

Conference Report

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Concerning his attendance from February 19-20, 2009 at lecture/conference session – Marquette University. This report is premised on comparing desired organizational change and policing policy development against the current state of transformation presently occurring within the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) to the information provided by the Conference Sessions. The opinions in this document are my own alone.

Introduction

MPD has been, since the hiring of Chief Edward Flynn, undergoing a profound level of organizational change. This has been a wholly internalized process in which public knowledge of the extent of change or the status of implementation has been intentionally limited in communication. Generally, Chief Flynn is facilitating the retraining of the entire police force along two distinct paths of change.

The first is the model of “Leadership in Police Organizations” fostered by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) which seeks to “decentralize” operations by achieving the following organization wide characteristics:

1. Attainment of a “shared understanding” what is leadership.
2. Commitment to a set of “shared goals and values” throughout all levels of leadership.
3. Adoption by leadership of an approach to leading that transcends a given position by fostering clear visions of what the agency wishes to achieve regardless of a police officer’s position in the organization.
4. Conscious dispersion of skills and knowledge throughout the organization coupled with oversight as to the developmental stage of competency a given officer has attained.

This is an on-going process that has only begun within the last 6 months. Change of this magnitude is both comprehensive and slow moving.

The second MPD commitment is to “community based policing”. This concept has a wide range of definition possibilities but can be defined by understanding that is seen as a concerted effort to build cooperation between neighborhood stakeholders at all levels through identification of specific concerns and working with the department in “joint police-community interventions”. It is implemented by:

1. Focused, mutually agreed upon goals and objectives. Environments that support criminal activity are addressed through a “partnership” with local organizations that focuses on elimination of those conditions.

2. Effective communication between police and local members that foster an “intimate knowledge” of the community.
3. Establishing a relationship of “trust” among all parties.
4. Providing a long term commitment to mutually agree upon goals and objectives focused on the “underlying causes of crime”.
5. Making “effective use” of the “talents and resources” residing in the community in order to fully establish a working and on-going relationship between the police and the local community members that reduces levels of crime.

Note: the terms and descriptions are my own.

These two policing approaches are not mutually exclusive. But implementation of Community Oriented Policing is dependent on the ability of the organization to comprehend the extent of change required before it can be successfully implemented. MPD is still in the midst of change implementation. Keeping this in mind as we now can address the information offered by Marquette University’s College of Law conference presenters.

The Legitimacy of Police among Young African-American Men

This was a lecture given Thursday evening by Tracey L. Meares, the Walton Hale Hamilton Professor of Law at Yale Law School. The focus of this lecture was the affect police can have in supporting communities as they seek to increase neighborhood safety through focused dialogue with the dominant group of incarcerated individuals in American prisons; young African-American men.

Professor Meares began her lecture by citing statistical evidence that leads one to understand that for a majority of urban dwelling young black males (16-25), being stopped by police, and going to prison are seen as a “normal part of life”. She argues that police thus have a “profound effect” on youth.

She points out that how people are treated by police and the perception they have over how authorities control of their lives is central to compliance with the law. Referencing the body of knowledge resident in the social sciences she argues that: human beings seek to be treated with dignity and respect; they want to be perceived as equal under the law; and they desire a level of mutual trust that creates a desired set of “normative” interactions (a set of standards for correct behaviors) between police, community stakeholders, and themselves as an effected population.

Police also possess a set of “legitimate” (logical, legal, agreed upon) powers that can be applied in creative ways to fostering target youth compliance with the law. Meares outlined the consequences of a program in Chicago called Project Safe Neighborhoods. (PDF of the report can be found at: http://www.psnchicago.org/PDFs/2009-PSN-Research-Brief_v2.pdf). The website states that:

The purpose of Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is to reduce incidences of gun violence in Chicago's most afflicted neighborhoods. We accomplish this objective through a multi-faceted approach that includes law enforcement, intervention and prevention strategies. PSN carries out these strategies through the development of partnerships amongst Federal, State and Local government as well as community and faith-based providers. Our comprehensive strategy is designed to prevent youth from committing a gun crime; intervene in the lives of those individuals struggling to re-integrate into society following release from prison; and prosecute to the fullest extent of the law those individuals who choose to threaten the safety of Chicago's neighborhoods by committing a gun crime.

<http://www.psnchicago.org/>

The essence of this project is to bring all pertinent stakeholders together in a non-threatening setting and guide ex-offenders through a group process that internalizes a desire to not re-offend. The focus was and continues to be “gun” violence. Thus the legitimate power of the law enforcement community coupled with consequence based discussion techniques (use a gun to commit a crime and you do hard time in Federal prison) can foster receptivity in black youth to more directly alter previous disruptive behaviors. Primarily applying non-lecture, face-to-face peer discussions guided by a command level (white shirt) police authority the outcome desired in this process is the creation of structures of support in neighborhoods where freed ex-offenders return to that is capable of ensuring diminishment of these same ex-offenders returning to prison. A practical grounding for this is the belief that each individual has the potential for rebuilding their community, no matter what segment of that community they came from.

