LEADERSHIP'S ROLE IN SHAPING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE:

THE KEY TO THE FUTURE

Marshall Jones

The secret weapon of cops has long been their creativity in problem solving. From the era when Robert Peel laid the foundation for the first modern police department in London, cops have drawn from the resources at hand, common sense, and experience to accomplish their mission. As human society becomes more technologically complex, cops are recognizing the need to marry that creativity with innovation to keep pace.

The culture of every law enforcement agency establishes the framework, norms, and "personality" for itself and its members. The agency culture establishes the environment that either facilitates and empowers members or constrains them by the structure of its rules, regulations, and customs. Leaders are the stewards of an agency's culture and are the catalyst to organizational change and development. Some argue that an agency's culture is the sum of its member's experiences and agency history. Often its members cannot recall the origin and purpose of accepted behaviors, just that "we've always done it that way." Culture most commonly happens by circumstance and without planning, although planning and intentional attention can pay huge dividends.

The power of an agency's culture on its members cannot be understated. Good or bad, culture establishes an identity for the agency. Landmark police corruption cases (see Finnie earlier in this volume) and international awards are equally rooted in agency culture. In a time where budgets are tight, training time and funds are limited, and agencies struggle to keep pace with technology and global changes, learning to understand and deploy organizational culture to influence, facilitate growth, and aid change can pay dividends for agencies. It is essential to understand the dynamics of agency culture and its potential as a tool for change-minded police leaders.

Leadership: The Bottom Line

Basic assumptions about leadership need to be established before exploring how leadership can shape culture. The interplay of leadership, management, followership, and other organizational actors in accomplishing goals and objectives has been introduced elsewhere in this volume. As background, Nelson and Quick (2002) do an excellent job synthesizing a relative consensus of leadership studies over the past 60 years in five general principles.

First, leaders and organizations should appreciate the diversity gained from the unique attributes and perceptions of each leader. We each bring our worldview based largely on our collective life experience; that can be an asset when the organization has a culture that values the critical, and often overlooked, diversity of thought and experience. In an age where "diversity" is most often perceived as race or gender, diversity of thought and experience is a critical "fuel" for an agency to develop and utilize.

Second, there is no "single best style" of leadership; there may be organizational preferences or situational optimisms in terms of style. Nelson and Quick (2002) stress that leaders should be chosen who challenge the organizational culture, when necessary, without destroying it. Many police cultures are challenged by officers and other members challenging the status quo.

Third, successful leaders demonstrate a consideration for the well being of followers and welcome participation. Nelson and Quick (2002) are careful to point out that a leader cannot ignore the mission, but well attended followers are more effective. In research that asked officers about core behaviors of their "model" sergeant, many respondents discussed that the ideal sergeants were "genuine" (Jones, McChrystal, Kung & Griffith, 2002). Even the human faults of the "model" sergeants, such as being brash, were overlooked as it was natural and who they were. This suggests that leaders who invest and demonstrate a genuine concern for their officers can build idiosyncratic credits that facilitate a positive leader-member, a strong dynamic in job satisfaction and retention.

Fourth, specific situations may call for various leaders, with differential talents and behaviors, to assume the leadership role. This is exemplified in the National Incident

Management System (NIMS) that outlines a global framework allowing multiple local, state, and federal agencies to effectively and efficiently respond to natural disasters and emergencies. This response calls for the best leader for the specific incident at hand regardless of rank. This concept may rattle the paramilitary senses of structure and formal hierarchy, but within proper guidelines and to accomplish specific goals, it makes operational sense. This also reinforces that all formal leaders often find themselves in followership situations, and that leadership can emerge from those who do not possess formal rank or authority.

Fifth, good leaders are likely to be good followers despite the distinctions in role. Nelson and Quick (2002) contend that a closer examination of the attributes and behaviors of leaders and followers may not be as distinct as often thought. There is a lot to be said for the leader who recognizes the need to follow and support a bigger cause. This followership behavior can also strengthen the "message" conveyed to his/her subordinates in the value and necessity of followership behaviors and strongly demonstrates desired behavior. Even these five generalized leadership principles demonstrate that an agency's organizational culture is critical in the emergence of these behaviors. Healthy organizations utilize individuals with leadership and followership abilities as change agents for evolution and growth.

