



Problem Oriented Policing

Information Sheet

By

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Question One: How do we create a Problem-Solving Policing Culture?

At the heart of this question is the fact that in police education quality and consistency “vary tremendously” (Stoughton DW, 2016). Police at all levels of service and command are trained for their responsibilities using a variety of methods from “recounting war anecdotes” to “hands on-scenarios to role playing”. But out of “18,000 different law enforcement agencies [in the United States] ...no unified training standards...exist” (Stoughton DW, 2016).

All this is confirmed by Recommendation 5.1 in the “[Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing](#)”:

The Federal Government should support the development of partnerships with training facilities across the country to promote consistent standards for high quality training and establish training innovation hubs. (Report, p. 53).

These proposed hubs should work to develop “replicable model programs that use adult-based learning and scenario-based...that would influence nationwide curricula, as well as instructional methodology” (5.1.1 Action Item, p. 53). All this is well and good. It replicates some of the best world models of centralized police training. But it is also my contention that to create a climate of change open to these recommendations one must first address the imbedded and unexamined mindsets that permeate society and policing.

Finding One

Changing a culture is hard; doing so requires consensus driven, centralized curriculum and training modalities.

Question Two: What is the traditional police mindset for solving problems.

Problem Solving in the Traditional Policing Mindset

How do you define a “problem”? By first determining if it is real! In my teaching, I begin by restating a problem around an intended outcome (the end belief of the affected person(s)). If you can clearly delineate what you wish to achieve in observable human behavioral change then you probably have a pretty good understanding of the problem. But in policing one tends to define a problem around statements of increased/decreased data sets (statistically verified facts), not around subjective hopes, aspirations and frustrations of local citizens.

Attributes of Problem Oriented Policing (POP)

Policing, as previously noted, tends as a profession to be mission focused and lineal in thinking. POP was developed because of the tendency of police to focus on standards and procedures to the exclusion of outcomes they wish to achieve (Eck, 2014).

POP seeks to bring creative logic to complex situations that do not lend themselves to simple procedural solutions. At the heart of POP is the conceit that effective policing is best done when it is focused on

clearly defined perceptions, conditions and community concerns. Once clarified, these views can be harnessed into willing partnerships between police and related services (both public and non-profit). Crime reduction becomes the responsibility of both law enforcement and the community-as-a-whole.

Thus, for police:

- A problem is the **basic unit of** police **work** rather than an individual crime, case, call, or incident.
- A problem is something that **concerns** or **causes harm to citizens**, not just the police. Things that concern only police officers are important, but they are not problems in this sense of the term.
- Addressing problems means more than quick fixes: it means **dealing with conditions** that create problems.
- Police officers must routinely and systematically analyze problems before trying to solve them, just as they routinely and systematically investigate crimes before making an arrest. Individual officers and the department **develop routines and systems for analyzing problems**.
- The analysis of problems must be thorough even though it may not need to be complicated. This principle is as true for problem analysis as it is for criminal investigation.
- **Problems must be described precisely and accurately** and broken down into specific aspects. Problems often aren't what they first appear to be.
- Problems must be **understood in terms of the various interests at stake**. Individuals and groups of people are affected in different ways by a problem and have different ideas about what should be done about the problem.
- The way the problem is currently being handled must be understood and limits of effectiveness openly acknowledged to come up with a better response.
- Initially, all possible responses to a problem should be considered so as not to cut short potentially effective responses. Suggested responses should follow from what is learned during analysis. They should not be limited to, nor rule out, the use of arrest.
- The police must pro-actively try to solve problems rather than just react to the harmful consequences of problems.
- The police department must increase police officers' freedom to make or participate in important decisions. At the same time, officers must be accountable for their decision-making.
- The **effectiveness** of new responses must be **evaluated** so these results can be shared with other police officers and so the department can systematically learn what does and does not work. (Michael Scott and Herman Goldstein 1988.)

