

## Military and Policing Recruiting and Retention: Common Threads

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The success of any organization rests on the talent and skills of its members. Recruiting and retaining highly qualified members is one of the greatest challenges facing law enforcement<sup>1</sup> today (McKeever & Kranda, 2000).

Recruitment concerns for civilian law enforcement are nothing new. The past decade has proven challenging for law enforcement agencies, regardless of size. A downsized military in the 1990s, a healthy economy, and increased retirement numbers from civilian law enforcement officers hired in the 1970's have created a shortage of quality applicants. The increasing complexity and sophistication of the workplace requires that candidates possess good cognitive ability, excellent social intelligence (a.k.a. common sense), and technical aptitudes that were not required in the past. The introduction of TASERS and other less-lethal technologies, patrol car cameras and computers, crime analysis software, and the instant media presence has required departments to more carefully scrutinize candidates.

The military is suffering recruiting and retention problems that are very similar to civilian law enforcement issues. While many practitioners and academics spend time pointing out the differences between civilian law enforcement and the military, they often dismiss the utility of the best practices and research

<sup>1</sup> In this article, the term "law enforcement" is used to refer not only to civilian and military police but also to law enforcement roles the military has served in as witnessed in the Iraqi and Afghanistan missions.

across the two environments. The importance and utility of studying workplace "critical incidents" across both domains should not be overlooked by either law enforcement or the Services.

## Differences

For the purpose of creating a mental model useful for discussing similarities in civilian law enforcement and military recruiting and retention, there are important differences that must first be identified.

1. *Level of Discretion:* There is a general difference between military police and their civilian counterparts in the level of discretion at the line level. Civilian law enforcement officers are generally given broader discretion in daily duties than their military counterparts. The difference is a direct result of the nature and environments of the respective missions and assignments.

2. *Training:* Most states have established minimum standards for law enforcement officers. The programs generally provide the basic training needed to prepare a new law enforcement officer to enter a field training program. Some training academies have more extensive training requirements. Most practitioners agree that the "real" training of new officers takes place during the Field Training and Evaluation (FTOP) programs that nearly all civilian agencies have implemented. The military trains military police in a much more standardized manner across branches. Non-MP military units assigned to peacekeeping and policing duties are provided redeployment training, but the actual demands of policing civilian populations can be demanding. Both civilian and military law enforcement organizations screen and select individual members with aptitudes toward police

work. Peacekeeping and policing demands using non-MP personnel can be problematic. Individuals in police work (both military and civilian) volunteer for that duty and have better training and much clearer expectations than military personnel tasked to that same type of duty.

3. *Command and Control*: There are thousands of local law enforcement agencies in the United States. The majority of the local police and sheriff's departments are small, employing fewer than 30 officers. Most states have several state law enforcement agencies, and the federal government has dozens of law enforcement agencies. The agency structure, policies, procedures, and perhaps most importantly, the cultures of each are as different as they are similar. Civilian agencies are guided by the communities they serve and extremely diverse in their structure and mission priorities.

By contrast, the military has an overarching command structure that begins with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and is executed by the Joint Staff, who sets forth requirements that are provided to each of the services for their implementation and service uniqueness. This unified command and control helps establish protocols for training, performance appraisal, promotions, and transfers that are accepted as universal within the environment. These same areas often prove difficult for many civilian law enforcement agencies to effectively handle, especially the personnel decisions that ultimately relate to recruiting and retention issues.

### **Similarities**

The similarities between the various civilian law enforcement organizations

and the military are not very surprising. Both environments are unique to most other professions and frequently involve life and death decisions made in situations not created by the individual. Both require members to function in an increasingly complex world in which they are expected to follow orders and work within a chain of command while also exercising the individual initiative and problem-solving required for community policing and quality of life issues. These evolving dual expectancies in law enforcement and the military require specific recruiting and selection methods that are not commonly in place.

### **Existing Research**

It is very important to examine existing research in problem identification and solving. There is actually little empirical research on the topic of police recruiting and retention, and the studies that do exist tend to examine recruiting as a singular problem. Recruitment and retention are strongly related and should be examined in unison. Proper recruiting strategies can lead to more satisfied members and thus, result in fewer turnovers. In turn, retention requires less recruitment and builds a positive culture that attracts potential candidates. Chase (1999) suggests that recruitment is a key retention strategy, where if the right individuals are recruited, retention will be influenced significantly (Chase, 1999).

