more secure, since the perception of danger from criminal activity is often greater than the actual risk. Fear of crime can impel citizens to hide and can force individuals and businesses out, causing the destruction of social and economic ties within communities. (Meese, 1990)

Foot patrol is especially suited to this strategy, since rapid response by patrol cars after crimes occur does not give citizens the opportunity to express their security concerns. By contrast, the sight of a familiar foot officer walking the beat gives people a chance to make their fears known. (Meese, 1990)

The one drawback of community-oriented policing is that it is expensive, often requiring expanded police resources. The difficulty is finding time and resources to make community-oriented policing work. Sometimes existing resources can be redirected through methods such as "civilianization" or limiting rapid response to taking non-emergency calls and reports over the phone. (Meese, 1990; Locayo, 1991) Further, when the number of arrests is no longer the mark of success, new yardsticks will be needed to measure individual police performance, because it "is hard to measure what doesn't happen." (Locayo, 1991, p. 24)

Politics plays a role in community-oriented policing, as power struggles are natural in bureaucratic settings;
struggles that are fueled when new strategies like community policing are implemented. Networking plays a major role in community-oriented policing because the technique is still so new. A conference involving personnel from both the civilian and police sides of government offers an ideal environment for that type of support and exchange. (Parker, 1991)

Some officers and administrators feel that community-oriented policing does not equate itself with "real" police work. In this respect, there is a need to look for what is best for the organization - the city - as a whole. Officers must move away from the status quo mentality and become change agents and risk takers. Without resources, this concept cannot exist, and the police need to market themselves as more than mere responders to criminal activity and draw people from other services as full partners in problem solving. This method revolves around the accessibility and application of community resources, including waste disposal, public housing authorities, road departments, code enforcement, community groups, etc. If there is no team effort, services can be duplicated and ineffective. Problem solving using resources and analysis is a specific tactic officers can use as much as anything else in policing, such as deterrence and intervention. (Parker, 1991)

In 1982 in Houston, Chief Lee Brown set up twenty storefront offices in different city neighborhoods. Officers
were tasked with building community contacts through churches, PTA’s, and other community organizations. Similar efforts including a Community Board to resolve neighborhood disputes are found elsewhere. (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992)

Community-oriented policing is a process rather than a program, because programs are too easily subjected to change and indirectly suggest a short-term commitment. Another concern is that programs tend to split the patrol force into specialists (participants in the program) and the others who are left to perform routine functions, leading to an "us and them" feeling of resistance. As a philosophy, community-oriented policing must focus on the need to change attitudes before behavior. As a process, it must commit to identify operational functions before management accountability mechanisms. A critical component is the reaching of a consensus by all parties as to what community-oriented policing means in terms of job tasks and responsibilities. This consensus can be achieved through the communications process by the methods described herein, including using individuals in different agencies and groups to form both formal and informal networks through the group process, thereby leading to the building of a coalition with common goals. The overall goals are to: (1) open communications and create a cooperative relationship between the police and residents, (2) identify problems that affect quality of life,
(3) devise strategies to address these problems, and (4) work cooperatively to solve them. (Ottmeier, 1988)

The purpose of this research paper is to examine the forums as a method for bringing the police and civilian sides of local governments together. It is recognized that in terms of community-oriented policing, there must be a much broader emphasis to include community members and groups as well as other governmental entities in the process. The premise of this immediate study, however, emphasizes that communications barriers exist between police and civilians in government service and offers a method for overcoming these barriers through group interaction, networking, and coalition building, as the first step in the process.

**ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE FORUMS**

**FORUM 1**

There were several issues identified at the first session. Generally, the biggest problem was one of individual values and perceptions. Key issues were:

1. **Support**: Both civilian and police managers desire better communications, support, and cooperation between each other. Support was most desired to address current community problems of gangs and drugs but, in addition, each side wanted support in other areas. Budgetary support was a critical issue, with the civilian side generally feeling
that police "got everything they want."

