



Perspectives on Policing



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Values in Policing

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This paper explores the role that the explicit statement of police values can have on the pursuit of excellence within police departments. Values are the beliefs that guide an organization and the behavior of its employees. The most important beliefs are those that set forth the ultimate purposes of the organization. They provide the organization with its *raison d'être* for outsiders and insiders alike and justify the continuing investment in the organization's enterprise.¹

Often, however, the beliefs about purposes are hopelessly entangled with assumptions about the nature of the organization's environment, the principal means for achieving its purposes, and the sorts of relationships and expectations that exist within the organization. For example, in policing, the strong belief among many police officers that they stand as the front line of defense against community lawlessness—reflecting what is often a rather narrow definition of order—conditions the organizational environment within which the police operate. These beliefs can easily become the prevalent values of the force.

All organizations have values. One can see these values expressed through the actions of the organization—the things that are taken seriously and the things that are rejected as irrelevant, inappropriate, or dangerous. Jokes, solemn understandings, and internal explanations for actions also express values.

Police departments are powerfully influenced by their values. The problem is that police departments, like many organizations, are guided by implicit values that are often at odds with explicit values. This breeds confusion, distrust, and cynicism rather than clarity, commitment, and high morale.

This is one in a series of reports originally developed with some of the leading figures in American policing during their periodic meetings at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The reports are published so that Americans interested in the improvement and the future of policing can share in the information and perspectives that were part of extensive debates at the School's Executive Session on Policing.

The police chiefs, mayors, scholars, and others invited to the meetings have focused on the use and promise of such strategies as community-based and problem-oriented policing. The testing and adoption of these strategies by some police agencies signal important changes in the way American policing now does business. What these changes mean for the welfare of citizens and the fulfillment of the police mission in the next decades has been at the heart of the Kennedy School meetings and this series of papers.

We hope that through these publications police officials and other policymakers who affect the course of policing will debate and challenge their beliefs just as those of us in the Executive Session have done.

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Values in the private sector

High-performing corporations, the elite of American industry, have one thing in common. They operate with a core set of values that guides conduct throughout the organization. Companies such as Federal Express, Gore-Tex Fabrics, and Digital Equipment Corporation have all developed explicit corporate values that not only define excellence for the enterprise, but also help to achieve it.

Take Federal Express. At the broadest level, the goal is to earn returns for shareholders. More concretely, the objective is to get packages where they are going on time. In addition to these substantive goals, Federal Express has values that define

relationships within the company and its markets. These values are: (1) to treat each customer and each transaction as though the entire success of the corporation rested on that transaction; (2) to make the workplace a satisfying environment for employees; and (3) to keep employees informed about company policy. Every Federal Express employee knows these values. Federal Express succeeds because all employees acknowledge them and understand that their survival in the corporation rests on embodying the values in their actions.

At Gore-Tex, the values are somewhat different. They emphasize the production of high-quality material, creativity

in the design of new products and production technologies, and the cultivation of a “worker-positive” workplace. The differences in values reflect the differences in their products. However, both companies share the explicit statement and emphasis on values as an important management tool. Management of the corporations believes that workers are pressed toward excellence not by autocratic direction but rather by management through values, creating a sense of purpose, direction, and performance that is uniform throughout the organization.

Almost as bad, the explicit values articulated by some police organizations are unsuited to the challenges confronting today's police departments. Finally, there is a reluctance on the part of some police executives to rely on explicit statements of values as an important management tool for enhancing the performance of their organizations. Still, some police executives are working towards superior police performance by articulating a new set of values, and by using these as a primary management tool.

“... police departments, like many organizations, are guided by implicit values that are often at odds with explicit values. ”

“Value orientation” has been neither the driving force nor the basis of organizational life in American policing. Should the American police organization have a set of organizational values that are explicitly acknowledged and well known throughout the organization? Should police officers recog-

nize that their survival in the police department rests on whether they embody these organizational values in their actions? This paper examines these questions.

How are values articulated or expressed? Some organizations state their values directly to clientele or employees. Even so, customers, clients, and organizational authorizers (community residents, mayors, and city council members in the municipal setting, and bankers and institutional investors in the corporate sphere) become aware of an organization's values only through the actions of members of the organization or the work of public relations officials.

American corporations are far more sophisticated in communicating values than are government organizations. In industry, values often are expressed through corporate value statements, public advertising, and management pronouncements.² Yet, while public relations may create an illusion that a particular set of values is important to the corporation, actual consumer experience often determines eventually the true nature of the corporation's values.

There is often a disparity between the values explicitly established by an organization and those that are actually embraced and pursued. In such cases, corporate management focuses on one set of values while employees adopt an entirely different set. This occurs either because of the failure of management to communicate organizational values or

because stated organizational values fail to take into account the reality of the workplace.

