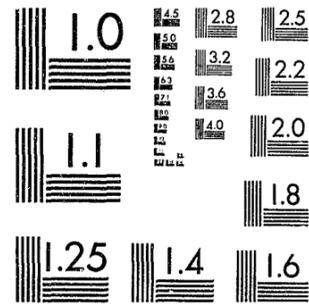


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ACQUISITIONS

Effects of Organizational Design on Communication Between Patrol and Investigative Functions (Part I)

By LT. COL. JOSEPH J. STAFF
Police Division
Cincinnati, Ohio

A major concern for the administrator of any large organization is that of maintaining harmonious relations, open channels of communication, and coordinated activities among his agency's subunits. The very nature of the executive function is to promote cooperative effort.¹ While a free flow of information is essential in any organization, the problem is more critical in a police agency. By far, the greatest bulk of work depends on its ability to process information effectively.

One of the most critical intra-agency interfaces in a police department is that of the investigative and patrol functions. To operate efficiently, each function should be highly dependent on the other. Yet, this is often one of the most strained points of exchange within law enforcement agencies.

The problem of maintaining cooperation and exchange of information between uniformed patrol officers and plainclothes investigators is not a recent one. As early as 1926, the Missouri Crime Survey reported on the problem, stating:

"The ancient rivalry between the uniformed and plainclothes forces has a substantial basis. It arises from the fact that in a given case the patrolman is often the first to risk life and limb. With the arrival of detectives, however, he is automatically displaced. The plainclothes operative takes command of the situation, and the patrolman returns to his beat. This condition inspires a natural resentment, which sometimes leads to a series of retaliatory acts by the two branches. In the maneuvers which follow, the public functions of the officer are lost sight of. Their energies are directed at causing each other confusion, discomfort, and discouragement."²

Later comment on the same point was made in a 1962 consultant's report, which reads:

"The lack of coordination between detective and uniformed divisions leads to duplication of effort, unarticulated field work, and the loss of some cases, and the missing of arrests which might otherwise be made."³



A police officer and a detective investigate a crime scene.



Lieutenant Colonel Staff



Col. Myron J. Leistler
Chief of Police

It is not likely that difficulties in investigative-patrol coordination are confined to only a few police departments. Most police administrators would have to admit to experiencing some communication problems between these units, although differences would likely be in degree, not in kind.

Several contemporary observers of police behavior have commented on off-times strained relationships between police patrol and investigative forces. Professor Egon Bittner of Brandeis University writes, "The hostility and information denial between bureaus and details of department is occasionally admitted. But that every individual officer has important information that he does not share with anyone is virtually never mentioned in the literature. Yet this is a central fact of police work and every officer learns it in the first year of his practice."⁴ Professor Arthur Niederhofer of John Jay University comments that when the patrolman uncovers a felony from which the suspect has fled, the case is turned over to the detectives who, if they find the culprit, get all the credit.⁵ Harvard University Professor James Q. Wilson, in his study of police behavior, has much to say about differences between the patrol and investigative functions.⁶ The patrolman functions in an uncertain, hostile atmosphere with the ambiguous, often unpopular, mandate to "maintain order." The detective, however, usually enjoys higher prestige and higher pay, more interesting work and more freedom, and has a better sense of what is expected of him. When one reflects upon these differences, it does not seem strange that conflicts may arise between operational units.

Factors Influencing the Problem

The difficulties in maintaining cooperation and coordination between the patrol and investigative functions can be grouped into three general classes of interrelated problems: Organizational problems, social problems, and inadequacy of information systems.

The Presidential Task Force Report on the Police describes the manner in which organizational structure can adversely effect coordination of activities between the investigative and patrol functions.

"In almost all large police departments there is a considerable amount of organizational fragmentation. Traditionally and almost universally, patrol and investigative forces have separate lines of command and tend to be isolated from one another; often they keep separate sets of records; frequently they work different shifts or are based in different places so that there is a minimum of contact between patrolmen and detectives. In addition, investigators are more often than not divided at both headquarters and precinct levels into squads—vice, robbery, burglary, fraud, homicide, and so forth—that may themselves keep separate records, use separate informants and remain more or less isolated from each other in other ways. At both the staff and the field levels, this over-separation of functions, or overspecialization, can have undesirable results. When intelligence is not centralized and coordinated, staff planning for the purpose of either apprehending specific criminals, or solving crime problems such as, for example, an outbreak of burglaries in some neighborhoods, is almost impossible. When lines of command are kept rigidly separate, it is difficult to bring the full resources of a department to bear on crime solution."⁷

Rigid and separate lines of command imply equally rigid and separate channels of communication. If each bit of information relevant to solving or suppressing crime must travel up the chain of command to a common point, then back down to the affected unit, little information, indeed, could be processed.

