

JANUS LEADERSHIP

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Janus, the Roman god who looked back at the old year and forward to the new, provides an apt metaphor for leadership. The leader is a boundary-spanning position, with one foot in the organization (a shrine to its own past) and another in the external environment (from which blow the winds of change). The leader is both a two-way conduit, translating two very different worlds to each other, and a buffer to mitigate the unrealistic demands and expectations of each. The leader has two responsibilities: preserve the organization and prepare the organization for change. On one hand, leadership is a position oriented to the past, inasmuch as the culture of organizations is based upon traditions forged by the triumphs and catastrophes of earlier generations. Tradition bestows upon the organization an identity quite independent of the leader. In the worst-case scenario, it provides a bulwark against even positive changes.

Leadership is futures-oriented in that leaders must anticipate the impact of visible trends in the environment. The arrival of the future will not eliminate the unsavory inheritances of the past: it will exacerbate them. No matter what their vision of or for the future, a leader must be aware of the constraints imposed by the past before he or she can move an organization forward; hence the Janus metaphor. On the other hand, leaders confront the inevitability of change, as well as constant legitimate and illegitimate demands for change. Although change comes primarily from the external environment, it can have multiple forms. It can be *imposed*, either by adverse budget conditions, new legislation, or a court decision. It can be *induced*, by federal funding for innovation, or by imitating successful innovation elsewhere. It also can be *anticipatory*, coming from within as members of the organization recognize developing needs in their own area. Change can produce a refinement of existing practice – better management – or it can foster wholesale alteration of those practices in order to respond to new challenges. While it might be tempting to equate “stability” and “change” with “management” and “leadership,” such a division constitutes a false dichotomy: the two

roles are symbiotic and constantly in play. Whether a leader has inherited a relatively stable, functional organization, or has been brought in to forge change amidst crisis, efforts toward both stability and change demand the leader's attention.

Despite the stereotype of The Leader as a prime mover of an organization, a main internal responsibility of leadership is the development of other leaders. Immediately beyond that, the incumbency of leadership is to coordinate the narrower products generated by subordinate leaders. Integral to leadership is the task of providing feedback to inform and educate those who produce the work; to help subordinates understand how their efforts fit into and benefit the larger organizational framework. Almost every newly appointed formal leader faces a series of hurdles to establishing their legitimate claim to the chair. If they have been promoted from within, the foibles of their earlier days will be well known. If they come from outside, they are largely a blank slate, but the standing members of the organization will be searching for background information – often, but not exclusively, “dirt” – in order to be able to gauge the likely impact of their appointment.

Before any substantive work can begin, leaders must identify the real strengths and weaknesses of their new command. Some will be known or revealed during the hiring process, but there is a new dimension that appears when one is thrust into leadership positions. Abstract possibilities now become realities and unsuspected resistance appears out of nowhere. Long-stymied agendas – both worthy and illegitimate – rise from graveyards inside and outside the organization.

Futures-Oriented Leadership

The biggest obstacle to the future is the comfortable past. In police culture, an ethos of “if it ain't broke, don't fix it” has almost talismanic properties against innovations that do not directly benefit the officers' individual circumstances. Regardless of the conditions in the local environment, one of the biggest challenges facing any leader is the job of broadening their subordinates' field of vision to recognize as equally valid the needs of the organization and the surrounding community.

Preparing an organization for change has several distinct phases: validating the need for the change almost always precedes validation of the change itself. Once the parameters are identified, there remains the task of overcoming innovation fatigue. That leads directly to the need to look beyond the just-completed task and anticipate environmental changes that result. The final task is identifying the necessary resources for the endeavor, a task little different from dealing with the day's alligators.

Validating the Threat/Validating the Need

If we all lived by the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" bromide, we would wait until our cars ground to a halt before changing the oil. "Broke" and "ain't broke" is another false dichotomy. One of the jobs of leadership is establishing the terms of discussion for the change process and moving beyond the "ain't broke" paradigm is paramount. Modification is a form of enhancement, tuning the engine, enhancing performance, or any of a host of alternate metaphors that serve better than "broke" and "ain't broke."