Active and Constant Attention to Organizational Culture

Law enforcement is possibly the best example of a vast disconnect between academics and practitioners in workplace research. The volume of critical incidents, often used in studies of law enforcement, is by far the highest for the daily first responders in our society. Researchers attempting to do more applied inquiry in law enforcement face the classic, if not universal, closed nature of police agency cultures. Cops are sensitive to the "arm-chair quarterbacking" of the media when their time is a luxury not shared in the immediacy of the crisis call. Getting an agency and its members to openly trust longitudinal review and critique for researchers is a real challenge.

Law enforcement is often blind to the utility in organizational research from other professions and disciplines. Culture is a great example of an area that law enforcement practitioners and researchers alike could build on existing research and literature. Even with the

environmental differences of various domains, cultural dynamics are basic to all organizations regardless their mission. Efforts to shape and intentionally tap into the power of organizational culture are akin to looking at people who want to lose weight. Diets, and organizational change, often fail because of a focus on immediate success and a tendency toward quick reversion to old behaviors. Lasting change requires a long-term approach and gradual, but permanent, changes in behavior. It takes discipline and attention to the details.

Schein (2004) discusses five ways that leaders reinforce organizational culture:

1. What leaders pay attention to.
2. How leaders react to crisis.
3. How leaders behave.
4. How leaders allocate rewards.
5. How leaders hire and fire individuals.

These will be discussed and examined with respect to the impact and potential dividends for law enforcement agencies. Scenarios will be used to make one case in point for each concept. While these scenarios may have played out in reality for many agencies, the names and contexts of the situations are purely fictitious and any association with a real person or organization is coincidence.

What Leaders Pay Attention To

The issues, ideas, problems, and opportunities to which leaders pay attention are extremely important in shaping expectations and outcomes. This often occurs without announcement or documentation and can vary from supervisor to supervisor. The implications for existing supervisors, and for developing future leaders, are tremendous but often happen without design or thought. Agencies that encourage and sanction appropriate risk taking and use the honest mistakes made by members as learning opportunities can create an atmosphere of innovation and openness to change. On the other hand, agencies that focus on rigid procedures, reports, and strict accountability for mistakes can lose focus on quality policing and lose out on valuable development opportunities.

Case in Point: Officer Smith

A 27 year-old male probationary police officer, Officer Smith works the midnight shift in an agency of 140 officers. He performs very well under stress and displays common sense and life experience. In this age, where most candidates are barely out of their teens, Officer Smith is a commodity in terms of new officers. His biggest deficit in field training was report writing. He demonstrated consistently that he could perform the job, but his reports were weak at best. Other trainees failing to meet standards in perception and judgment were subsequently terminated, so Officer Smith's report writing was not such a critical issue.

Officer Smith's patrol supervisor, Sergeant Jones, is young and energetic and likes to be in the field with the officers. Smith's squad works the most active part of the city and it has been doing an exemplary job balancing community policing with proactive policing, especially concerning drug arrests. Smith routinely shows up on calls and serves as back-up when calls are holding. Witnessing the good and consistent performance of Officer Smith, Sergeant Jones usually glances at his reports, as with most shift members, and endorses them along to records. Every evening prior to roll call the watch commander would return Officer Smith's reports to Sergeant Jones and ask Sergeant Jones why this continues to occur. Sergeant Jones most often tells Officer Smith how to correct the report so Smith can make the changes and get out of the station as quickly as possible. The squad enjoys hitting the streets and Officer Smith has fit right in to that group philosophy. The problem is Sergeant Jones is not paying attention to the detail of the reports. It is not long until Officer Smith's cases are not being prosecuted by the state attorney's office and someone in command staff notices the stat line. Change happens fast with downward momentum.