Competition between units can be a very useful tool for motivation and morale, if the competing units can operate independently of one another. However, when tasks are interdependent and exchange of information is critical, competition becomes counter-productive. Intergroup conflict probably dissipates more energy and money than any other single organizational disease.⁸ Competition can produce "win-lose" intergroup orientation, dysfunctional loyalty to subunits instead of the overall organization, and cognitive distortions of behavior of competing group members. Communication processes are impeded. If organizational rewards, such as promotion and preferential assignments or unit and individual prestige, are bestowed on the basis of "who gets credit" for arrests, case closures, and the like, a situation develops which encourages officers to keep information to themselves and withhold aid to other officers or units competing for "credit" for the arrest or closure. The organizational reward system should not induce competition which is so intense that it frustrates rather than furthers organizational goals.

The manner in which responsibility for investigation of cases is assigned can also affect task performance and cooperation between units. Traditionally, patrol units have been given responsibility only for preliminary investigations or complete responsibility for investigation of "minor" offenses. At some point prior to the conclusion, responsibility for investigation of serious crimes is handed off to the investigative specialists. Hence, the patrolman feels he is left with only routine and mundane investigations, while the detective investigates the interesting or spectacular cases. The patrol officer, relegated to the role of "report taker," may see little personal

incentive to conduct a thorough and meticulous preliminary investigation or to forward any information not specifically required by procedure when he knows he has no responsibility for the ultimate closure and will receive no credit for a subsequent arrest made by the detective bureau.

Social Problems

It was suggested previously that the functions of the detective and patrol officer differ somewhat. Both Wilson and Bittner comment at length on

"... organizational structure can adversely affect coordination of activities. . . ."

these differences. The patrolman is concerned with "keeping the peace," a very ambiguous and uncertain job description. The range of incidents with which he must deal is very wide. He often lacks the legal tools to "keep the peace," and the controversial nature of the tasks prevents common public support of his activities. The detective, however, has a fairly certain task, that of identifying and arresting the perpetrators of crimes. His task does not begin until a crime has been committed. The legal domain in which he functions is clearly documented, and there is general public support for the arrest and prosecution of felons.⁹

In addition to differences in assigned tasks, the status and prestige of the patrol and investigative officers differ. The detective enjoys higher prestige and usually higher pay than the patrolman. His task is more interesting and glamorous, at least as perceived by the public. His hours are better, he has greater freedom in his work, and he is under less public scrutiny than his uniformed counterpart. The patrolman, however, is subject to a strong hierarchical command structure, tightly restricted by rules, bound by military discipline, and under constant public scrutiny.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the news and entertainment media, particularly television and the movies, has reinforced the glamorous image of detective work as opposed to patrol duties, which are often portrayed as being dull and routine, requiring little initiative or mentality. These real and perceived differences in role and image create a cleavage between two groups of men who should be working together toward a common cause. The lack of a common identity may result in a "we vs. they" relationship between the groups. This relationship clearly is not conducive to close cooperation and exchange of information needed for combined crime reduction efforts.

Bittner feels strongly that because of the nature of the officers' tasks, they feel a great need to maintain an atmosphere of secrecy in respect to disclosing information to "outsiders."¹¹ He feels this subcultural trait then carries over into intradepartmental relationships, resulting in an unwillingness to share information even with fellow officers.

The unique nature of the relationships between the officer and his informants also contributes to the need for secrecy. Because police informants are part of, or on the fringe of, criminal activity, and because of the mutually beneficial nature of the exchanges between the informant and officer, it is in the best interests of both to maintain the confidentiality of their arrangement. If the informant felt that his identity might be compromised to another officer with no vested interest in the informant's welfare, that important source of information might dry up.¹²

Even if all members of a police organization were willing to share all information at their disposal with all other law enforcement officers, it would not be possible without adequate information systems. Information systems include national, regional, and local computer systems, electronic data processing systems, telephone and teletype networks, formal records systems, established channels for routing information, and personnel to operate these systems.



A crime victim is interviewed by patrol and investigative personnel.



Cooperation between patrol and investigative forces is an integral part of departmental operations.