Reference: <http://www.popcenter.org/about/?p=elements>

Traditional Police Management Leadership Style

Police management is notorious for rigid thinking. It is hierarchical in structure and command driven. It tends to be “boss-centered”. The inherent weakness of this modality is that problems tend to be pushed upward, not laterally or into the domain where they occur. Thus, problem solving is not localized with the line officer, it is shifted to the supervisor. Increase the complexity of the problem and you get higher levels of distortion in defining the true nature of a “problem”. This leads to conflict. A reminder: finding a resolution of problem in POP is a staged process that requires participants to:

1. Clearly state their interests and the outcomes they wish to achieve
2. Describe the varied emotions that impede clarity of communications
3. Seek understanding of the “others” perspective before judging values
4. Generate mutual supporting options
5. Reach agreement (some even suggest writing out a contract of team understanding)

At the heart of POP problem solving is the need to think critically about what drives individual perceptions of the significance of a given “problem”. How does critical questioning conflict with other dominant Mindsets?

Finding Two

For **police**, problems are “units of work” that need to be solved using pre-scribed, legal processes.

Question Three: What is the Engineering (Civilian) Mindset?

The primary difference that I have found between the system of education in India and other countries, particularly the U.S., is that they focus on problem solving and relating theories to reality around them. These two things are lacking in the education system in India. N. R. Narayana Murthy

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/n/nrnaraya704026.html>

Defining the “Problem”

For an engineer, the first step is to define the “core problem”. One must collect and verify the accuracy of inputs that indicate a problem exists. This can be done by talking to people affected by the “problem”. Asking insightful questions while pro-actively listening to what is not said leads to possible solutions and insights.

Law enforcement provides a rich data field of conflicting information. The authenticity of city crime reportage is directly related to community trust; we report when we are confident that the police agency will follow through and the reporting agent will be protected.

I have found that defining a problem is directly related to the competence of a practitioner to understand the difference between:

1. Fact = a verifiable measurement. The time/date that [Man landed on the Moon](#)
2. Information = an [accumulation of data](#)
3. Knowledge = [information that has been analyzed](#)
4. Wisdom = accumulated knowledge tested through life experience (See [Dialogue of Learning](#))
5. Opinion = Intuitive knowledge (Folger, p. 84)

The final engineering derived technique is to confirm all findings. This reflective process grounds the next phase...defining the problem around two key issues: Do I possess the resources (capital/skilled professionals/institutional commitment) to solve it and do I have sufficient time.

[Overcoming Barriers to Generating Ideas](#)

What blocks one's ability to solve problems. Defining and overcoming mental inhibitors drives this chapter. Common causes for mental blocks in this process include but are not limited to:

- Choosing to not explore ideas beyond a narrow construct
- Ass-u-me...assuming you possess the only right answer
- Defaulting to the first solution that easily comes to mind or almost works
- Allowing irrelevant information to distract you from the desired behavior/outcome
- Choosing to succumb to frustration because solutions don't come easily
- Losing patience...allowing yourself to think the process/analysis before it is done

[Finding Three](#)

For **engineers'** problems are eliminated through implementation of fact finding procedures that lead to logical, sequential and testable agreed upon solutions.

[Question Four: What is the Military \(Warrior\) Mindset?](#)

Within law enforcement, few things are more venerated than the concept of the Warrior...Modern policing has so thoroughly assimilated the warrior mythos that, at some law enforcement agencies, it has become a point of professional pride to refer to the "police warrior." This is more than a relatively minor change in terminology. Though adopted with the best of intentions, the warrior concept has created substantial obstacles to improving police/community relations. In short, law enforcement has developed a "warrior" problem. (Stoughton)

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2593798

Defining the “Military” Mind

In its most basic form the “warrior” seeks to define the enemy, gather needed resources, determine appropriate tactics/goals/objectives, issue orders and close with the enemy to destroy them. For example, the United States Marine Corp’s [Five Paragraph Order](#) sequence follows:

1. *Situation*: Overall status of friendly and enemy forces and their physical location
2. *Mission*: A one sentence statement of what a unit is assigned to accomplish
3. *Execution*: A paragraph that defines the intent of the commander, concepts that support the operation, the tasks to be achieved and guidance to properly coordinate (time, order of movement, etc.) operations
4. *Administration* and Logistics: Information necessary for support units to function
5. *Command*: Defining who leads from where

A specific warrior mindset that has, over time, been adopted by police agencies for acting quickly is the [OODA Loop](#). It is more intuitive and rapid in implementation than the lumbering business (engineering) mindset and thus supports the warrior’s need for immediate action.

