Paths Forward: Developing and Expanding Effective Leadership in Policing

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Some contend that current knowledge regarding the generation of leaders and

leadership in policing is hampered significantly by an inability of current evidence to specifically

identify the traits and attributes of the leaders that we seek. According to this notion, policing

relies upon experiential evidence of "what works"; that evidence may sometimes be

idiosyncratic to the circumstances and environments in which the police operate. Notions such

as these are well-reflected in this recent comment by Chief Rick Myers (Colorado Springs Police

Department):

> Having been a "formal" leader now for over 20 years, I confess that I probably am
> as confused as anyone about what the hell it means; I can tell you for sure that
> my "practice" of it has changed over the years, but not exclusively because
> someone wrote up something about it or I went to a seminar. Scars have a lot to
> do with it!

That is, experience has a significant impact on defining what leadership may encompass and

also helps us define what leadership is not. From a futures perspective, questions arise such as:

How do we select entry-level applicants who are or have the potential to become leaders? How

do we create and maintain environments in which true police leaders can emerge and excel?

How do we create promotion systems that allow for leaders to shine (so we do not simply

promote those who have avoided professional self-destruction)? How do we create a policing

profession that allows talented and proven leaders to advance based on what they have done,

rather than promoting those who have "played the game" of organizational brown nosing?

How do we avoid the "Peter Principle"?

Perhaps the key police leadership questions should be: How do we balance assessment of past leadership with the promise for future leadership? While we rely upon assessments of the former to identify "lessons learned", what we really seek is future leadership not just remodeling old leadership efforts. In the end, what do we do with all these notions of leadership? If police leadership is strictly situational, what can police departments do to develop, identify, promote, and expand effective leadership? What can our employees do to enhance their efficacy as leaders? Unresolved questions abound, yet there is minimal dialog within police professional publications and associations regarding these thorny matters.

While some suggest that the existing scholarly research literature has limited practical information for police, we contend that this body of writings can still inform the effort to a significant extent. Such efforts must, however, be grounded in experimentation and statistically-based research with experience. This volume represents one such effort along these lines. While experience as a leader is critical to understanding the process and its development, it is not enough (as evidenced by the persistent challenges that are present in identifying and developing great leaders or even good leaders). Scholarly inquiry plays a role and is important, but if leadership is situational (at least in part), it is not just about understanding theories and concepts, but also knowing when and how to apply that knowledge (i.e., if leadership is in part intuitive and experiential…it can also then be augmented, but not replaced, by research evidence).

The lack of definitive strategies for insuring the continual development of leadership -- or even operational definitions for leadership – also suggests a different possibility. Perhaps we are asking the wrong questions and assume we know the individual traits and attributes that

engender leadership when, in fact, we simply do not. This may well be the case with leadership dynamics in the realm of law enforcement. There have been many attempts to address key questions associated with police leadership (definitions, measurement, outcomes, and development), yet few clear answers having emerged. For example, there is still an acute shortage of objective evidence that any specific strategy generates improved leadership.

The challenges in identifying these answers may be supportive of the above notion. That is, the specific delineation of the traits, attributes, programmatic efforts, and organizational processes of what leadership is within the realm of policing may be elusive. Another more extreme but simplistic version of this contention relegates leadership to a concept akin to pornography: We are not sure what it is but we know it when we see it. **We contend in this essay that such notions are likely not only wrong but also insufficient for future considerations of police leadership.** Drawing upon evidence provided in this volume, we argue that such notions are not adequate for the past, the present, or the future of the policing profession. This concluding essay will briefly explain why and what paths forward may be available to policing to engender the development and maintenance of leaders and leadership within the profession.

Numerous others (both in the current volume and elsewhere) have pointed out the many changes that have and are occurring not only in policing but also in our communities, our nation, and globally. For the moment, consider just one: traditional organizational hierarchies have become, or are becoming, obsolete. That net-centric organizations have emerged is hardly news. The primary purpose of this section is to connect developments such as these with notions of the future of leadership. The essays contained in this volume highlight specific

actions can be taken by both individuals and organizations to foster the development of not only future leaders but also overall future leadership within policing and police organizations.

While each contribution in this volume holds some nuggets of wisdom that illuminates paths to future leadership in law enforcement, some examples should be noted here. Take, for example, the essay offered by Gerald Konkler which suggests that one path for the future of police leadership may lie in the commitment to succession planning rather than secession planning. That is, devoting resources to plan for change rather than simply serving a policing agency or community until such time that this responsibility falls upon someone else's shoulders. In Konklers' viewpoint this includes planning for knowledge transfer, stacking knowledge, and avoiding over-reliance on hardware and software to provide for the actual transfer of knowledge and wisdom pertaining to agency practices and policies. In another similar vein, consider Al Youngs' essay discussing the notion of a leadership university and the idea of identifying other departments (such as the Lakewood (CO) Police Department) where leadership development has become a hallmark and legacy of agency operations. These operations have included embracing education, training, and integrity as well as encouraging diversity of opinion, diversity of assignments, and diversity of ideas in providing police services to a community. Such efforts are likely to identify some best practices for developing both leaders and leadership.