Both Sergeant Jones and Officer Smith are surprised to learn at roll call that Officer Smith is immediately being transferred to the other squad on the shift, a "quiet" and less active zone. Officer Smith's new supervisor, Sergeant Little, is a 25-year veteran of the department and a stickler for documentation. Weeks pass and Officer Smith finds his routine of traffic accidents, domestic disputes, and burglaries an unpleasant task. He focuses on his reports but he is discouraged. A ritual has begun where every morning about an hour before shift ends, Sergeant Little calls Officer Smith to his office to review the red marks on the reports. The

latest day included a memo from the patrol commander that Officer Smith's probation was being extended based on a deficiency in report writing. The scenario could end with Officer Smith resigning and going to another agency; ultimately failing to meet probation; finding a mentor followed by a resolution; or, approaching a host of other outcomes. This scenario has played out time and again in many agencies.

Sergeant Jones paid attention to the performance on the street while Sergeant Little focused on report writing. The watch commander facilitated kickback reports and reacted to the commander's reaction to the statistics. But could more have been done? Should more have been done? Was Officer Smith's writing deficiency identified prior to being hired? Was remedial training ever available or offered?

Anyone that has been in policing realizes that if an incident is not documented properly "it did not happen." Qualitative information from police executives since 2000 share a common theme that new officers "are better educated but less literate." This issue can easily create a situation where the actual effectiveness of "policing" can be diminished with the lack of efficiency and/or proficiency of documenting the events. Once the focus is on the paperwork and not necessarily the task then the message can be very disheartening to the current generation of young law enforcement officers.

Supervisors who invest in officers to assist weak performers in better articulation of events can not only help them with report writing but also in critical thinking skills, such as the behavior of an individual that may create a reasonable suspicion. The failure to properly articulate and document activity seems simple enough, but it can evolve into case law, policy review, or ultimately one of those command edicts that other members refer to as the "Officer X rule" when it is easier to toss a blanket over everyone than to work on the behavior or deficiency of an individual. Unfortunately, it is often the path of least resistance to transfer a problem employee, or in Officer Smith's case, an employee with a writing problem, rather than facilitate the necessary steps with the officer and supervisor responsible. Perhaps the field training system should have conducted remedial training, but Sergeant Jones should have attended to Officer Smith's deficits to further facilitate the squad's proactive and effective performance. A host of potential solutions could have been employed.

Obviously sending someone to training is the easy way out, but report-writing courses are infrequent and may not be logistically possible. But inter-squad mentoring, peer review, or one-on-one work with Sergeant Jones are among the squad level options. An agency culture where the patrol commander and/or watch commander uses this as a lesson for Sergeant Jones would have been preferred. The diagnosis and possible solutions are limited only by innovation and creativity, but the scenario unfortunately reflects reality too often. In this case the failure of leadership was multi-level.

How Leaders React in Crisis

Officers and supervisors alike pay close attention to how leaders react to crisis. From the Chief or Sheriff down, others watch and may very well shape their acceptable "norm" on the behavior modeled. The age-old "what if" scenario discussions can be very helpful to those in positions of leadership to prepare models of responses to incidents. The power of storytelling is also widely recognized as valuable in both cultural development and training and can serve as common reference points for future behaviors. Training, particularly scenario training cannot be overlooked but the time and cost can be prohibitive.

<u>Case in Point: Sergeant White</u>

The Sunshine City PD in south Florida is a 70-officer department formed a year ago and is comprised of experienced officer from all over the country. Sergeant White had been a supervisor with a sheriff's department in Kentucky prior to taking the job in Florida. He has about two years experience as a supervisor and eight years in law enforcement. Hurricane Johnna has been traced as a level 4 storm headed toward south Florida with an expected landfall about 50 miles north of Sunshine City. Two days prior to landfall the department suggests officers get their families evacuated. The agency made arrangements with a north Georgia police department to shelter police families if they did not have closer options. The department learned from Hurricane Andrew that cops that did not need to worry about their families were far more effective and focused, so the agency worked hard to tend to the families.

