

Organizational Change in Law Enforcement: Community-Oriented Policing as Transformational Leadership

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Abstract

Comprehensive organizational change in law enforcement practices remains constrained by its adherence to the quasi-military model. While transformational leadership continues to gain popularity within the business field, police leadership and officers also express a desire to emphasize follower-oriented practices. However, the transactional relationship persists for police, inhibiting the widespread implementation of community-oriented policing, a transformational law enforcement style. Exploring the factors affecting organizational change for police, this literature review examines police leadership style preferences as they interact with perceptions of organizational effectiveness. Specifically, what style(s) of leadership most positively affect police efficacy within the United States, England, and Wales? Implications for leadership styles provide discussion and recommendations for organizational practitioners, researchers, and students.

Keywords: Organizational change, transformational leadership, police, leadership behavior, law enforcement

Glossary of Terms

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Police Chief, Chief of Police, Chief Officer of Police, Chief Police Officer: The highest-ranking officer within a police department; an appointed or elected official who oversees departmental operations and police officer performance.

Law Enforcement Supervisors/Managers: Oversee individual divisions within police departments.

Police Leadership/Upper Management: Denotes a distinction between higher-ranked officials within departments such as chiefs, assistant/deputy chiefs, commanders, captains, and lieutenants as opposed to sergeants, detectives, and officers.

Stamper (2016), a former police chief and officer of 34 years before his retirement in 2000, argued the apparently permanent tensions between problematic police actions and public scrutiny stem from systemic issues that will inherently remain unaddressed without comprehensive institutional reform of law enforcement practices. The best approach to addressing modern-day concerns of police decision-making procedures, Stamper suggested, would embrace a community-oriented policing paradigm, radically transforming the role of law enforcement toward one of full partnership between officers and citizens in best serving the needs of their shared communities. Community-oriented policing procedures have existed since the 1980s, but Ponsaers (2001) argued due to a lack of consistent definitions, nor a clearly established and agreed-upon theoretical basis for this paradigm, many efforts at community-oriented reform lie in the responsibility of individual police chiefs and political leaders to determine the approach and efficacy of departmental policies. This lack of consistency regarding community-oriented policing practices impedes widespread implementation of a direly necessary paradigm.

However, a theoretical basis for community-oriented policing currently exists; it merely requires further empirical justification. Vinzant and Crothers (1994) explored interactions between police and the public, arguing street-level officers

play an essential role within their communities as individual leaders. In consideration of evaluative criteria for understanding officers' roles and their integration into a community-oriented policing context, Vinzant and Crothers drew upon Burns' (1978) theory of transformational leadership. Burns (2003) explained a consistent factor in effectively leading others depends on how "the needs are defined and their satisfaction sought on the needing person's terms" (p. 240). Northouse (2015) defined transformational leadership as "the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower" (p. 162). Expanding on the influence of transformational processes, Wood, Fleming, and Marks (2008) likewise argued that individual officers of all ranks contain the capacity to grow into leaders of change within their communities. The authors suggested due to all officers' equal consideration as change agents, "the challenge before us is to...establish the conditions that build this capacity... 'from the bottom up'" (Wood, Fleming, & Marks, 2008, p. 75).

Furthermore, Silvestri (2007) provided a conceptual bridge between officers' roles and change efforts, arguing officers who utilize transformational leadership styles, most notably female officers, proved more successful in effecting organizational and community change. Unfortunately, Silvestri also offered the police organization as a whole persists in utilizing more transactional rather than transformational leadership practices. Northouse (2015) defined transactional leadership as a style whose primary focus pertains to an exchange of services through a system of rewards and punishments. Rather than prioritizing a unique connection with followers, the transactional relationship emphasizes performance through strict compliance to policy and procedure, essentially depersonalizing all aspects of organizational processes.

Purpose & Research Question

While transformational leadership grows popular amongst organizational leaders within more traditional business fields due to its emphasis on developing follower motivation (Northouse, 2015), and whereas police leadership proves open to

incorporating transformational leadership practices (Murphy, 2008), many police departments remain constrained by a transactional relationship between leaders and subordinates (Jermier & Berkes, 1979; Silvestri, 2007). Thus, this work seeks to explore the causal relationship between leadership styles and policing outcomes. Specifically, what style(s) of leadership most positively affect police efficacy within the United States, England, and Wales? This literature review will primarily focus on police leadership style preferences as they interact with perceptions of organizational effectiveness. Additionally, while this review will benefit leaders working in law enforcement, an exploration of the processes and hurdles in navigating behavioral change in police practices will also enhance understanding of the barriers provided by extremely policy and procedure-focused organizations for both practitioners and students of organizational leadership.