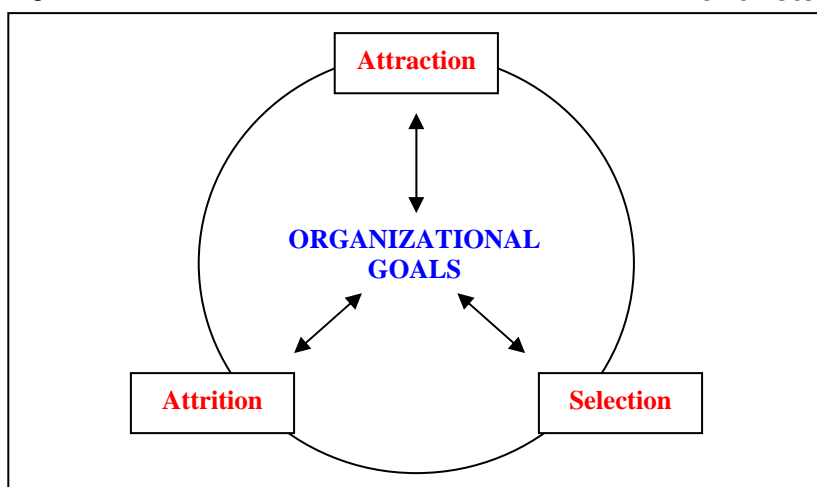
The Florida Police Chiefs Association (FPCA) commissioned a recruiting and retention study in 2000 to examine the state-wide problems of recruiting and retaining officers. The FPCA study, in partnership with the Florida Institute of Technology's Industrial and Organizational Psychology Program, explored a theoretical foundation for recruiting and retention strategies. The 2 year project

concluded with some recommendations that passed both the “best practices” and “theoretical foundation” tests and since then have proven valuable across organizations.

### Attraction-Selection-Attrition Model

Schneider (1987) proposed the Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model (illustrated in Figure 1) that states that people are *attracted* to a particular organization because they perceive they share the same values as the organization. Organizations naturally *select* people who they think “fit” into the organization and culture; and once people are hired, *attrition* can occur if the “fit” does not materialize. This theory, along with person-environment (P-E) “fit” theory, is supported in the field of industrial/organization psychology, sociology, and vocational psychology.

Figure 1.



Schneider, Smith, & Goldstein (2000) caution regarding the ASA model and suggest that there is a “dark side” to a good fit. ASA can create a cycle that lacks innovation, increases groupthink, discourages risk taking, and creates adverse reactions to the diversity of persons, places, or processes. As the

term “diversity” is starting to include diversity of thought and ideas, the homogeneity cautioned by Schneider and his associates may not be as much of a concern in the future. With various viewpoints and experiences proving valuable in community policing and in enhancing the quality of life of those collectively served, it is the futurist viewpoint that organizations embracing a diverse variety of thought and expectations will thrive while homogeneous organizations will be forced to struggle, change, or turn to outside consultation.

### Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

Leader-member exchange (LMX) and Perceived Organizational Support (POS) are interrelated organizational factors that are critical to organizational outcomes and retention. These factors operate alone and interact and result in either a positive, neutral, or negative outcome for an agency and its culture.

LMX and POS are not new concepts, but they have been recently used in examining law enforcement recruiting and retention. LMX is defined as an exchange between the employee and his/her supervisor (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Exchanges can be positive, negative, or neutral and can be either outcomes of leadership or management style or interpersonal relationships between supervisors and subordinates.

POS is defined as an exchange between an employee and the organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). POS is

witnessed in regard to training, equipment, resource allocation, and other factors that demonstrate an organizational commitment to the members and as perceived as support by the member. POS can have positive, negative, or neutral effects on the perception of the members and, ultimately, their decision to stay in the organization. These effects can also shape how current members portray the organization to others.