Before we can change the terms of discussion, however, it is important to recognize that "if it ain't broke" is a demand for validation of the need for change. Change is disruptive and disturbing to comfortable routines. For many individuals, change will be undertaken voluntarily only if it is a controlled process that averts more serious dislocations. As a general rule, the greater the buy-in from the employees, the greater their commitment to the enterprise. In this regard, the leader must function as a teacher, authenticating trends in the environment that demand the change, and establishing the predicted impacts for the agency. This rule is predicated upon *anticipatory* change that is futures oriented; the process for dealing with wild-card *imposed* changes with immediate consequences -- such as adverse court decisions or budget cuts -- presents a more forceful rationale that short-circuits this part of the process.

The leader must also be ready to neutralize the nay-sayers, those who will take every opportunity to assert the opposite view. Preempting the opposition is one means; if the right circumstances exist, squashing the "yeah, but" arguments in a public forum can be effective. Ignoring the "yeah, but" may serve to maintain an on-task focus early in the process, but that approach can be self-defeating in the long run. Refusal to engage in the debate will be

interpreted as evidence of the “truth” of the objections. The true audience is not the loudmouths, who may be informal leaders or perhaps only legends in their own minds. A larger group of the uncertain and the uncommitted waits for someone to justify one or the other path to them in terms that they can understand: they are the target audience. Leaders must understand that would-be leaders of the opposition have a natural advantage, speaking in the familiar tones of traditional police culture.

Authenticating external trends can be done in a PowerPoint presentation or a memo, but dictated rationale is rarely as strong as discovered rationale. To the degree that it is possible, ranking and line-level officers should be invited to investigate and authenticate manifestations of trends in their own areas. It will not always be possible: large-scale trends are not always immediately visible. But pump-priming tabletop exercises, fact-gathering to establish baseline data, and assignments to bring the issue before community groups for their input can all make a future trend more real. The information sources that are used by the leadership teams to identify the trends should be made available in an on-line library or other accessible form. Even if most of the agency’s horses choose not to drink, the water should still be available to them: its mere presence can be a powerful validation tool, a trump card in the internal “put up or shut up” struggle for justification.

Establishing the predicted impacts is an activity linked to the trends, but not necessarily self-evident. The process is similar, though there will be an absence of literature. A variety of participatory tools can be made available, though: benchmarking and periodic reporting of impact – positive or negative – keeps the officers’ minds engaged in the process and provides an informal canary-in-the-mineshaft function that precedes the fourth stage, anticipation of course changes from the original trajectory.

Validating the Change

Establishing the forces driving change does not necessarily mean that the proposed solution is the correct one. The process of discovery may be a Pandora’s Box that produces a number of unrealistic alternative “solutions” that are “common sense” only within a particular perspective. Nevertheless, those alternatives that resonate more closely with the cultural

status quo will have more support with the rank and file. Deflating alternative solutions is an important part of the change process. Dismissing them out of hand will generate hostility; they need to be acknowledged, deconstructed, and compared to the preferred solution. The tipping point may be any one factor or a combination of factors, including legal constraints and available resources. Short-term effects may be compared to predicted long-term outcomes and the impact on other operations added to the analysis.

Another of police culture's sacred cows is an entrenched desire to not "reinvent the wheel." Traditionally this has resulted in a viral adoption of Flavor of the Week programs that have been publicized as having been successful somewhere else. Nothing validates a police innovation quite so much as another police department having it already. However, this "off the shelf" approach is a second major contributor to the failure rate: adopting the shell without examining the roots of the problem. If the program is a mere façade with no specific fit to the new situation, it is unlikely to produce results. It becomes the institutional equivalent of a Pet Rock, the latest fad, soon forgotten in a back closet.

Like the original exercise, the consideration of alternatives is a teaching exercise. It is unlikely to convince every individual that the administration's choice is superior to their preferred solution, but that is not a necessary outcome. More important is the fact that all of the efforts are taken seriously. Whether the logic of the selected solution is evident or not, accepted or not, cultural norms still support leadership decisions as long as they are not seen as arbitrary or malicious.