The hurricane plan for Sunshine City was for half of the department to head north a few hundred miles and for half of the officers to shelter either at the station or at one of the local schools during the storm. Eight hours prior to the storm making landfall, Sergeant White and his squad of five relatively new officers were assigned to shelter at the high school. Once the storm passed, they were to report to the station for assignments. The first few hours passed quietly. Around midnight Hurricane Johnna kicked up unexpectedly high storm surge. The last report from the station was that Johnna would make landfall right atop Sunshine City as a strong level 4 hurricane. Power, cell phones, and radio communications were lost. Nearly all of the city population evacuated except critical personnel and some stubborn or homebound residents. Sergeant White's high school housed the assigned police personnel, a handful of school staff and members of other critical government services, and about 40 residents who sought shelter just before the storm hit. All the people, including his officers, were getting anxious.
Officer Green asked, "Sarge, so is this why we sent half the department to Jacksonville?"
Sergeant White responded, "Well Green, relax, we have learned that having fresh and rested relief is important. Heck, a clean car loaded with food and drinks will be nice too. Don't worry, this place has three floors and a solid roof." At about that time the storm surge began banging the front doors of the high school building. The residents were panicked and looked to the police for answers and action. All eyes fell to Sergeant White. The moment of truth had arrived. Sergeant White had played this worst case scenario out in his head for days. He had a plan. "Ok, folks, calm down, grab your stuff and follow me."

He led them up the stairs to the second floor faculty lounge that had been reserved for the school staff assigned to the shelter. The lounge was in the center of the building with no windows and several couches. Once there, White assigned an officer and a school representative to every 8 to 10 residents and formed groups. Each group had an assignment from food to sanitation. Sergeant White and the assistant principal went back downstairs and placed a note on the door that they were sheltered in the second floor lounge and they unlocked the door. The storm surge was about 5 feet and rising.

The night was busy. The group attended to everything from over-flowing toilets to missing roofs. Communications were established with the department via a landline, but this

link was eventually lost. The next morning's daylight revealed that the damage of the storm surge was more devastating than the wind. The waterline was 8 feet up the 1st floor wall. The cars from the parking lot were partially submerged in the canal between the school and the soccer field. Although uncomfortable, the people led to safety by Sergeant White were unharmed.

Agencies around the country prepare for such disasters and events. Lessons learned from Hurricane Andrew, Hurricane Katrina, and the multitude of other natural and induced disasters demonstrates how preparedness is key. Flexibility is critical and the unpredictable nature of the phenomenon reminds us all how insignificant we are. Sergeant White also exemplified how critical leadership, and followership, is at every rank and how anyone in the agency may be in a very important and demanding position. How can agencies prepare their members for such critical tasks? A culture where officers are afforded the opportunity to perform various tasks and given leadership opportunities can be critical. A culture that recognizes officers need to be free from the worry of the immediate needs of their families during crisis is critical to dealing with the issue at hand, in this scenario a strong hurricane. The scenario could have played out in a multitude of ways, but each member of Sergeant White's squad will remember how he handled that situation for the rest of their lives and helped establish the new department's identity and history.

How Leaders Behave

How leaders behave is also closely watched. This is obvious during roll call and other times when "people are watching" but it is more global. Members are always "watching" even if their eyes are not present. How do the leaders deal with sick time and overtime? Does the patrol sergeant or commander often show up on scene or are they always at the station or "somewhere else" and nonresponsive. Can they tell dispatch the location of an officer when they cannot be raised on the radio. Basically, are they paying attention?

Case in Point: Captain Coleman

Captain Coleman was the operations commander of a small Midwest police department. The officers and staff of the agency looked up to and respected Captain Coleman, even if he was perceived to go to extremes at times. He had one extreme and a resulting annual pilgrimage each year around town. He went to every restaurant and convenience store to personally ask shop owners not to provide free drinks or reduced priced meals to officers. Some would verbally agree. Some chain stores and restaurant managers would explain that it is national company store policy for uniformed public servants. Others would tell him that it was their business and not a topic for his concern.

On more than one occasion, the debate between Captain Coleman and Big Al from Al's Diner was overheard and subsequently became breakfast table legend among cops for years. The pilgrimage was always followed up with the annual "thou shall not" address that accompanied the annual training on ethics, critical incident management, harassment, and communicable diseases as mandated by the state. The issue always came down to the line between gratuity and graft. The debate continued, as it does in most every law enforcement agency everywhere. A fair number of the officers would subsequently frequent establishments that were not renowned for their "ability to count" and avoid the situation of an obvious gratuity situation. Many officers would take their own mug into the local convenience store and go to the counter to pay, or at least attempt to pay, for the coffee to keep with the Captain's order.