Positive LMX will occur when both the subordinate and the supervisor view each other as being valuable and when both sides view the exchange as equitable or fair. POS is high if members develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and demonstrates concern about their well-being. Research has demonstrated that both LMX and POS have been associated with positive performance and attitude exhibited in members. For example, when LMX is high, workers demonstrate higher quality and quantity of performance, increased job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, positive role perception, increased positive organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), and lower intentions of quitting (Gerstner & Day, 1997).

The interaction of LMX and POS is of growing interest as it relates to recruiting and retention. Recent research suggests that generational differences may sway research results. Generation "X"ers, for example, are more impacted by POS than LMX. This finding was based on a focus group of experienced officers that had resigned from smaller law enforcement agencies to go to work for a bigger department. These officers discussed a variety of "little things" about the agency that created a desire to leave. Some of the issues included slow equipment repair (laptops in particular),

lack of opportunity for advancement, availability of take-home cars and, most important, the reduction of specialty assignments (Vice, Canine, Motors) to meet the minimum staffing needs of patrol. These were critical to their decision to leave. Many of the officers who had worked their way off of patrol were especially frustrated when they were pulled back to patrol to meet staffing demand. Money was not mentioned as a critical issue, and nearly all of the officers liked their sergeants. These findings warrant additional research to explore whether the shift in power between LMX and POS is an environmental issue or a generational issue and is equally important to the military as law enforcement.

One issue from the focus group that crossed agencies was laptop computers for patrol cars. Many agencies obtain grant money for laptops and other technology to enhance performance. Unfortunately, grants often do not cover repairs, and agencies may overlook budgeting for maintenance or replacement of this equipment. It can be more damaging to provide a tool that cannot be maintained long term and eventually taken out-of-service than to not provide the tool at all. Officers assimilate the tool as a method of agency support but see it as a lack of support when it cannot be maintained. It is critical that maintenance and replacement considerations be included in grant or other new equipment or technology acquisitions.

LMX and POS are also important in organizational stressors. Issues such as promotional process and selections, consistency of performance appraisals, developmental feedback and goal setting, car and equipment assignments, and specialty unit assignments, are central to POS and moderated greatly by LMX. Members, especially Gen "X" ers,

express frustration when they do not get feedback. Supervisors express frustration about the lack of timely support from the agency, as well as a good system of consistent evaluation. As research is obtained from the “millennial” generation, this shift in generational values will be of growing concern as technology and globalization effects are stronger of the workforce.

### **Recent Trends**

The FPCA project identified several sources of member frustration and subsequent stress stemming from leadership and organizational support. Too often these stressors stem from internal organizational issues such as perceived inequities, selection processes for promotions and lateral transfers, and resource allocation, rather than mission-specific stressors, as they are often expected and known threats.

A common stressor to both the military and police is the promotional process as noted above. The military has invested the resources to establish a promotional process that establishes clear and consistent standards for promotion and allows members to develop clear expectations.

Most law enforcement agencies struggle with promotional processes. Among most small and mid-sized agencies, promotions are infrequent, which adds to the anxiety. The promotional tests/processes range from direct appointment to multiple sophisticated processes. Issues associated with expectancy theory, organizational politics, and perceived fairness all come into play with these processes in civilian law enforcement. Timely and transparent promotional processes that test based on written directives and anchored to a job

description tend to reduce anxiety and provide the best candidates for command staff to promote.

Once promotions are made, the issue of training the new supervisors becomes an issue. The military have established both Officer and Non-commissioned Officer schools to prepare them for promotion both before and after such has occurred. These are a known entity and one that all professional service members are made aware of, but their civilian law enforcement counterparts are, for the most part, left with few options. Some states have recognized the issue and have worked toward addressing the void in supervisory training, but small agencies struggle with losing the personnel resource for extended periods.

Performance appraisals and evaluations are extremely problematic in law enforcement and the military, most often because of the instrument design. The service members are further hampered by both real and imaginary performance and assignment curves that affect their evaluations. Some use general employee evaluations that have little, if any, context, while others address some context-specific areas, but may be too broad to define “good” performance.

The common thread between the military and civilian worlds is the need for standardized assessor training and standardized deployment of modernized rating scales. Often, performance ratings are used for specialty assignments and promotions; thus, performance appraisals without standard anchors are problematic. The result of this faulty performance evaluation process can manifest as challenges to the processes. Even more important, however, such processes may create perceptions of unfair selection or rejection and create animosity toward the process, the

organization, the assessors, or even the selectees.