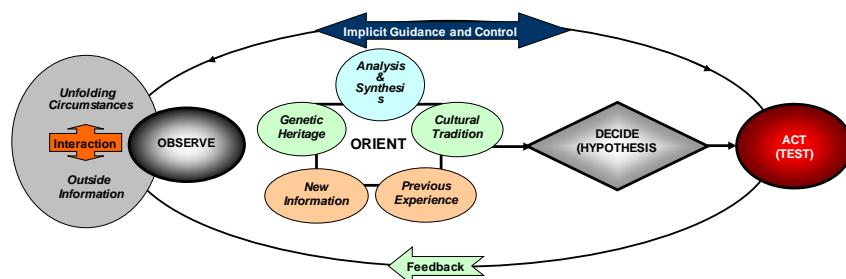
Modern total warfare (blitzkrieg) is totally dependent on the ability of independent, well trained and adaptive war fighters to overcome the enemy, no matter the quality of their weapons or the “élan” of their troops. This is called “an organizational climate for operational success” (Richards, p. 51). What are the attributes of this cultural climate? They are [in my words]:

1. A climate of shared experience that builds mutual trust and fosters group cohesion.
2. The development of an intuitive feel for deciphering complex and potentially chaotic situations. This is created through rigorous training and interminable practice.
3. A sense of Mission that permeates all organizational levels. Know your mission and “empower” your subordinates to achieve it. Finally, leadership has full trust that his/her empowered subordinates will achieve it, thus freeing the leader to think beyond immediate needs.
4. A consensus bound culture that provides focus and direction. Cultural driven values focus war fighters on defeating an enemies’ will to fight, cultural derived direction institute crippling blows before they can react. (“asymmetric fast transients” ...see Richards, p. 60).

All these observations lead to the introduction of the OODA Loop concept.

OODA Loop

This term means to Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act. Generally, the OODA Loop can be depicted as:



The essence of the OODA Loop concept is to ascertain and exploit strategic advantage over an enemy before the enemy has time to react. Getting inside the enemies' strategic "loop" requires the ability to quickly mount "abrupt, unexpected, and disorienting maneuver, much like creating and exploiting a market niche, one might say" (p. 72).

Strategy

Strategy, on the other hand, is loosely defined around a process that works to surmount obstacles that impede the successful completion of organizational goals in an evolving "world of unforeseen change and contending interests" (Richards, p. 84). One plans to achieve a discerned goal, one strategizes to create and manage those plans. The author advocates that strategy should:

1. Maintain customer (think local community) focus while reading indicators of competitive and environmental change
2. Provide a continuing stream of options to the team
3. Enable rapid switching between options
4. Encourage initiative and a creative mindset
5. Harmonize organizational efforts to achieve a "future state" envisioned in the Vision/Mission.

The key to this concept is to know what the community needs. In a commercial setting one maintains a competitive advantage by keeping the competition off-balance while working with your customers to find "new ways of conceiving the product or service" (Richards, p. 88). Thus, successful organizations shape their marketplace to their advantage. You can adapt this mindset to policing.

Summary

The OODA concept is an apt device for integrating strategic and tactical thinking into actual police practices. It is supported by the basic research cycle and emphasizes constant evaluation.

Finding Four:

For the **military** problems are manifestations of enemy activity in need of immediate destruction.