Overcoming Innovation Fatigue

Academics are fond of wryly noting that the most common finding of social research is there is a need for more research. It is only a small step beyond that to observe that the most common outcome of innovation and new programs is no change at all, or only temporary change. Innovative police programs are wiped out when the leader who promoted them leaves the agency or informal leaders are promoted or transferred. Special units that have dealt effectively with special problems still cannot survive budget cuts that return the agency's operational emphasis to the least effective common denominator, answering calls for service.

Police officers with any substantial time in grade have been through numerous short-lived change scenarios, few of which made a lasting impact. During their careers, scores of fads and ill-conceived innovations have been inflicted upon them, without any resulting change in what they actually do or how they are rewarded (or punished). Some have witnessed a parade of temporary leaders, immortalized as “bungee bosses” in the Dilbert comic strip, who arrive with a flourish, only to depart quickly. History has taught the old-timers that most change is merely temporary and that by withholding commitment they can outlast the advocating leaders. The old-timers preach this view to the newcomers and organizational culture grows inured to the possibilities of substantive change.

Leaders cannot afford to ignore this phenomenon, as it is the primary inertia that any change process must overcome to be successful. Most failures have been top-down, shoved-down-the-throat changes by decree, providing the agency employees with little stake in the process. While not every change can be wholly participatory – indeed, some agencies may not be capable of even rudimentary participatory projects – the more the officers and supervisors have a voice and a role in creating change, the greater their commitment, the more incisive their critiques.

Since participation runs a huge risk of going sour, one of the responsibilities of leadership will be to lay the firmest groundwork and outline the clearest course possible in the early stages of any change process. This may require use of a small leadership group responsible for mapping out as much of the big picture as can be foreseen, then creating a roadmap for roll-out, and working with each successive group in small, easily-digested stages. It need not be a drawn-out process, but the core group cannot expect immediate comprehension and buy-in by any other element of the organization. A commitment must be made to responding to the many potential variations on the theme of “why we should not do this.”

Anticipating Evolution

If no plan of battle survives the first contact with the enemy forces, no futures-oriented change is deployed into the same future that it was predicated upon. A persistent feature of

failed innovation is the lack of a “Plan B” or “Level 2” contingency. Most innovations are promulgated as a monolithic entity, set upon an assumption of instantaneous success. When the inevitable stumbling blocks are encountered, most fail to adapt to the new conditions. It is essential that change not be viewed as undimensional, but fluid. Because future-oriented changes anticipate the influence of many currents, not just one, the process of engaging agency personnel can embrace one or both anticipatory strategies designed to build as many contingencies as possible into the planning process.

Multiple probabilities. In order to combat group-think, agency personnel should be invited to consider as many second-stage developments as possible, a precursor to developing “what if?” contingency plans to support the change once it is launched. As an example, we might posit that a new gang enforcement strategy is to be launched in response to growing signs of gang activity. It is a familiar scenario and on the surface it might appear to be just a backward-looking enforcement action, one more link in a long chain of similar actions that produced feeble results. To improve the effort, part of the charge would be to anticipate the reactions of the gangs and to prepare contingency plans, adapting the program to meet those countermeasures. Another might be to anticipate the possible downstream effects if the top leadership of the gang were to be incapacitated: dissolution, succession, succession battles, encroachment by a newer gang, reconstitution, or redirection, among others.

At first, this portion of the exercise is certain to be an exercise in reviewing history: what happened the last time we did this, what was the result of other cities’ similar enforcement actions, and the like. Properly guided, however, the exercise should also include questions of what is different about our current situation-- will these results be inevitable here? While it is a thinly-disguised exercise in critical analysis, it can be done in terms familiar to line officers and supervisors, with an emphasis on practical, street-level conditions and measures. A premium should be placed upon empirically valid conditions, not raw opinion based on unverifiable assertions or individual instances. The process should demand empirical markers that provide tangible evidence of actions, trends, and outcomes.