While the military can certainly claim several of the aforementioned stressors, currently the main enemy is that of the operational tempo as it directly relates to the individual service member and his/her family's quality of life. This appears to be a major cause for an exodus of current service members, both from the enlisted and officer ranks, and has grown to such proportions since 9/11. Historically, a service member, upon entering active duty, could expect a short- tour unaccompanied assignment (e.g., Korea) overseas every 3–5 years, normally broken up with an accompanied overseas tour of 3 years (e.g., Germany), but that was before the current on-going conflict. Now, the average deployment to overseas duty into a combat zone is on a rotational basis of a minimum of 6 months every 18 months if the service member remains in the same home assignment. Quite often, service members who have completed a deployed assignment are at the end of their home assignment rotation and are reassigned to a new home station only to be redeployed earlier than 18 months. Meanwhile, these same service members are still eligible for the normal unaccompanied and accompanied tours. This constant disruption of family life, pulling up stakes, moving, and starting all over again, is very hard on any family, but more so recently. This, more than anything else, is the reason for current service members opting out of the military.

Other organizational stressors in both the military and law enforcement can come from inconsistencies between policy and practice. Practices often continue, even though policy prohibits them. One law enforcement example is the offer of free or reduced meals for

officers in uniform. Agencies that ignore conflicts between policy and practice are at great risk for diminished job satisfaction and perceptions of unfairness once a member is accused of violating a policy that has been a practice.

### **Future Oriented Suggestions**

Research is not useful to practitioners if it does not translate into better practices or innovations. Although some suggestions may not be fiscally possible for every agency, research, and suggestions that result from such efforts, offers a point for organizational discussion and perhaps additional exploration of alternative practices.

### **Recruiting: Realistic Job Preview**

Studies show that tenure and job satisfaction are increased when an individual's pre-selection expectations about a job or assignment and the ultimate reality are aligned (Premack & Wanous, 1985). Applicants with realistic job expectations are more likely to be retained. A Realistic Job Preview (RJP) is an instrument that creates that realistic expectation.

An RJP can take the form of a flier, brochure, video, or other advertisement for an agency. The critical aspect of a RJP is an honest and accurate depiction of what the job entails. Many military and civilian recruiters are rewarded on the number of candidates they recruit; therefore, they are not best served by telling potential recruits about the downsides of the job. The agency, however, can be best served by offering the negative aspects of the job or the agency and then allowing the candidate to self-select out. If those candidates stay and are fully informed, there is not a

sense of disenchantment after 2 or 3 years on the job.

A classic example of how a recruiter may paint a positive picture of what to expect from an agency pertains to permanent shift work. A police recruiter should tell an applicant that he or she will likely work midnights for 3 to 4 years and then get an opportunity for an assignment on day shift. All too often, the recruiter tells the story of the member who spent 18 months on patrol and then became a detective. By giving the exception to the rule, the recruiter builds a false hope in the candidate and establishes a course for disappointment. Recruiters should provide the worse-case scenario and let the candidate decide.

Both civilian law enforcement agencies and the military can also look at the family and spouse of prospective or active members looking for specialty assignments and assist with an RJP as well. A candidate or member may not factor in the family consequences of his or her decision, and having a program for spouses and families can establish a realistic expectation and allow for family discussion that, ultimately, may assist in establishing a supportive home life.

Candidates without appropriate RJP form expectations about the “day in the life” of the career or position they seek. Police candidates cite the popular TV show *COPS* as the mechanism that establishes their mental model of law enforcement. Such hyped-up perceptions create not only recruiting issues, but can also lead to performance issues in the field.

Incorporating a RJP in the recruiting process will not only allow applicants to self-select out of the process but there is also a good chance that incumbents will have a realistic idea of what to expect on the job, thereby increasing job

satisfaction and the tenure of seasoned officers.

### **Recruiting: Recruiter Training**

Recruiters need to be trained. Even small agencies or units that recruit specialty assignments and cannot afford the personnel for a full-time recruiter need to invest in teaching basic personnel selection procedures, RJP, and marketing skills.