The disparity is particularly common in American policing. Mayors and city managers often give their police executives a dual set of objectives, such as “clean up the gangs in the park” and “don’t break the law in doing it.” Since cleaning up the park has primary importance, and the police are unsupported in developing tools and tactics necessary to solve the underlying problems creating the situation, the mayoral concern with “don’t break the law” implicitly becomes “don’t tell me about it if you must break the law.”

Major corporations have had to deal with the same pressures and ambiguities. In the case of a large producer of orange juice, maintaining profitability was translated by midlevel managerial employees as being more important than product quality, thus making it acceptable to water down the juice as long as it went undiscovered.

“ . . . the mayoral concern with ‘don’t break the law’ implicitly becomes ‘don’t tell me about it if you must break the law.’ ”

In many organizations, values are taken for granted until a crisis centers public attention on the disparity between the organization’s stated values and those actually pursued. High-performing commercial organizations consciously strive to ensure that values expressed by employee actions and comments match the values of the organization. Many other organizations, however, function with a dual standard of public relations pronouncements and actual workplace values.

Values as a management tool. The explicit statement and frequent pronouncement of organizational values becomes an important management tool in three circumstances: first, when management’s explicit values are so well incorporated in the administrative systems and culture of an organization that they become workplace values; second, when management’s values seem well suited to the challenges and tasks facing the organization, and their pursuit will lead to organizational success; and third, when the organization’s operations are such that management through values is superior to any other kind of management control.

Values play this important role for several reasons. To the extent that the values actually influence substantive and administrative decisions facing the organization, they lend a coherence and predictability to top management’s actions and the responses to the actions of employees. This helps

employees make proper decisions and use their discretion with confidence that they are contributing to rather than detracting from organizational performance. That means that the necessity for strong control is lessened. Explicit values also lend significance and meaning to the activity of employees. They transform small transactions and events into expressions of personal commitment to particular values. Finally, explicit statements of values invite broad public support and facilitate accountability. To the extent that the values are attractive to shareholders, customers, and employees in the private sector, and to constituents, clients, and employees in the public sector, a flow of resources to the organization is initiated. To the extent that the values are actually expressed in organizational actions, accountability is preserved, and the flow of resources sustained.³

Note that management through values is a particularly important tool for organizations that find it difficult to codify procedures or measure their performance. This occurs in organizations where outputs are hard to define, adaptations of operations to individual cases are often necessary, and technical innovations are occurring. It also occurs in organizations where operations make close supervision impossible. The reason is that in such organizations, the principal alternative methods of control are obviously infeasible.

Values in policing. Policing styles reflect a department’s values. A police agency that independently adopts an aggressive tactical orientation has a far different set of values than a police agency that carefully engages neighborhood residents in planning for crime control activities. The values inherent in policing before the reform efforts of the 1930’s often reflected political and personal priorities of employees or special interest groups rather than a commitment to broad principles of professionalism.

Sometimes the values of police organizations have been publicly stated. O.W. Wilson, for example, published a set of values for the Wichita Police Department when he was that city’s chief of police; he did the same for Chicago when he served as that city’s police superintendent.⁴ It is more usual, however, for the values that drive policing to be unstated. A number of police agencies, such as Los Angeles, have carefully incorporated values into their rules and procedural directives. Other police agencies, such as Madison (Wisconsin) and Houston, have articulated individual value statements reflecting organizational commitments.

Much of the current discussion about improving police performance is concerned about the values that should guide policing. To understand that discussion, it is useful to contrast the values of professional crime-fighting policing with the values of community problem-solving policing.

The values of professional crime-fighting policing. Over the last four decades, as police departments have become increasingly professional, several key values have emerged to justify and guide the performance of police agencies. While often unstated, these values include the following:

- Police authority is based solely in the law. Professional police organizations are committed to enforcement of that law as their primary objective.
- Communities can provide police with assistance in enforcing the law. Helpful communities will provide police with information to assist them (the police) in carrying out their mission.
- Responding to citizen calls for service is the highest police priority. All calls must receive the fastest response possible.
- Social problems and other neighborhood issues are not the concern of the police unless they threaten the breakdown of public order.
- Police, being experts in crime control, are best suited to develop police priorities and strategies.

“ [In professional crime-fighting policing] police authority is based solely in the law. ”

Other values reflect the common belief among police officers (and some chief police executives) that police departments exist to advance the profession of policing, not to serve as an important part of maintaining democratic values and improving the quality of life in urban communities. From these perspectives, there is little interest in, or respect for, the community basis for police authority.

The values of community policing. In the ongoing dialog about community policing, there are two important new developments. A number of chiefs of police have defined a set of values reflecting internal (employee and administration) and external (community and government) consensus about the nature of the police function and operation of the police agency.