Pre-mortems. The other face of change planning is to anticipate disaster rather than success. Some parts of the business world are experimenting with the concept of *pre-mortems*,

a negative form of advance thinking. Once the main dimensions of a plan are fleshed out, participants in a planning process are charged to anticipate all the ways in which the plan could blow up in their face. The purpose of the exercise is to identify flaws and potential obstacles before they happen; the second part of the assignment is to develop contingency plans to prevent those disasters or mitigate their effects if they occur for reasons beyond the agency's control. Police departments have no shortage of those who can pick apart a plan and see its flaws. The real skill to the pre-mortem exercise is to force their thinking beyond the "this will go wrong" stage to consider "how can we proactively stop it from going wrong?" That requires skill on the part of the leaders of the process, as well as rewards – acknowledgment, recognition, and "atta-boys" for real contributions, positive and negative.

As with the positive "multiple futures" approach, premiums should be paid for those observations that can identify useable measurements on the street, factors that would identify failure as well as success. It might even be worthwhile to challenge participants to identify -- and justify -- "cut points," conditions or circumstances that warrant the termination of the program. Both failure to accomplish the goals and the creation of unanticipated negative impacts could be cause for going back to the drawing board.

Once again, the point of the endeavor is not to have a plan, but to develop multiple paths branching from the central plan, to be invoked at need. Ancillary benefits should include greater buy-in at all levels as a result of participation, but that should never be considered a given. Another possible benefit is the identification of junior members of the organization who have some flair or capacity for broader thinking and critical analysis. These are future leaders, persons who can be tapped for other projects, and steered toward opportunities for further personal and professional development.

A Janus leader must avoid the trap of dismissing the negative comments. Looking back at history requires a willingness to learn from failure. The nay-sayers within an organization may lack the communications skills to make their points in dressed-up formal language, but even their crude dismissals may contain important truths. Though *why* earlier initiatives failed is more valuable than the mere fact of failure, the face the leader turns to the past must

understand the impact that those failures had on the organization. More importantly, the leader must value that impact.

Resource Development

Looking backward or forward, we see a lack of available resources. The constriction of available funds at local, state, and federal level continues to place police departments in the position of doing more with less. That in and of itself is a trend driving change, but it is also a trend that continues to engender resentment. We tend to think of resources primarily in terms of money: more money buys more cops, more overtime, more technology.... all the things we have traditionally valued, and squandered. The forward face of leadership must think in terms of community resources, private partnerships, innovative thinking at all levels, and institutional development as resources. Some can be more readily cultivated than others, but all of them – and more – are needed. Future changes are often spoken of in an amorphous vacuum, but a number of factors at work in the environment are impinging upon the police function. The distinction between the police and the military is narrowing. Crime itself is being redefined by the emerging area of cybercrime, while terrorist and natural events demand attention to the impacts of mass casualty and dislocation events.

There are other trends at work. The rise of the alternative policing industry, no longer just rent-a-cops but still less than The Man, is one such boundary-spanning topic. Changes in the nature of funding for the police may have an analog in the debates and court decisions that affect public funding of education. The shift from an investigative stance to an intelligence-gathering approach at the federal level has secondary impacts upon state and local police agencies, as do the associated lawsuits and court decisions defining privacy and the ability of government to reach into corporate databases. The demographic trends of the recent decade and the resulting changes in the faces of politics have implications for police actions. So, too, do decisions made in foreign courts, as globalization reshapes the nature of the nation-state and bends the concept of jurisdiction to the new economic circumstances. Technology and nanotechnology may change the nature of crime dramatically within a few years: it is possible at this point to anticipate a cashless society, with economic exchanges based purely upon

biometrics. Such a system may never develop, but it is one potential extension of the biometric security systems being developed for banking and for immigration control.

While these changes may not reach Smallville next week, or even next month, they are beginning to impinge upon Gotham and Metropolis. The Janus-faced leader, mindful of the past while peering into the possible futures, has a duty to deny her or his subordinates the fatal luxury of dwelling on the past. Demanding an ongoing awareness of the arrival of the future is a responsibility of leadership.