Law enforcement may be able to look at the example of the military, where there are established recruiter schools and curriculum, which produce service-specific personnel within a recruiter career field, whose primary responsibility is to draw perspective candidates from the civilian community. Additionally, the services have specific training programs for retention of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and officers that are located at company and above level expressly for the purpose of enticing service members to remain in military service.

### **Retention: Value the Agency**

Chiefs and commanders can improve their retention and increase job satisfaction by assessing and understanding their organization’s unique culture as it pertains to LMX and POS. This understanding and subsequent strategies to improve each have synergetic outcomes that actually feed into one another while developing a culture and membership capable of advancing to the next level with attraction.

A systematic and timely reward system creates a belief in officers that their contributions are valuable. A word of caution is warranted here. Many officers report a “watering down” of their

department reward system. Executives interviewed share a perception that new officers want constant rewards for doing expected work. The goal should be frequent developmental feedback from sergeants, with a timely reward system (monthly, but no later than quarterly) that has strict standards. Some agencies have instituted immediate reward systems, such as coins or other symbols of good work, from the squad level that can be redeemed for time off or other incentives. This system allows for immediate recognition from the squad and maintains the integrity of the departmental award system. Every organization has its unique culture, and care should be taken in assessing what is likely to positively impact officers.

### **Web Presence**

Recruiting the right candidates for both the military and law enforcement requires more sophisticated and technologically diverse methods than routinely used today. The candidates themselves have a higher expectation of a professional and contemporary Web-presence, and the image of the department is more and more predicated by such generational benchmarks. Agencies with a professional Web presence have a recruiting advantage. The days of allowing an organizational member to build the department Website are past. Successful agencies in the future will view their Web presence as important as they view the physical department itself.

### **Recruiter Training and Goals**

Agencies' and units' demands for both internal and external recruiting vary as drastically as the variety of missions.

Central themes for improvement lie in the training and goals of the particular organization. Large organizations with dedicated recruiters should avail themselves of training that incorporates a regard for long-term recruiting and uses accurate expectations and a realistic job preview component. Smaller agencies or agencies that assign the recruiting function as a collateral duty need to seek training. Employment law is a growing issue, but the tenants of recruiting for the long-term, rather than "filling slots", is in some cases a paradigm shift. People should be trained for the tasks at hand and rewarded and judged by their performance—not only on the quantity but also on the quality of the recruits they find. Recruiting demands can be reduced greatly by programs aimed at retaining current members.

### **Develop a Realistic Job Preview**

An RJP can be the most important tool an agency uses to select the best individuals for the job, and so it also has tremendous influence on job satisfaction and retention. An RJP should present a snapshot of a day in the life of a member performing the function the candidate seeks. Having a professional video presentation that can be streamed onto the department Website or given out on CD and DVD can present the candidate with interview clips of existing members discussing or demonstrating what they do at the organization. In the absence of a detailed RJP, potential candidates are left to their preconceived notions about the job and agency. Having candidates self-select out saves time, money, and potential litigations. Another important aspect of an RJP, especially for small departments, is that some candidates may be looking for opportunities that the small agency just cannot offer. A young



police candidate, for instance, may be looking for the opportunity to ride motorcycles or serve on a SWAT team. A small agency without those units might hire the candidate and then find themselves looking for a replacement when the young officer leaves the agency for additional opportunities at a larger agency. On the other hand, some military retirees or retired cops might like the environment that smaller agencies offer. Keep in mind that the large majority of military retirees are in the early to mid-40s age group and fully capable, and possibly willing, to enter the world of law enforcement with many good years to provide. Military retirees are unique in this aspect with regard to retirees from other career fields. An RJP can help candidates form realistic expectations that, when met, lead to reduced turnover and increased satisfaction. An RJP also gives agency recruiters and members a common message to present to the public and candidates.

### **Establish a Member Recruiting Program**

Who better to market the organization than members themselves? Who has a greater interest in selection than the operational members? Some agencies have employed recruiting reward systems with great success. Rather than rewarding the recruitment of a "warm body," the recruiters are rewarded once the candidate completes training or probationary periods. These programs typically involve recruitment packets that contain agency literature (preferably an RJP) and clear contact information. Finding potential members who have a vested interest in the community or environment can help build loyalty and commitment, as well.