2. **Police Insulation:** Clearly, this was the most emotional issue of the day, taking up the most discussion. Civilian participants saw as an extreme barrier the separation of police and civilian government facilities, especially with regard to the "fortress" type of building normally used for police headquarters, even though there was an acknowledgement of legitimate security needs for police facilities. Several civilian participants said they felt uncomfortable in the police facility, and resented the procedures necessary merely to gain access to the building. Additionally, there were numerous references from the civilian side to the police "ego", "esprit de corps", "elitism", and "paramilitarization," indicating that police are generally perceived as thinking they stand above other municipal functions. There was recognition from both sides that lack of networking at levels below department heads is a communications problem and, likewise, recognition that both sides need to be more open with each other.

3. **Leadership:** Civilians generally saw the police as trying to dominate municipal government, with
police and fire functions perceived in a more positive light by the community. Police are willing to take a broader leadership role for the municipality while the civilians were opposed to taking on any law enforcement responsibility. Some reasons for the difference put forth were personal background of police applicants, selection, and training. The police indicated a willingness to manage problems outside the scope of traditional law enforcement if civilians were either unwilling or unable.

4. **Social work:** There was a general consensus that the police are taking over an increasing number of traditionally social work-type functions involving the non-police aspects of areas like marital disputes and child neglect. These include intervention, placement, and followup. Police saw their duties in this arena as often forced upon them because of failures in the social work structure. It was recognized that the police are in a prominent position to identify problems at an early stage.

5. **Innovation and excellence:** There was consensus that there is an overall lack of innovation in municipal government. The primary factor causing
this is bureaucratic inertia. This inertia, along with other organizational impediments, causes innovative ideas to be put aside. Achieving organizational support by defining the department's role both internally and externally, was agreed upon as the key to overcoming these barriers. Civilians, according to the police, have to be responsive to innovation or the police will give up.

6. **Power:** The police chief is seen by civilian managers as the most powerful department head in the city, often surpassing that of the city manager. Definitions and roles were not so clear in terms of county managers (elected sheriffs vis-a-vis county administrative officers). The main reason for this perception is that the largest line item in local budgets is often public safety. Again, the perception from the civilian side that the police get whatever is requested causes resentment and creates one more barrier to effective communication.

7. **Organization:** The civilians were resentful of the system of recognition and rewards generally given to the police side (for numbers of arrests, shooting skills, etc.), while civilians have no
such reward system. For instance, what recognition and awards do public works personnel get for the number of potholes filled? Also in this area issues were raised as to how the different departments relate to elected officials. It was a general perception that the police spend more time "educating" and cultivating support among politicians. Elected officials were seen by both sides as transitory birds of passage and requiring a great deal of effort to keep them informed.

8. Leadership: There was general agreement that the keys to improving relationships between civilian and police personnel were leadership (by both sides), communications networking, and team building. It was recognized that chief administrative and law enforcement officers must provide symbolic and actual support for cooperative programs.

9. Race relations with police: There was great disagreement between the participants on this issue. Some participants simply did not want to discuss such things as police abuse, policing methods for multiethnic communities, police racial prejudice, and the minority communities as hotbeds of hostilities towards police. The general feeling on the part of these individuals was that
the larger issues would get bogged down in a discussion of this topic. Other participants insisted that it merited discussion because it is such a major issue and problem.

FORUM 2

The focus of the second forum was to discuss a community-oriented policing (COPS) strategy for a hypothetical city, and to achieve consensus among the participants on an implementation strategy.

Discussion of the different aspects of this strategy resulted in the following comparison chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITIONAL STRATEGY</th>
<th>COPS STRATEGY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilian/police relations</td>
<td>Insulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police/citizen relations</td>
<td>Separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police strategy</td>
<td>Incident driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Vertical hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Top-down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delegated power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bottom-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Incident driven plus problem solving

This typology clearly spells out the differences between traditional and community-oriented policing. Harlan Cleveland's *The Knowledge Executive* is quoted in *Reinventing Government*, "Not 'command and control' but 'conferrring and networking' become the mandatory modes for getting things done." (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, p. 253) Clearly, this
along with decentralization and bottoms-up emphasis was the consensus of the group at this forum. Community-oriented policing was differentiated from the old concept of team policing, which failed in the late 1960's, primarily due to its being a police-exclusive strategy. The difference between community-oriented policing and team policing is that the entire spectrum of governmental and community services is brought into play in the community-oriented policing method. This interplay of services and support depends largely on effective communications networks existing between the different departments, which is the focus of this research study.

