POLICE RESEARCH — AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR POLICE, OFTEN UNDERUTILIZED

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Police managers and executives routinely use various tools to effectively manage and guide their agencies. They also follow both the successes and the unsuccessful efforts of their peers in these endeavors. Evaluations of police receptiveness to research suggest that executives are receptive to research results.[1] Generally, rank and file officers appear to be similarly receptive and are willing to work with researchers.[2] However, there is a widely held perception that policing research is often underutilized and that police managers and executives miss opportunities to consider this tool when evaluating and directing their agencies' efforts.

Policing research has been around for decades. The body of knowledge was limited at first, but today it covers many of the issues that police managers and executives are currently facing. Examples of this can be found in the research on body-worn cameras, license plate readers, officer motivation, and patrol officer deployment (hot spots policing), to name a few. There is also emerging research on police legitimacy, officer safety, mental health issues, officer training, and officer wellness. There are many examples of police agencies collaborating with researchers to help create this body of knowledge. Many policing agencies have used this collaborative effort with researchers to implement, adjust, and sometimes abandon a particular policing program. The experience of collaborating with researchers has, in many cases, led to the development of a close relationship between the agency and the researcher, which can last for years.

Policing research often reveals what works and what doesn't work in the policing field. The term evidence-based policing is frequently used to describe research that targets, tests, and tracks strategies to help decision-makers deal with policing issues.[3] It also exposes issues that executives and managers need to consider in their policing endeavors. Many managers and executives who are interested in this material rely on organizations such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Police Executive Research Forum, National Police Foundation, and others to provide them access to research. There are governmental entities, such as the National Institute of Justice, that often showcase policing research. However, this is only the tip of the iceberg of policing research. There is a myriad of useful information in the research that is not highlighted by these groups. This can lead to missed opportunities to apply the research, avoid programmatic issues, and increase the potential success of a policing program.

Police executives and managers may believe that it is difficult to access policing research, but it can actually be accomplished rather simply. An email or a phone call may be the only action necessary to obtain this important information. The professional organizations noted earlier can help connect an executive or manager with a police researcher who is knowledgeable in the subject of interest. Police agencies often have such a person nearby or even within their jurisdiction. There are also policing researchers at many colleges and universities across the country. A local college or university might be able to locate policing researchers who can help the agency, or perhaps find a researcher nearby. A policing researcher may be able to unlock the often hidden treasure trove of policing research for the executive or manager, or may be able to find an individual with the knowledge that will help to address the specific issues the police agency is facing. Policing researchers can also help translate complicated findings so they are understandable. Finally, policing researchers might be willing to assist you in developing, implementing, or evaluating your own policing programs.

My message to my fellow police practitioners is to reach out to the policing research community. You will find that many of the researchers are more than willing to assist you in making your policing programs and practices work for you and your agency.

Notes

1. Cody W. Telep and Steve Winegar, "Police Executive Receptivity to Research: A Survey of Chiefs and Sheriffs in Oregon," *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 10 no. 3 (2016): 241-249.

2. Cody W. Telep and Cynthia Lum, "The Receptivity of Officers to Empirical Research and Evidence Based Policing: An Examination of Survey Data from Three Agencies," *Policing Quarterly* 17 no. 4 (2014): 359-385.

3. Lawrence W. Sherman, "The Rise of Evidence Based Policing: Targeting, Testing, and Tracking," *Crime and Justice* 42 no. 1 (2013): 377-451.

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