Many supervisors pointed out over the years that the policy was not aligned with actual practice; the agency needed to either rewrite the policy to be less restrictive (reflecting actual behavior of officers) or enforce the existing policy so that everyone would begin to comply. Captain Coleman's influence on gratuities, although limited to only part of the agency, came to an abrupt stop when it was revealed that he went to the annual police chief conference and accepted free golf and meals from venders at the event. Word spread like wildfire and behavior changed in the agency in the blink of an eye. Every day of the year, at the end of every cop's meal, cops simply "pay the bill." The bill is often ironically about half the menu price and a very generous tip is customarily left to the servers who day after day take care of the

culinary needs of cops everywhere. Captain Coleman's agency, despite his attempts to gain internal and external compliance, is not exceptional. Rather than having an influential member serving as the role model for ethical behavior, the story shifted to the hypocritical standards "they" send that all started with a free round of golf.

How Leaders Allocate Rewards

How leaders allocate rewards may appear at first glance as minimal given that the majority of law enforcement agencies cannot give financial rewards. But the cultural significance of traditional rewards is too often lost. Properly utilized and rewarded with proper standards and care, ribbons and recognition are powerful cultural currency.

Case in Point: Lieutenant Farmer

As the Commander of the Investigations Division of a mid-sized agency, Lieutenant Farmer supervises three sergeants, each with six detectives or agents. He also has a civilian support staff supervisor with nine staff members that handle evidence, crime scenes, and crime analysis. Lieutenant Farmer wants to be promoted to Captain and he is on top of everything. After last year's annual awards ceremony, he noticed that the annual awards went to patrol officers and most of the distinguish command level commendations were also from patrol. He was admittedly embarrassed that the lobby greeter won the civilian of the year award. At the next Investigations staff meeting he issued a directive that every month each supervisor would nominate someone from their squad for a department award. The supervisor's looked at one another in astonishment and one veteran sergeant finally said, "Lieutenant, you cannot do rewards by quota."

The lieutenant quickly pointed out that a member of their unit had not won a major award or commendation in years, yet he knew there was quality police work being done by the unit's personnel. The same veteran sergeant pointed out that over half of the investigations unit had over ten years experience in the unit and many had grown complacent. The agency just would not rotate people out. The new and energetic investigators are stuck on property

crimes. He also pointed out that they enjoyed a relatively quiet community with low violent crimes that are usually solved quickly. His arguments fell on deaf ears.

Three months passed and the Lieutenant had not seen any award nominations come across his desk. They were making a statement, he thought. The next week two of the sergeants were reassigned to patrol and two junior sergeants were assigned to investigations. Soon, nominations were flowing in as requested. Unfortunately, all it takes is one supervisor to over-submit members for awards on shaky or embellished criteria to negate even the highest of honors in an agency. Using rewards (particularly ribbons) to reinforce officers to do what they are suppose to can be not only damaging to the reward system, but can minimize the basic expectations of behavior. Meritorious service should be based on an event worth sharing the story rather than for an officer who finally has made it to roll call on time for the past quarter. Law enforcement often misses the basic lessons of behavior. People behave depending on how they are rewarded. Perhaps the most common reward for cops is their sense of doing a good job by way of recognition and praise from their supervisors.

How Leaders Hire (Promote) and Fire

How leaders hire and fire individuals may be better stated as "select" and "transfer" in the context of policing. Promotions and special unit selections are largely overlooked in terms of organizational impact and the messages being sent. Agencies where "someone has to retire or die" for a promotion or special unit assignment (such as detectives) is commonplace in many agencies in the US. The competition is fierce in many agencies. The process and sense of fairness can be neutralized without proper processes that are clearly stated well in advance of the promotion or assignment.

<u>Case in Point: The Leadership Book of the Month</u>

Chief Pauley is the newly hired police chief at a small agency of 50 officers. He retired as a Captain from the state police and always wanted to be a chief. It has been five years since a sergeant's slot has been available. Nearly every officer in the agency is eligible to compete for the promotion and many have obtained degrees. The agency is fortunate that there are several

qualified applicants. The Chief has asked one of his commanders to write the test and to look for leaders. He recently read a leadership book focused on putting people where their strengths are and wanted that as part of the test. He also wanted questions from their policy manual and union contract. The sources were announced to the agency.