Law Enforcement Adaptation

In law enforcement, the Department of Justice through the Community Oriented Policing Office suggests the **SARA Model**. This model defines the process of problem solving around the following:

Scan the Situation: Ask questions that identify a given problem, its importance, and the community stakeholders who are concerned with finding a solution

Analyze the Problem: Gather data on the extent the problem exists by defining the Victims, Offenders, Physical Environment of Recurring Crime, Guardians (helpers...citizen "keepers of the peace"), and appropriate Resources available to solve the Problem

Responses to the Problem: Development of appropriate responses to eliminate/diminish the defined Problem

Assessing the Impact of Problem Response: Evaluation of Problem Response through the measurement Qualitative and/or Quantitative data generated because of agency action

Comparison of the Models presented in this paper is provided in the following graphic:

Problem Solving Model Comparisons

| Generic | | Commercial/Engineering | | OODA Loop | | Policing/SARA | |
|-----------|---------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|--|
| Define | Problem Definition | Problem Recurrence | | Observation | | Scanning | |
| Generate | Situation Appraisal | Ideal Final Result | Orientation | | 1. Problem Identification | | |
| | Problem Priorities | Available Resources | | | 2. Selecting by Importance | | |
| | Problem Analysis | Problem Contradiction Resolution | | | 3. Stakeholder Identification | | |
| Decide | Decision Analysis | | Decision Making | 1. Define Victims | | | |
| | | | | 2. Define Offender | | | |
| | | | | 3. Define Crime Scene | | | |
| Implement | | | Taking Action | 4. Define Guardians | | | |
| | | | | 5. Define Resources | | | |
| | | | | | 1. Design Tailored Response | | |
| Evaluate | Avoidance Analysis | | | 2. Challenge Past Practices | | Response | |
| | | | | | | Assessment | |
| | | | | 1. Define Measures of Assessment | | | |
| | | | | 2. Adjust SOP | | | |

Creating a Cooperative Culture

What the reader should consider is how to create the adaptive culture modern policing needs to support. I believe that communities create cooperative police/civil culture when all stakeholders:

- Take a proactive approach not only to problem solving but understanding each other lives creating trust between police and the communities they serve.
- Have a vision of what we collectively want to accomplish and we make sure all steps taken are in the right direction.
- Are not afraid to fail. Problem solving, in all its varied forms is a template for experimentation. Learn from failure.
- Observe good problem solvers, no matter where they work. Ask them questions and brainstorm with them.
- Don't dismiss ideas of others out of hand, leverage these ideas-they may trigger the correct solution. Community partners will see solutions that police can't see.
- Get in the habit of planning their time and prioritizing tasks all must accomplish with the views of others in mind. I usually double, if not triple the amount of time allocated to estimating working with community stakeholders.
- Don't force-fit a certain technique that you have used before in others. If we agree it's not working, choose another or move on.
- Finish a task we reflect on it. Evaluate it. Is it the best the group (and you) could have done? If not, can we improve upon it?
- Who did we directly/indirectly effect and why?

In summary, it is my belief that cultural change is best done from the bottom up. Changing a police agency to meet evolving community expectations is tough and fraught with uncertainty. Where to begin?

Finding Five

Coordinating and cooperating with diverse stakeholder groups is hard. Expect resistance as well as joyful discovery of common views throughout the problem-solving process.

Locating the Change Agent

For law enforcement that bottom is the Police Academy. It is here that law enforcement agency cultural and social norms are inculcated. It is here that those norms are also reinforced in continuing professional education. It is also here that re-orienting policing around mutually defining problems must be the optimal way of interacting with the community. Remember, every time you practice problem-solving techniques, you become a better problem solver. Every time you involve your whole community in the process, you overcome the pre-existing mindsets that inhibit thinking.

In the end, all community members should remember that law enforcement is a profession undergoing radical change. The skill sets, educational needs and social demands placed on the modern police agency are in evolutionary expansion and dependent on acquiring services tailored for fulfilling unmet community needs. Meeting those needs requires sophisticated approaches to problem solving. And solving problems is a cooperative endeavor. We all must work to more fully understand each other as we seek a safe and productive community to live in.

Finding Six

Problem oriented policing is **best taught** in ways that permeate the concept(s) throughout the police organization...from its Training Academy to the highest levels of command.

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