Leadership Behavior and Subordinate Engagement

First, Jermier and Berkes (1979) explored the influence of leadership behavior and police bureaucracy on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Specifically, the authors focused on the respective interrelation of instrumental leadership, participative leadership, and supportive leadership with task variability and task interdependence in influencing subordinate outcomes. Based on their results, the authors offered while traditional adherence to a quasi-military model persists, the findings did not provide evidence for the effectiveness of the transactional nature of authoritarian police leadership, and participative and supportive leadership styles yielded more positive subordinate outcomes. Ultimately, this research suggested that the strength of subordinate engagement with leadership proved more effective in achieving organizational outcomes than subordinates' passive and unquestioning acceptance of authoritarian orders.

Leadership Style and Productivity

Similarly, Bruns and Shuman (1988) explored the effects of police leadership style on subordinate productivity. Bruns and Shuman (1988) collected a convenience sample of "365 law enforcement

officers in 10 managerial training programs in Arizona from 1978-1982” (p. 151). The researchers measured 22 characteristics of perceived and desired departmental leadership styles on a continuum from authoritative to participative concerning 4 management styles, exploitive – authoritative, benevolent – authoritative, consultative, and participative – group. The findings indicated that law enforcement supervisors and managers in Arizona largely supported a participative leadership style but persisted in functioning authoritatively. Interestingly, the focus of Jermier and Berkes (1979) and Bruns and Shuman (1988) provided an early discussion of a preference for change among police departments regarding leadership styles, and the transactional nature of authoritarian leadership seemingly served only to restrict efforts of change.

Organizational Accountability

Further literature evidenced how the restrictive nature of transactional leadership and authoritarianism in police departments likely stems from municipal management oversight of police chiefs. Caless and Tong (2013) qualitatively explored the tensions between police leadership and the governmental bodies tasked with their accountability. Employing semi-structured interviews of 85 chief officers of police in England and Wales with nine additional participants completing questionnaires, chief officers discussed police accountability in relation to the governmental oversight of the Tripartite Arrangement consisting of “police authorities, the home office, and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)” (Caless & Tong, 2013, p. 5).

The researchers’ semi-structured interviews and questionnaires of chief officers of the police revealed the responsibilities of police authorities regarding employment appraisals, budgetary determinations, and diversity recruitment within the police force served to constrict chief officers’ sense of independence (Caless & Tong, 2013). The authors noted that although many English and Welsh citizens believed chief officers of police operated unaccountably and without consequence, police authorities proved deeply engaged in oversight of all areas of operation. This intense accountability measure, however, may have negatively affected

communication and morale of chief officers of police in relation to police authorities, as chief officers reported feelings of encroachment and a tendency of police authorities to prove overly critical of operations. As a result, the authors explained, this imbalance in power of the police authorities’ roles in affecting the daily operations of chief officers of the police fueled the deterioration of chief officers’ respect for the police authorities’ roles in ensuring accountability. Essentially, the authors suggested a transactional relationship exists between chief officers and their oversight bodies, with its tension inadvertently manifesting in an appearance of police chiefs’ resistance to public accountability measures.

Politics & Promotion

In addition to the transactional tensions present in organizational accountability of police chiefs, the literature also indicated organizational politics and promotion of individuals into oversight roles could fuel transactional tendencies. Regarding Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), Caless and Tong (2013) explained the political system of promotion for an officer to the role of inspector overseeing police operations serves to foster negative relationships with chief officers of police. Interviews offered how many chief officers questioned the competency of the inspectors to perform their previous tasks as police officers, let alone their ability to assess chief officer efficacy. Because the role of the HMIC contained a political component in representing public concerns regarding the police alongside the intense scrutiny and development of chief officers, 80% of chief officers interviewed expressed mostly negative comments regarding their relationship with inspectors. Thus, the authors suggested the ability for the HMIC to influence senior appointments of chief officers fostered suspicions of political intent and a lack of authenticity in assessing accountability.