Major points made and receiving the general consensus of the group during this second forum were:

1. Supervisors at all levels of the hierarchy must afford street level personnel consistent, visible, and strong support.

2. Incremental implementation of community-oriented policing is preferred over systemwide implementation. The former allows for adjustments to be made as necessary.

3. Selection of the right personnel in the early implementation phase is critical. Combined with a strategy of incremental implementation, this leads to a contagion strategy (or multiplier effect)
whereby the community-oriented policing ethos "grows" and takes over much like an organism.

4. Formal and informal networks across agency, government, and neighborhood boundaries are essential.

5. Cultivation of citizens should be done in conjunction with community problem solving. Community problem solving means that mutual identification (by police, civilian government workers, and community members) of potential and existing areas of concern are addressed. This can include relatively simple things like cleaning up accumulated garbage and trash to more complex strategies such as transitioning tenants of government housing from free or subsidized rent to achieving personal ownership.

6. Community-oriented policing will work if and to the extent that it is accepted as effective by the personnel involved in its planning and implementation. This point is crucial - it is essential to involve personnel (both civilian and police) in the strategy development to get them to "buy in" to the program.

During this session, there was disagreement over when political leaders should be involved, and to what extent. The
general perception was that in the developmental stages, where there are gaps in the strategy, elected officials may seek to fill those gaps without allowing for input by others.

FORUM 3

This session began with a paradigm for providing community policing services to the community using the police as an overall coordinating entity. The model’s purpose was to provide a mechanism for exchange, with the goal of broadening the range of public services provided.

Other models were suggested. One indicated that civilian departments already have horizontal networks in place between one another, suggesting that it is the police who need to fit themselves into this network.

Again, the perception arose from the civilian sector that the police get anything they requested. Also, once again, the civilians raised their concern about the "police attitude," saying the police are "insensitive" to the civilian departments and have a "know-it-all" demeanor. Much discussion centered around the topic of a lack of a unified strategy between the police and civilian sides of government, but this was offset by the example of the joint efforts of police and schools, especially in programs such as DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education.) With regard to a unified strategy, the argument was made that, in fact, there may be no common goals between departments or within a municipality,
because there is no consensus as to what the goals are. It was clear from this part of the discussion that there is a major problem in perceptions, especially of the civilians toward the police, and a major problem in communications between the two. This occurred between forum participants who had two three-hour opportunities to resolve some of these differences.

Dialogue also centered around what may be seen as general misconceptions on the part of all participants. The first centered on employee motivation, and the assumption that municipal employees in fact want to serve their public. The fact may be that they are motivated solely by a steady income and not have higher motives. Another issue involved organizational barriers, from the standpoint of department heads who are unwilling to share resources and, to some extent, responsibilities for nontraditional functions. In this area are individuals who want the police to address "police" problems (e.g., crime) and civilians to address "civilian" problems (e.g., recreational needs). In this aspect, it is important to recognize the organizational value structure of different departments and the constituencies which they serve.

In terms of implementation strategies for community-oriented policing, there was again disagreement over where it should begin. Some felt the heads of the various departments
should start the strategy while others thought the mid-management levels should be the initiators. Another method would be to bring in an outside mediator/facilitator, or a "missionary" to start up the implementation methodology.

From a training viewpoint, it was postulated that a two-step approach would be best. This emphasized entry level training for new employees and upper level training for remaining employees. In this part of the discussion, it was generally agreed that personnel at the mid-management level will have the greatest impact, influencing both superiors and subordinates. One suggestion was that zealots, or climbers, be used in development and implementation, so as to sell the strategy to others who may be more reluctant. (Downs 1967)

It was generally agreed that participants must go through the process of discovery for themselves rather than have program goals and implementation strategies imposed on them in top-down fashion. This will help obviate the problems of perceptions, misconceptions, different goals, and assumed cooperation. There were three implementation issues identified: (1) internal problems within departments; (2) interagency conflicts; and, (3) municipal government acceptance of strategy and community involvement methods.