Second, from the discussion of values, these chiefs have discovered that communities are more thoughtful and receptive to discussion of police priorities and strategies if

that discussion occurs within the context of mission and value considerations. No longer is the chief of police considered out of place when he suggests to his community that public consideration of policing values and standards is in order. The experience of these chiefs has shown that the development of value statements can be illuminating to both the community and members of the police department.

“ . . . communities are . . . receptive to discussion of police priorities . . . within the context of mission and value considerations. ”

In 1982, for example, Lee P. Brown, Houston’s chief of police, made public a statement of the values of the Houston Police Department. This statement set forth the commitments of the police department in several critical areas such as policymaking, community access to decisionmaking, standards of integrity, and field strategy development. As Chief Brown noted, the statement established the criteria for evaluating the performance of the department.

The value statement for the Houston Police Department includes the following:

- The Houston Police Department will involve the community in all policing activities which directly impact the quality of community life.
- The Houston Police Department believes that policing strategies must preserve and advance democratic values.
- The Houston Police Department believes that it must structure service delivery in a way that will reinforce the strengths of the city’s neighborhoods.
- The Houston Police Department believes that the public should have input into the development of policies which directly impact the quality of neighborhood life.
- The Houston Police Department will seek the input of employees into matters which impact employee job satisfaction and effectiveness.

By publicly stating values, the beliefs underpinning organizational actions, Chief Brown wished to have both the community and the police department focus on important issues of police authority, standards, and operational limits. Indeed, he believed public acknowledgment of community-oriented values was an important step in his move to change

the culture of the Houston Police Department from a defensive orientation designed to protect internal organizational patterns to an externally directed community-positive orientation.

The developing emphasis on community policing has generated a substantial amount of discussion about values because, by definition, community policing reflects a set of values, rather than a technical orientation toward the police function. It reflects a concern with the quality of police service delivery, the relationship between the police and the community, and the relationship within the police agency between management and employees. As opposed to the more traditional perspective of professional crime-fighting policing which emphasizes the maintenance of internal organizational controls, community policing emphasizes service output, the quality of results, and the impact of police service on the state of urban living.

“... by definition, community policing reflects a set of values, rather than a technical orientation . . . ”

There have been several examples of values that reflect this orientation. In Boston, Commissioner Francis M. Roache has set forth the following commitment for the police department:

- The department is committed to the positive evolution, growth, and livability of our city.

Sir Kenneth Newman, former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in London, England, set forth the following values for that department:

- In pursuing the aim and duty of maintaining a peaceful community, members of the Metropolitan Police view their role as one involving cooperation with others in the creation and maintenance of a way of life in communities which strikes the optimum balance between the collective interests of all citizens and the personal rights of all individuals.
- The aim of the Metropolitan Police will, therefore, be to work with other agencies to develop what is known as a “situational” or “problem-solving” approach to crime prevention.

Discussions of the Executive Session on Community Policing at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government have produced a set of values that represent the

key characteristics of community policing. These characteristics are embodied in the following principles:

- Community policing is committed to a problem-solving partnership: dealing with crime, disorder, and the quality of life.

The value here is the orientation toward problem solving. In community policing, incidents (such as crime or 911 responses) are viewed from the perspective of community action which will seek to resolve the problem, not simply handle the incident.

- Under community policing, police service delivery is decentralized to the neighborhood level.

Community policing holds that policing a city’s neighborhoods is best done at the individual neighborhood level, not by centralized command and control. Since the solutions to most neighborhood problems are through neighborhood action, the community policing effort concentrates on developing a cohesive neighborhood capability reflecting responsibility, self-help, and co-production of service with the police. The value of decentralization suggests that every police effort is pushed down toward the neighborhood level unless there is a specific reason for the effort to be centralized, such as a concern with a citywide problem or issue.

- The highest commitment of the community policing organization is respect for and sensitivity to all citizens and their problems. Community policing values the skills of positive social interaction, rather than simply technical application of procedures to situations, whether dealing with crime, disorder, or other problem solving.

“Community policing holds that policing a city’s neighborhoods is best done at the individual neighborhood level, not by centralized command . . . ”

As is the case with several notable private sector companies, community policing’s officers have a service orientation. Citizens are supposed to be treated with respect, regardless of the involvement of the citizens in the incident to which the police are responding.

Police officers often find this value difficult to accept. There is a widespread tendency to think of, and describe, street

criminals as maggots and other, even less endearing terms. With a service orientation, such characterizations are avoided, if for no other reason than recognition that the initial police contact may erroneously describe the true nature of the individual.

- The community-oriented police department makes the highest commitment to collaborative problem solving, bringing the neighborhoods into substantive discussions with police personnel to identify ways of dealing with neighborhood problems.