Now consider the contributions by Sid Heal and Robert Bunker. Each of these essays encourages the merging of scientific knowledge with practical ends. This includes researching "what works" and examining what leadership may be required in different contexts to respond to different problems or groups. Bunker's contribution specifically holds promise for addressing

the leadership challenges related to confronting the myriad problems associated with gangs, guns, and drugs that may threaten public safety in a community.

John Jackson, Rick Myers, and Tom Cowper offer an essay that details the advantages a net-centric approach to organizational leadership may provide. They contend that a net-centric organizational transformation will foster the movement of power from the organizational level to the individual level thereby spreading leadership throughout the policing organization. A transformation to a net-centric organizational scheme puts a premium on cooperation, collaboration, and rapid response to problems inside and outside the organization. Jackson and his colleagues contend that leadership will breed in this environment; indeed, leaders and leadership must flourish if a net-centric organization is going to function and survive. Though empirical evidence to date is limited, preliminary experimentation with net-centric approaches shows great promise. The greatest obstacle is not in developing and articulating the idea; it is in finding the will and courage to experiment with the application of this structural model in policing.

On a similar note, Michael Buerger, Greg Weaver, and Toby Finnie endorse the importance of organizational considerations, while also noting new directions for leadership research to inform the future of policing. They point to both dynamic and static dimensions of leadership and the need for succession planning in ever-changing environments (again, see also Konkler in this volume). Buerger, Weaver, and Finnie lend additional support to the idea of the net-centric concept of distributed leadership that they argue fosters networking and partnering.

Taking these arguments as a whole, perhaps no single measure, strategy, or course of action will reliably produce or improve efforts to deliver the complete promise of leadership in policing. In fact, to reduce these arguments down to specific types or styles of leadership and management of people and problems may be unnecessarily complicating the potential paths for leadership to develop and prosper. This may be akin to examining the strengths and weakness of community policing versus intelligence-led policing versus problem oriented policing rather than simply examining what leads to effective and efficient policing strategies. Perhaps one path forward is simply to focus on productivity and quality rather than the dynamic and elusive concepts related to leadership. In fact, one could effectively argue that cultivating leadership is really a process of empowering or influencing people to be able to be most productive in their lives, their careers, their organizations, and their communities. From a police productivity standpoint, the outputs from this process may take the form of more effective community-based crime reduction strategies, lower fear of crime within the community, or a greater issuance of tickets for driving violations; the result would be the same—increased police productivity. Under these conditions, the path forward to future police leadership would be through maximizing productivity by wielding influence to persuade people to realize their potentials both individually and organizationally.

Regardless of which leadership path is chosen, several recent developments have emerged that show promise for the future of police leadership. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. There has been a plethora of leadership development initiatives occurring throughout law enforcement (including this both this volume and on-going efforts of the Leadership Development Institute at the FBI).

2. The Public Safety Leadership Development Consortium (now a part of Police Futures International) has emerged to network those working in police leadership development and to begin advocacy for increased research into elements of the leadership development process.

3. And, lastly, the more people – good people, competent people – wrestle with the meaning, measurement, and means of leadership, the more likely some light will be generated to illuminate paths forward.

So, what is the path forward? How do we create preferred futures in conceptualization and implementation of leadership as discussed in this volume? While no easy answers emerge, some directions include identifying and promoting practices and research pertaining to not only influencing people and policies but the leadership that results from such efforts. Further efforts to determine how the development of influence works in net-centric environments, as well as intermediate formats such as public-private partnerships and neighborhood-driven policing, may also serve as a compass forward. These directions -- and many others found in earlier chapters -- must be given serious consideration. We simply cannot continue as we have been. The world is changing. While some agencies will change by attrition, the more proactive and effective agencies will change intentionally how they do business, how they are structured, how they empower employees, and how they operate internally.

There is not one right answer. There is not one right mold for leadership for the future. There is, however, an inexhaustible list of unproductive paths to these ends. Let us not continue to do what we have always been doing. Let us move forward in a principled way knowing that there are numerous complexities to this task such as leveraging competencies both at the top and bottom of an organization, confronting the challenges of similarities and differences across nations and organizational types, and identifying evidence-based approaches for determining best practices. Perhaps most importantly, evaluating outcomes and continually

assessing our organizations for opportunities to lead only identifies the present and future

challenges that lie ahead. We hope this volume has, at least in part, provided some paths

forward to meeting these challenges.