Even though creation of the systems might be far simpler than inducing personnel to feed information into them, the mechanics of providing the systems must not be overlooked. These systems should be considered when examining communication capabilities of a police organization.

Implications of Organizational Design

Perhaps the greatest single factor which affects the information processing capability of an organization is its formal structure. Reporting and authority relationships between subunits of an organization have significant impact on the development and maintenance of formal and informal information channels.

In any viable organization, information must flow (1) from top to bottom, (2) from bottom to top, (3) laterally or horizontally, and (4) between the organization and its environment (including cooperating agencies).

Throughout the history of organizational design, a wide range of concepts, generally classified as classical, human-relations, or modern approaches, have emerged.¹³ There are advantages and disadvantages of each type of organization as it relates to improving communications between investigative and patrol personnel, and no attempt should be made to prescribe an organizational strategy suitable for any or all police agencies. Rather, an attempt has been made to document some of the organizational trade-off costs and benefits to be considered when examining the issue of patrol-investigative cooperation. The following "contingency theory"¹⁴ of organization is commended to the reader; however, there is no one best way to organize, and any way of organizing is not equally effective.

Classical Approach

Classical organizational theorists have differed somewhat in details of their theories. To grossly generalize, however, let it suffice to say that the classical approach generally suggests that the tasks of an organization be divided among one or several bases of specialization, subunits be created to accomplish each of the specialized tasks, and coordination of the subtasks be attained through a hierarchical authority structure with each superior manager coordinating the activities of the persons and units beneath him in a rigid chain of command.

The organizational principles of business scholars Bulick and Urwick¹⁵ are perhaps the most representative of the traditional approach most police departments have taken toward organization. Both advocate the division of labor because men are limited in their abilities. The range of knowledge and skills required in a modern police department is so great that one man could not possibly become expert in all areas in his entire lifetime. Therefore, some division of labor, or specialization, must occur.

Specialization offers certain advantages to a police agency. It permits precise placing of responsibility, more intensive training of specialists, development and maintenance of skills through continual experience, creation of esprit de corps, and increased support from certain public special interest groups.¹⁶ Consideration of these advantages would certainly be justified when contemplating establishing or eliminating specialized investigative units. However, for each of these advantages, there are corresponding disadvantages, which will be noted later.

After a decision has been made to specialize within an organization, the classical theorist would provide means by which activities can be coordinated. Gulick and Urwick contend that coordination of effort can be achieved through organization, i.e., interrelating subdivision of work by allotting them to men who are placed in the structure of authority so that the work may be coordinated by orders of superiors to

subordinates, reaching from the top to the bottom of the organization, or by dominance of an idea, i.e., intelligent singleness of purpose of all in the group so each worker will fit his task into the whole with skill and enthusiasm. These two methods are not mutually exclusive; in fact, effective organizations must have both.¹⁷

In applying the preceding to the organization of investigative and patrol functions, the chief would first determine the scope of the investigative responsibility assigned to his agency,

"To operate efficiently, [investigative and patrol functions] should be highly dependent on the other."

and then the nature and number of specialized work units required, e.g., crimes against person or property squads, vice squad, patrol precincts, etc. Following this, he would create an appropriate organizational and authority structure, with authority flowing down through clearly identified chains of command and responsibility.

Some other principles the classical theorist would consider are span of control, unity of command, development of technical efficiency, and authority commensurate with responsibility.

Gulick and Urwick suggest the division of labor in an organization be based on purpose, process, clientele, and/or place.¹⁸ Other writers include specialization by time. Examples of each of these bases of specialization can be found in the organization of the investigative function of contemporary police agencies, and each has inherent strengths and weaknesses which must be considered when relating organization to communication capabilities among members of a police agency.

Examples of police subunits organized on the basis of purpose of function are investigative bureaus, homicide, robbery, burglary or vice control squads, traffic enforcement details, etc. Each of these units is responsible for some function or purpose of the police mission, e.g., detection, apprehension and prosecution of robbery suspects, prevention of traffic accidents and apprehension of violators, suppression of vice activity, etc. Organization by purpose facilitates the accomplishment of certain assigned objectives by bringing trained specialists and specialized resources together under a single manager who can be held accountable for attainment of a desired state of affairs. The unit can be judged by what it accomplishes, not by its methodology. This type of organization is effective for gaining energies and loyalties of assigned officers because their purpose is clearly understood.