The third session participants repeatedly tried to get from generalized to specific implementation strategies without success. It was in the area of specific strategies and
methods that disagreements arose again, mainly due to one individual department (on the police side) being more comfortable with developing a strategy alone, then having other departments get involved, which other participants saw as dead on arrival. The belief emerged on the part of the majority that it is necessary to involve all potential participants in the developmental process so each individual and department feels an ownership in the strategy.

ANALYSIS

The literature, community-oriented policing strategy, and forum results are linked in several ways. Community-oriented policing faces communications barriers, and must employ group methods, networking, and coalition building to overcome these barriers.

As seen from the surveys, communications barriers between individuals on the police and civilian sides occur at several levels. The primary block is due to the perception on the part of civilians that the police are not supportive of the efforts of others in local government. Second, the insulation of the police from the civilian side with regard to separate buildings, etc., serves as a communications impediment. Third, the civilian perception that the police wield the most power within local governments taking resources from the other functions. Barriers such as these were addressed in the literature and, according to other research, can be corrected
through methods such as openness, listening, and forming groups to solve common problems.

Combining the civilian and police into a group to implement community-oriented policing is a method with substantial basis found in the literature. The findings indicate that group dynamics will tend to coalesce the members into a like thinking whole and, for problem solving particularly, group interaction provides more benefits and better solutions than other methods.

Networking was examined in detail in both the literature and survey results. Overwhelmingly, the forum participants felt networking achieved positive results and believed the implementation of a community-oriented policing strategy was impossible without it. These findings support the research literature, where both formal and informal networks serve to streamline communications and overcome barriers.

Coalition building through the group process of networking is the ultimate desired result to unify the police and civilian members of local government in an implementation strategy. Although there is not a great deal of literature on this specific subject, it can be inferred from the processes of group interaction in forming networks that the next logical step is building the coalition. The coalition originates with individuals and progresses into organizations - in this case study departments within local governments - forming a
coalition to put community-oriented policing in place. In the larger sense, group participation, networking, and forming the coalition must include not only the members of both the police and civilian sides of local government but community members, community agencies and volunteer groups, and other governmental agencies, such as Mental Health, Social Services, Welfare, Housing, and others as well. These include members, both paid and volunteer, of various community groups. Each individual and department thereby has a stake in the success of the strategy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the review of existing literature and the issues identified by the participants in the public management forums, it appears that a proper methodology for improving communication between civilian and police managers in the public sector would be to form communications linkages, both informal and formal networks, through the forum process. The format of group participation in the open, or round-table, setting, which encourages dialogue, is a viable vehicle for such forums.

Formal links can be instituted by department heads and their subordinates. Mechanisms like the public management forum are useful in establishing informal linkages through the efforts of group process for sharing information and problem solving. Formal networks, the literature shows, often follow
informal networks, and the generalizable assumption is that more formal interrelations will follow in municipalities using group strategies.

Although the group participants in these forums were selected by the facilitators, thereby eliminating randomness, there appears to be at least limited generalizability for these research results to other similar groups of public managers. All participants agreed that the forums helped in identifying perceptions and constructing meaningful dialogue with participants on the opposite side of government. Indicators are that such groups, particularly if limited to participants of a single municipality, will benefit from this process.

As a strategy, no comment was made about community-oriented policing as opposed to other methods. However, it is noteworthy that several major cities, as well as moderately- and smaller-sized communities, have implemented this holistic approach in an attempt to impact community problems which spawn crime. Major metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles and Houston and others are attempting this method with successes reported.

It is important to realize that this model emphasizes the need for both police and civilian government personnel to be responsive to community interests. Both government and community must engage in the task of controlling crime and
disorder. Community-oriented policing looks for long-term effectiveness rather than short-term efficiency and immediate responsiveness to every call for service. It should also be realized that the police do not create conditions for crime, nor can they resolve them or combat crime singlehandedly. Law enforcement is a community responsibility where the police take a leadership versus an autocratic role, for it is through the actions, or inactions, of the police that the civil rights of individuals are affected. It is incumbent upon all the members that make up the community - its residents, interest groups, and its governmental representatives, both civilian and police - to look now towards building of the community infrastructure just as previous efforts have been dedicated to building the physical infrastructure of our communities.
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