The Future of Community Justice in Wisconsin

As stated in the conference advertisement the purpose of this daylong event was to:

In the past two years, policymakers and community leaders in Wisconsin have devoted much attention to a range of important challenges facing the state's criminal justice system, including perceptions of unwarranted race-based disparities in the treatment of similar cases, budgetary and other pressures resulting from a long-term increase in the state's prison population, the need for enhanced treatment options for incarcerated individuals suffering from chronic mental illness, and the need to engage the communities most directly affected by high crime rates more fully in crime-prevention initiatives. New community justice councils have been developed at the local level to address these concerns, encourage dialogue between community leaders and criminal justice professionals, promote official cooperation across jurisdictional lines, and facilitate creative problem-solving.

The focus of the sessions was to answer the following community justice organizational questions:

1. How can they bridge longstanding political, cultural, and jurisdictional divides?
2. What are the most pressing criminal justice policy questions they face?
3. What innovative responses are being considered?
4. How can community-based organizations learn from one another and from the experiences of other communities across the nation?

In general, conference panel discussions provided rich information on the complexity and difficulties inherent in coordinating the varied activities of jurisdictional responsibilities with a clear, comprehensive philosophy of justice application. Attainment of coherence in crime reduction approaches was a common theme throughout the program.

Keynote Address

An interesting overview of the criminal justice system was presented by Dr. Jeremy Travis, the President of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York City (<http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/>). Travis began his keynote by pointing out that Community Justice is a term defined by location and time. There is not one definition. The mental model of justice as it exists in this country is a “funnel” that can be defined as follows:

First, the criminal justice system operates as a "funnel." At the top of the funnel are all the crimes that are committed, and at the bottom, the number of offenders sentenced to prison. The slope of the funnel is quite steep since for many offenses, the crime is never reported to the police, an arrest is not made, a conviction is not obtained, or an offender is not sentenced to prison. Generally, fewer than 3 percent of all serious crimes result in a prison sentence.

http://www.drugpolicy.org/library/bars_p2.cfm

Thus traditional law enforcement approaches to crime reduction can be seen as a set of “mechanical”, engineered, input-output, and metrics based process that has, in Travis’s opinion, become “warped” and inadequate to contemporary law enforcement. Thus, enforcement and the evaluation of effectiveness becomes a product (locked up criminals), business driven (increased number of arrests etc.) mindset tends to operate in a vacuum and is seen as unresponsive to community needs.

Travis sees “Parallel Justice” as a movement that can better support community healing. This concept can be defined as:

The concept of Parallel Justice elevates the goal of helping victims rebuild their lives to a fundamental component of justice. Parallel Justice requires us to decouple the pursuit of justice for victims from the administration of justice for

offenders. Under a system of Parallel Justice the societal message to victims would be, "What happened to you is wrong and we will help you rebuild your life."

http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbID=DB_ParallelJustice156

He advocates seeking ways of preventing crime that avoids the use of the “funnel” and adopts a more holistic, less mechanical approach to dealing with criminal activities that can be best presented in approaches like the Problem Solving Court Movement (see http://www.courtinnovation.org/_uploads/documents/Principles.pdf). Also see: http://www.ncsconline.org/WC/Publications/COMM_ProSolProbSolvCtsPub.pdf

The principles underlying this concept are:

1. Community service and alternative sanctions replacing jail and fines in appropriate cases.
2. Refocus court time on “minor” misdemeanors.
3. Expand information gathering on defendants (understand them better and the matrix of relationships that produced them).
4. Plan for change better.
5. Strict monitoring of sentence conditions and compliance.
6. Imposed sanctions for non-compliance.
7. Access to comprehensive treatment and social services.
8. Linked commitment between offenders and the “quality of life” in their community.

Thus Travis seeks to negate the tyranny of the funnel and create a “tipping point” of communities that are focused on restoring justice back in to the communities directly affected by abhorrent resident behaviors.

Panel Discussions

The conference has had a set of Working Group Breakout Sessions that focused on:

- A. Juvenile Justice Referrals: Developing Appropriate Interventions for Children
- B. Advocating for Communities: Prosecutorial Discretion, Pretrial Detention, and Diversion]
- C. Public Health Impacts and Resources Coordination, Collaboration, and Information-Sharing Across Systems
- D. Mapping Milwaukee’s Community Justice Resources
- E. Addressing Racial Disparities: Prosecution, Incarceration, and Work

I attended the Mapping session and that described the range of difficulties present in getting diverse Information Technology (IT) systems working together.

Conclusions

The application of the conference recommendations is highly dependent on the receptivity of police organizations to the concepts and the internal sophistication of the all departmental employees (sworn and staff) to fully adapt to the needs of adapting processes and procedures to have them conform to the Community Justice Philosophies presented at this conference. I believe that MPD is now in the process of reforming its organizational structure around community driven concepts but that at present the status of leadership growth sufficient to support this desire awaits completion of continued internal training and development.

In summary, those of us who advocating change for the City of Milwaukee thus are somewhat forced to be patient with MPD as they transform themselves. I would recommend that MPD do a better job of communicating its leadership development programming to the greater community because right now many of us are operating with insufficient knowledge as to the directions Chief Flynn intends to take. Trust comes from transparency and I wish that the glass we must look through was less opaque.