Difficulties arise when purposes overlap or conflict. A patrol unit and a specialized investigative unit may be jointly charged with responsibility for the same task. For example, a local patrol precinct and a specialized robbery squad may share responsibility for reduction of the robbery rate in a certain high-crime area. Each of the units reports to a separate commander, both of whom are at least informally evaluated by how effectively robberies in that area are reduced. Each of the commanders may have his own ideas how this might be accomplished and each wishes to receive credit for improving the crime situation. This type of coreponsibility for the same results negates the advantage of specialization by purpose. It may result in the two units working at cross-purposes, refusing to share critical leads, and duplicating efforts. In this case, competition becomes dysfunctional and cooperation and communications between the patrol and investigative units are impaired.



A detective and patrol officer exchange information regarding a case.

An equally dysfunctional situation exists when subunit purposes conflict with other subunit or agency goals. Often, when personnel over-concentrate on purposes of their own subunits, they lose perspective of the overall goals of the agency. A vice control specialist, through much personal effort, may develop an informant who advises him of habits and whereabouts of narcotics dealers, illicit gambling or liquor establishments, or other vice-related activity. The vice officer may learn that the informant himself is involved in criminal activity, but may be sorely tempted to withhold this knowledge from fellow officers rather than lose his personal source of information.

Organization by process is most advantageous for grouping skills which require a high degree of technology or long periods of training and experience to gain proficiency. Specialists of this type would include police helicopter pilots, traffic radar operators, canine handlers, identification specialists (fingerprint and photography experts), evidence technicians, etc. Advantages accrue by permitting highly trained specialists to share expensive equipment, exchange technical information, and keep abreast of the latest innovations in their field. They are grouped into

single units that can be supervised and coordinated by one supervisor who possesses the specialized knowledge needed to direct and evaluate his subordinates. Process specialization permits attainment of the highest levels of proficiency in technical (and perhaps infrequently used) skills.

Specialization by process offers little advantage if the frequency of need for a particular skill is not great enough to justify at least one man being assigned full time. Any given process can accomplish only a small part of the overall goals of a police organization. Coordination problems are increased each time a new specialized process is added onto the organizational structure. Process specialists may become so engrossed with perfecting their technical skills that they lose sight of the reason for performing the function. For example, a canine handler may become more interested in interdepartmental canine competitions than in suppressing criminal activity, or a scientifically oriented evidence technician may be more interested in publishing articles in scientific journals than assisting field officers

with processing crime scenes or identifying perpetrators. The police administrator must insure that the process specialist contributes to the organizational effort by cooperating with line units rather than practicing his art in the vacuum of his own subunit specialty.

Certain police functions are grouped according to the clientele they serve or upon whom they focus their investigation. The most obvious example of this would be a police juvenile unit. Juvenile officers, through special aptitude, long and frequent experience, and specialized training, become uniquely qualified to handle cases involving juvenile victims or suspects. Some cities have initiated specialized units to handle victims of rape. Intelligence squads concentrate investigations on suspected organized crime figures. Any unit organized by type of crime somewhat implies that it will deal with certain clientele groups. For instance, a check and credit card squad deals primarily with community merchants and personnel of credit agencies on an ongoing basis and frequently encounters recurring suspects. Clientele become known to the investigator. Faces and M.O.'s of bad check artists became familiar to the investigator who benefits from the relationships developed with his clientele over a period of time.

Organizing by clientele, however, means the loss of some advantages of other specializations. Obviously, a juvenile squad could not afford to maintain its own evidence technician, narcotics expert, or identification specialist, even though all these skills might be needed in an investigation involving a juvenile. The clientele-based unit must depend on cooperation of the process specialists for assistance.

There is the danger that clientele-oriented groups may form stronger allegiances with its target group than with its own agency. An example of this type of coopted behavior is a check squad investigator who acts in the special interest of a merchant by emphasizing only restitution of financial loss in lieu of apprehension and prosecution of criminal offenders.

Due to differences in orientation, goals, and values of the specialist, he may experience difficulty in communicating with other members of the department. Sarcastic references to "kiddie kops" (juvenile officers), "dogooders" (community relations officers), or "pencil-pushers" (desk or administrative officers), are not uncommon. Uniformed field patrol officers understandably may not identify with the specialized officers and may not feel a fraternal obligation to share street-acquired knowledge with the specialists. Clearly, the situation also works in the reverse direction, i.e., specialized investigators also withhold information from patrolmen.