“ . . . constructive action by police and community is always better than action by the police alone. ”

The community-oriented police department recognizes that constructive action by police *and* community is always better than action by the police alone. Before any major action is undertaken, whether a shift in resources or implementation of a new problem-solving approach, the community-oriented police department discusses that change with the appropriate neighborhood. The willingness to discuss publicly priority setting or selection of problem-solving tactics reflects the high value the organization places on bringing the community into the business of policing. It is also recognition that the community is an important source of police authority.

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Points of view or opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice or of Harvard University.

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- The community-oriented police department views both the community and the law as the source of the department's authority.

Since police action is not prescribed by the law, the community empowers the police agency to deal with difficult problems of importance to neighborhood residents and accepts the actions taken as long as the police are continually careful to engage the neighborhood in selecting tactics and priorities beyond those set forth under the law. When a police agency has lost its community authority, a range of responses always occurs, from widespread dissatisfaction with the department to substantial disorder when the police apply the law in the neighborhood.

- The community-oriented police agency is committed to furthering democratic values. Every action of the agency reflects the importance of protecting constitutional rights and ensuring basic personal freedoms of all citizens.

The commitment to democratic values is a cornerstone of community policing. Placement of a high value on the democratic process provides police agencies with the shield they need to ensure that actions proposed by communities do not infringe on others' rights. Embodiment of this value by the organization, and its use as a defense against inappropriate neighborhood initiatives, will succeed only if the police themselves strictly adhere to the law in all aspects of their work.

Implementing values. While a number of police agencies have set forth written statements of their values, few have carefully considered ways of implementing their values so that the actions of agency employees will match the value orientation of the organization.

Police departments that have adopted the community policing philosophy have found it helpful to develop concise value statements that reflect these principles and commitments. The philosophy then can be understood throughout both the department and the community, and serve as the basis for the application of discretion within the department.

Written value statements are useful if for no other reason than to force management to reach agreement on the organization's values. Experience in most police agencies indicates that this debate is not an easy task. But written value statements are not sufficient, since the values eventually must be reflected in all aspects of the organization, from training to field operations.

“Written value statements are useful if for no other reason than to force management to reach agreement on the organization’s values.”

Presenting values through training must involve more than simply handing out value statements, as has occurred in some agencies. Carefully developed case materials, class discussion, tests, and field officer programs must all reflect the official values of the agency. Policy statements not only state the values explicitly but also provide explanations of the reasoning behind the derived policies.

When auditing field operations or investigative performance, the review must include careful consideration of the degree to which the actions follow stated department values. When riding in police cruisers, supervisors and managers must listen for the “talk of the department” to see if values expressed by police officers reflect those of the department.

“... only when the formal values ... match those ... [of] the rank and file can the organization be ... ‘high performing.’”

Some police administrators will claim that officers will never match the values articulated in their street talk with those of the organization as it pursues excellence. That, of course, is the greatest challenge the police administrator faces; for only when the formal values of the organization match those acted out by the rank and file can the organization be considered “high performing.” Community policing requires that match of values; it provides a structure and orientation that make such a match easier.

Summary. The values of community policing are different from those of previous eras in police history. Equally important, values are no longer hidden, but serve as the basis for citizen understanding of the police function, judgments of police success, and employee understanding of what the police agency seeks to achieve.

Notes

1. In describing the characteristics of organizations, Peters and Waterman note that excellent companies “are fantastic centralists around the few core values they hold dear.” Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence*, New York, Harper & Row, 1983: 15.
2. Thomas J. Watson, Jr., the founding father of IBM, authored an early work about how values must be articulated by the successful corporation. See Thomas J. Watson, Jr., *A Business and its Beliefs: The Ideas that Helped Build IBM*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1963.
3. See George L. Kelling, “Police and Communities: the Quiet Revolution,” *Perspectives on Policing*, No. 1, Washington, D.C., National Institute of Justice and Harvard University, June 1988; and George L. Kelling, Robert Wasserman, and Hubert Williams, “Police Accountability and Community Policing,” *Perspectives on Policing* No. 7, Washington, D.C., National Institute of Justice and Harvard University, November 1988, for a discussion of how management through values lessens the need for reliance on strong command and control systems.
4. Wilson published the values to provide both the police and the community with an understanding of why the police department undertook many of its actions. See Orlando W. Wilson, *On This We Stand*, Chicago Police Department, 1983.

The Executive Session on Policing, like other Executive Sessions at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, is designed to encourage a new form of dialog between high-level practitioners and scholars, with a view to redefining and proposing solutions for substantive policy issues. Practitioners rather than academicians are given majority representation in the group. The meetings of the Session are conducted as loosely structured seminars or policy debates.

Since it began in 1985, the Executive Session on Policing has met seven times. During the 3-day meetings, the 31 members have energetically discussed the facts and values that have guided, and those that should guide, policing.

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The Executive Session on Policing

convenes the following distinguished panel of leaders in the field of policing:

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