Frustrations abounded among chief officers concerning the home office primarily due to its financial control over operations and perceptions of how these policymakers “who hold the police accountable do not themselves understand the nature of policing” (Caless & Tong, 2013, p. 13). Coping with the stresses of implementing policies with potentially dangerous or deadly consequences,

86% of chief officers expressed preponderantly negative views of the home office. Ultimately, the authors suggested the further removed from police operations the governmental body, the less respect afforded by chief officers for the body. While practically significant for police leadership, this research proved only generalizable to English and Welsh departments, as United States governmental oversight relationships function in a somewhat different manner. Unsurprisingly, while this work revealed the negative notions chief officers internalize regarding perceptions of an overstepping of boundaries in operations, the actual utility of this research stems from an understanding of chief officer resistance. Feelings of hostility, disrespect, and distrust permeated the interviews of chief officers in relation to accountability, suggesting perhaps further research should focus on how chief officers navigate relationships with these governmental bodies to gain a clearer picture as to how this tension might manifest in daily operations and potentially hinder positive change efforts.

Perceptions of Leadership Performance

Although transactional leadership tends to focus on meeting goals through practical performance and strict compliance with policy and procedure, the literature indicated others' perceptions of leaders' styles and performances impact their leadership efficacy. Krimmel and Lindenmuth (2001) sought to identify leadership styles and performance indicators of police chiefs whom municipal managers deemed both desirable and undesirable. Utilizing a mailing list of all Pennsylvanian municipal managers directly supervising police chiefs, the researchers collected a convenience sample of 205 completed questionnaires regarding police chief performance. The authors utilized 45 dependent variables concerning police chief performance and leadership styles and 8 independent variables including tenure, years of experience, whether hired from outside or promoted, graduate of the FBI National Academy, education level, type of community, number of personnel, and departmental unionization measured on a Likert-type scale. The findings indicated municipal managers gave higher performance and leadership ratings to police chiefs who possessed a college education, participated in

the FBI National Academy, received promotions to leadership internally, and worked in a union environment (Krimmel & Lindenmuth, 2001). Poor performance ratings identified chiefs without collegiate degrees and chiefs hired from outside of the department. However, the dependent leadership and performance indicators valued by municipal managers reflected qualities such as delegation, trustworthiness, sensitivity, and collaboration—each reflective of qualities associated with transformational leadership. Both Caless and Tong's (2013) and Krimmel and Lindenmuth's (2001) work contributed to the understanding of the role governmental oversight plays in affecting departmental leadership of police, particularly in reinforcing the transactional process to achieve goals despite seemingly perceiving higher-performing police leaders as possessing transformational leadership qualities.

Perceptions of Leadership Competence

Beyond reliance on governmental offices providing perceptions of police chiefs' performance, other studies explored perceptions of police leadership competence and efficacy from police leaders themselves. Schafer (2010) investigated the consequences of ineffective police leadership practices through a convenience sample of 304 police supervisors attending the Federal Bureau of Investigation National Academy from October 2006 to April 2007. Results revealed police leaders regarded ineffective leadership as reflective of a focus on the self-over-others, arrogance, closed-mindedness, micromanagement, a lack of consistency in decisions, a poor work ethic, general failures to act, ineffective communication, and a lack of interpersonal skills and integrity (Schafer, 2010). Ultimately, Schafer's survey of police chiefs attending the FBI National Academy revealed perceptions of ineffective leadership reflected instances of failing to meet subordinate needs and undermining followers' trust in leadership.

Leadership Behavior Preferences

In addition to gauging current perceptions of leadership performance and competence, Andreescu and Vito (2010) explored idyllically preferred leadership behavior within police departments. The authors utilized a convenience

sample of 123 police managers from 23 states attending the Administrative Officers Course at the Southern Police Institute during 2007-2008. Each police manager completed a survey concerning perceptions of ideal leadership behavior. Results indicated “the officer’s current assignment has the highest relative predictive power and influences the most an orientation toward the ‘transformational’ leadership style” (Andreescu & Vito, 2010, p. 578). Likewise, findings revealed females more likely to engage in laissez-faire leadership styles, African Americans more likely to engage in transformational leadership, and the likelihood of leaders to engage in transactional leadership decreases with each increasing year in the present department.

These findings proved significant in predicting the leadership styles of individuals within departments and in providing illumination of how best to work with these preferences (Andreescu & Vito, 2010). Findings revealed that police managers believed the ideal leadership behavior should integrate subordinates into organizational decision-making and promote their wellbeing, favoring a transformational leadership style approach. The least desirable leadership behaviors preferred by police managers included dictatorial leadership and a focus on results. Ultimately, Andreescu and Vito’s (2010) work regarding police managers’ perceptions of ideal leadership behavior indicated a transactional leadership style proved much less favored as a form of idyllic leadership than a transformational leadership style emphasizing the integration of subordinates’ wellbeing and decision-making processes into organizational functionality. Thus, the work of Schafer (2010) and Andreescu and Vito (2010) served to establish clear boundaries for leadership styles police supervisors considered either idyllic or ineffective for police leadership, emphasizing the positive impacts of a transformational leadership approach.