A few weeks later the test was scored. Some officers scored where they were expected while some excellent officers did poorly and some mediocre performing officers did very well. In an agency of 50 officers, everyone knows each other and their work behaviors. The Chief consulted his commanders and they choose one from the top five candidates as called for in the labor contract. The top two scoring candidates were senior officers and considered by most as malcontents; a third officer was barely eligible to take the exam. The remaining two candidates were good officers and very capable; one of these were selected for the promotion. Within a few days the two malcontent officers filed a grievance wanting to know why they were passed over. Most of the agency questioned the test itself when the best officers did not pass it and the malcontents were the top two. The grievance was dismissed as the contract clearly gave the Chief the ability to select from the top five.

A week later a grievance was filed on behalf of several members claiming the test was not valid to the job. The challenge pointed to the source materials needing to be anchored to a valid job analysis of a police supervisor and that the text, dubbed "book of the month" was certainly not relevant. They also took issue with the number of policy questions that were asked and when challenged, revealed conflicting policy or practice. Months passed before the matter was settled. To avoid future problems, the city had to hire a consultant, at appreciable expense, to write a validated exam based on the job tasks of a police supervisor and derived from the written directives necessary to the job.

Chief Pauley learned a valuable lesson in managing perceptions of fairness and the importance of culture in promotional processes, regardless of who gets selected. His previous agency had annual promotional opportunities and the agency's psychometric staff conducted standardized testing for the entire agency. His current agency did not have the resources and technical proficiency to prepare a defensible process, thus the outcomes insured a controversy. Critical organizational events, such as promotional processes, can generate significant internal

turmoil. Proper processes are built on the job task analysis and job description of patrol supervisors, and are based on the written directive systems of an agency. Testing processes based on the "leadership book of the month" are neither valid nor reliable. Scenario-based assessment (written and exercise-based) offers great opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their abilities. Using supervisors from outside agencies for assessment panels with reliable processes will demonstrate a fair and consistent process.

Conclusion and the Future

Each of the scenarios presented here demonstrate a snapshot of events some agencies encounter and each has cultural ramifications well beyond the life of the event. It can be challenging to anticipate the multiple potential pitfalls when making decisions. It can be helpful, however, to examine events in terms of how frequent they occur and how important and/or critical they are to the people in the community and the agency. When the frequency is low, the event is not a routine occurrence, and the importance is high (hurricane or promotion as an example), then take time to think out multiple scenarios; consider how seemingly simple decisions may send a message and impact the agency culture.

It is also important that supervisors make concerted efforts to "walk the walk" when "talking the talk" of ethics and acceptable behavior. Everyone in the agency is "watching" whether their eyes are present or not and even if they are unaware they are watching. The messages conveyed are powerful. Reward the behaviors that are wanted. Does the agency recognize initiative and creativity or stifle it with paperwork. Do all the supervisors have a common frame of reference that the agency universally recognizes and desires to insure all members are being evaluated equally and have very clear expectations? Establishing performance standards can be challenging but it is very necessary. Yes, most supervisors recognize good police work when they see it, but can they articulate the behaviors that comprise goods police work? If not, how can they mentor new officers or supervisors in what good police work is?

Developing an organizational culture to facilitate leader and follower emergence and development is critical to maintaining agency effectiveness. Smircich (1983) discusses

organizational culture and contends it serves four important functions by providing a sense of identity to members, facilitating a sense-making framework for organizational behaviors, reinforcing organizational values, and serving as a mechanism for shaping behavior. Law enforcement has a historical lag in keeping pace with technology. In the past, these lags were not as critical and were overcome by solid police work. As the degree and frequency of technological change takes place, law enforcement must live and adapt to changing environments faster. An agency culture that facilitates change and embraces new ideas and technology is not just a good idea, but also a necessity to keep pace with technology, to recruit qualified candidates, and to manage fiscal constraints.

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