### **Performance Management System**

Traditional performance appraisals are typically negative chores for supervisors and an uncomfortable time for the members. Studies of Gen"X"ers suggest that members of that generation welcome and even solicit feedback. Newer performance management systems incorporate regular developmental feedback and goal-setting along with traditional semi-annual or annual performance appraisals. The feedback and goal setting aspect of this process provides the member frequent feedback on performance and provides opportunity for correction prior to a performance evaluation. It also helps foster rapport between the supervisor and the member, encouraging a stronger LMX. Supervisors need training on these systems, but once training is accomplished and the organization accepts and facilitates developmental feedback, the organization then has an internal, constant mechanism to train and mentor while building trust and value rather than perceived punitive alternatives in poor performance reviews.

Performance appraisal systems designed for the specific job assignment must be developed to capture the behavior the agency desires. Training supervisors and providing behavioral anchored scales reduces the time it takes to evaluate the members, and it assists greatly in rater reliability by reducing the various rater errors or halo effects and other similar rating issues.

It is ironic that new-hire law enforcement officers are often evaluated with a Daily Observation Report (DOR), as established initially by the San Jose Model of field training and subsequent adaptations, on common knowledge, skills, and abilities of a patrol offer. But then have inadequate performance measurement tools once they are out of

field training. The universal need for performance scales for community policing are a definite area for future research and development.

### **Supervisor Training**

Not all members have the desire or the attributes to be leaders or managers. Law enforcement often uses the term “leadership” as a synonym for supervision and management. Leadership, management, and supervision are not the same, and organizations need them all. Simply put, leadership is influence that can be seen at every level in the agency and is often independent of supervisory rank. Management, on the other hand, is most simply defined as authority and may or may not be practiced by a person with leadership abilities. The need to understand the dynamics of leadership and management and to develop within the members of an agency future-oriented mind-sets is paramount to continued professionalism in both the military and law enforcement. The environment in which law enforcement and the military operate is more demanding, sophisticated, and under scrutiny like never before. Discretion and decision making is being placed to the lowest possible levels so that officers who are on-scene can assess situations or problems and then deal with them in a less bureaucratic manner. This not only means that the need to properly hire and train recruits is increasingly important but also that developing the newest members for their next progression needs to take place sooner.

There are more opportunities for law enforcement command-level members to find training for newly promoted line-level supervisors, such as the FBI National Academy, Southern Police Institute, and

other regional executive leadership programs. The critical area for future development lies in line-level training for sergeants or their organizational equivalent. “One-day-on-patrol, the-next-day-the-boss,” has interpersonal dynamic issues long known to law enforcement, but given the requirements for feedback, member development, and decision making, sergeants are too often promoted and left on their own to figure things out. The military does an excellent job of addressing these issues with various Non-commissioned Officer schools and various command schools, but in civilian agencies it is generally a nonexistent part of the organizational culture.

### **Reward Systems**

A common failing of many organizations is not rewarding the desired behavior. This is another aspect of proper performance management systems. It is also important to members that their contributions are recognized and that they are viewed as valuable to the organization. Timely rewards and recognition of a job well done sounds like an easy concept, but it can prove difficult. While private-sector members often get bonuses and financial incentives based on the profit line, public-sector employees don’t usually have that option. Reward systems do not always require financial incentives, however.

Some progressive civilian agencies have adopted some of the military approaches. It is commonplace for ribbons and medals to be awarded for meritorious service and bravery, but some trends suggest that smaller recognition in terms of “challenge” coins given by supervisors or time off (which is very valued with many GenXers) are having positive results on job satisfaction.

## **Conclusions**

As we look to the future, the key to recruiting and retaining members for the increasingly sophisticated world is education. Law enforcement must continue the professionalization movement started in the 1970s and encourage at least an associate degree-level of education among line officers to increase their tolerance, problem-solving skills, and the knowledge to understand how to think outside the box. The military should encourage non-commissioned officers to earn the same level of education as they advance through enlisted ranks and, perhaps, become officers. Law enforcement and local military commanders need to partner with local higher education institutions to build working relationships and tap into interdisciplinary resources currently not widely utilized. Opening the door to the closed culture of law enforcement is critical for agencies to gain sophisticated and technological expertise that is becoming more necessary in a complex and shrinking world.