Gulick and Urwick consider organization by area to be tertiary or secondary.¹⁹ Division of work by geographical area occurs in all but the very smallest of police departments, however. Most large departments are divided into patrol districts or precincts which are responsible for providing police services to a given area of the city. Precincts may or may not have their own investigative personnel. To the extent that patrol officers and investigators can be assigned within the same geographical boundaries without competing against each other, communications and cooperation can be improved. The mere fact that the patrol officers and investigators are likely to have frequent face-to-face contact encourages exchange of information. Additionally, both the patrol and investigative officers may feel a common responsibility for providing service to the same geographical area. If cotermination of boundaries does not exist, however, geographical organization in itself will have little effect on improving patrol-investigation interaction. A uniformed beat officer may possess enormous amounts of information about an area within his beat boundaries, but if a detective has responsibility for investigating cases throughout the city, it is likely that the investigator will fail to solicit information from the officer which might assist his investigation.

Specialization by area presents many of the same hazards as other forms of specialization. By emphasizing effective and efficient law enforcement

in one particular area, an officer may fail to consider the department's overall problems. Crime and criminals seldom restrict themselves to neat geographical boundaries. Whenever a police function is specialized by area, provisions must be made to coordinate the flow of information across intracity and intraorganizational boundaries.

Any agency which operates beyond an 8-hour shift, 5 days a week, must consider coordination by time. Police departments are responsible for effective performances of the law enforcement function 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The same officer who initially investigates an offense may not necessarily be the same officer assigned to the follow-up investigation. In fact, the assigned investigator may be working a different time period than the officer who possesses information relevant to the investigation, complicating the task of communication. While much of the investigator's work must be performed during "business hours" when witnesses, victims, and records are available, some consideration must be given to the need for the investigator to communicate with the officer who made the original report and did the initial investigation. That officer is likely to have intimate knowledge of the area where the offense occurred and of the people who frequent the area. He may even have specific information or ideas relating to the crime under investigation which does not appear on the report. It appears obvious that the reporting patrol officer should be a primary source of information for the investigator. Conversely, the investigator may turn up suspects or descriptions of suspects which would be invaluable to the patrol officer seeking to prevent recurrences of criminal activity on his beat. Yet, due to differences in working hours, the exchange of information may never occur.

Division of labor by time further complicates coordination, because a supervisor who is responsible for a

given function or area cannot always be physically present to direct activities of subordinates or to act as a facilitator for inter and intragroup communications. If duty hours prevent face-to-face communication between officers, information exchange must depend on written reports or relay by a third person. Neither of these forms of communication is as effective as personal dialogue.

In summary, a police agency which is solely dependent on the classical form of organization limits development of critically needed channels for lateral communication between patrol officers and investigative specialists. As each specialized subunit is created, additional communication problems develop. Subunits are likely to become preoccupied with their own objectives instead of working toward the agency's overall goals, they may fail to volunteer assistance and information to another subunit, or even worse, they may deliberately frustrate efforts of competing subunits. **FBI**

(Continued next month)

Footnotes

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- ² "The Missouri Crime Survey" (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1926), pp. 46-47; in *Task Force Report: The Police* (Washington, D.C., 1967), p. 53.
- ³ Public Administration Services of Chicago, "Police and Fire Services in Meriden, Conn., (Chicago, Ill.: Public Administration Service, 1962), p. 36; in *Task Force Report: The Police*, p. 53.
- ⁴ Egon Bittner, *The Functions of the Police in Modern Society* (Chevy Chase, Md.: National Institute of Mental Health, Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency, 1970), p. 65.
- ⁵ Arthur Niederhofer, *Behind the Shield: The Police in Urban Society* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday and Co., 1967), p. 58; in James Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 68.
- ⁶ Wilson, pp. 16-56.
- ⁷ *Task Force Report: The Police*, p. 53.
- ⁸ Warren G. Bennis, *Changing Organizations* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966), pp. 57-58.
- ⁹ Wilson, pp. 16-53.
- ¹⁰ Bittner, p. 58.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63-71.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ John C. Buechner, *Public Administration* (Belmont, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Co., 1968), p. 24.
- ¹⁴ Jay Galbraith, *Designing Complex Organizations* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1973), p. 2.
- ¹⁵ Luther Gulick and L. Urwick, *Papers on the Science of Administration* (New York: Institute of Public Administration, 1937).
- ¹⁶ *Municipal Police Administration*, Esther M. and George D. Eastman, ed., (International City Management Association, 1971), ch. 3.
- ¹⁷ Gulick and Urwick.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*

END