Transformational Leadership

While the literature suggested police preferred transformational leadership processes and perceived leaders who reflected this paradigm as higher-performing and more competent, two studies explored the effects and role of transformational leadership behaviors within police departments. Murphy (2008) qualitatively explored the impact

of a leader’s transformational vision upon vast metropolitan police culture. The researcher employed a semi-structured interview of 28 police officers of all ranks within a municipal police force regarding their feelings, daily routines, goals, and expectations concerning their police duties. Due to the emphasis on emotionality, the author also utilized an autoethnographic approach to this study, immersing himself in the daily happenings within the department over four 16-hour days. Murphy’s results revealed that police officers appeared to connect more with transformational leaders emotionally, and these leaders seemingly challenged dominant militaristic or unemotional leadership paradigms. However, senior management often hampered the transformational relationships of these departmental leaders due to its members’ inflexibility in envisioning different approaches to leadership and a fear of fostering reckless behavior in subordinates.

Subordinate Influence

Interestingly, Deluga and Souza (1991) explored the influence of police leadership styles and subordinate officer behavior upon one another. Targeting the entire population of a United States East Coast city’s police force, the authors utilized a convenience sample of the 117 total officers, with fifty-three officers returning two questionnaires measuring transformational and transactional leadership styles and subordinate influencing behaviors. Deluga and Souza (1991) wisely surveyed an entire police force to glean insight as to the influence between leaders and subordinates upon each other’s leadership styles and behaviors respectively. Deluga and Souza (1991) also found transformational leadership within police departments encouraged more rational influencing activity than transactional leadership, and transformational leadership allowed for subordinates’ behavior to, in turn, impact leaders’ behavior as well. Both Murphy (2008) and Deluga and Souza (1991) furthered the justification for the transformational leadership style as a more productive alternative than transactional leadership and the traditionally authoritarian quasi-military leadership paradigm often protected by the upper management and municipal managers of police departments.

Discussion

A review of the literature pertaining to police leadership and organizational outcomes appeared to support a shift in the police leadership paradigm from transactionalism toward a transformational leadership approach. Although many departments still adhere to the quasi-military model, findings indicated police supervisors and subordinates both tended to favor subordinate-oriented leadership styles over their current dictatorial departmental leadership practices. However, the relationships between police supervisors and their direct reports often derailed efforts to effect changes in leadership style and management due to municipal managers or upper-level police leadership sharing fears of a lack of results or risky relationships among officers.

Although this article focused on law enforcement, these findings prove enlightening for understanding barriers to organizational change within highly regulated or procedurally-focused organizations. Essentially, although leaders and subordinates may desire to embrace transformational processes, organizations with an increased degree of public scrutiny and accountability must inherently navigate a relationship housed in transaction. Whereas previous discussions of whether transformational or transactional leadership prove preferential or more productive, perhaps more restrictive organizations call for a more integrative approach. While the literature suggested upper-level management often impede efforts to enact transformational leadership practices due to a fear of diminishing results, leaders may need to learn to frame transformational leadership practices as a tool to better achieve organizational goals.

Likewise, leaders must also navigate transformational processes in relation to hiring, promotion, and training within their organizations. Despite the necessity to meet quantifiable performance metrics through the number of officers' arrests and citations in addition to departments' overall reduction of crime rates, promotion to leadership roles should not stem solely from quantitative measures lest they might dominate departmental priorities. Police serve the public, and unless training and hiring practices prioritize a transformational, community-oriented paradigm, as Stamper (2016) suggested, tensions stemming

from problematic police behavior will remain unaddressed.

However, these discussions demand deliverable metrics. Empirical research proves critical to the potential for transformational leadership in law enforcement. Future studies should focus on empirically exploring the relationship between transformational leadership practices and rates of police misconduct, community perceptions of police, and crime rate among other measurable factors important to all levels of the police organization. While qualitative studies may provide academically stimulating tinder to stoke discussion, the flame of transformational leadership will never truly catch within law enforcement without the metrics to justify its implementation.



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