Challenging the Limits of Professionalism

Lessons from Neil Behan's Management of the Baltimore County
Police Department

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## I. Introduction

Neil Behan has been an innovator at least since the mid-60's. Then, he worked with New York Police Commissioner Patrick Murphy to field a "fourth platoon" to overcome the rigidities of a complex manpower schedulling system and ensure adequate police were on the streets to deal with the peak crime hours. By the mid-1980's, he was running the Baltimore County Police Department, and committed to far more ambitious and adventurous innovations in policing. In ____, his COPE unit, with its focus on "fear reduction" as an important "end" and its reliance on "problem solving" as an important "means" of policing, won a Ford Foundation Innovations Award.

There is much to be learned from Behan's innovative leadership at Baltimore County. From a substantive perspective, police throughout the country have looked to the COPE unit to be inspired by new ways to police cities. Here, our purpose is different: to discern important lessons about managing innovation in the public sector. Specifically, we will consider what this case has to tell us about: 1) what occasions innovation in the public sector; 2) what managers can do to stimulate innovation in their organizations; and 3) how they can widen the impact of a particular innovation and sustain innovativeness throughout their organizations.

## II. Occasioning Innovation: Crises and Professional Doubts

It has long been a cliche that important innovations start with crises or widely noted operational failures: "necessity is the mother of invention." It is tempting then, to interpret the Baltimore County case as yet another example of the "crisis-response" mechanism for stimulating innovation. After all, the COPE unit was established in the wake of two shocking murders -- one involving a man who was robbed and killed while bicycling near his home, the other a clerk killed during the robbery of his family's store. The relatives of these victims had helped to organize a victim's rights movement. Alarmed and afraid, the citizens of Baltimore County, acting through their elected representatives, called upon their chief of police to provide greater protection and security. The County Commissioners

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appropriated sufficient funds for Behan to hire 45 additional officers -- a __% increase in the size of the force. From this largesse, the COPE unit was formed. Thus, once again, crisis led to innovation.

But that story is a little too simple. It is true, of course, that the crisis played an important role in establishing the COPE unit. But while the crisis permitted Behan to innovate, it did not require him to do so. Indeed, it is significant that the citizens of Baltimore County and their elected representatives would have been content if Behan had simply increased the overall level of patrolling, or beefed up the homicide detective unit. And that would have been the usual response of police departments across the country.

What made the Behan case different -- what caused Behan to exploit the opportunity to innovate rather than simply increase the scale of current, standard operations -- was Behan's own conviction that he could not deliver a satisfactory substantive result to the community if he made the conventional police response. Indeed, he observed that his Department had not failed in its response to the murders; it had successfully done what police departments were then designed and expected to do. It had caught the offenders relatively quickly, and had prepared evidence against them that would, in all likelihood, send them to prison for the foreseeable future.

Where Behan differed from many of his colleagues was that he noticed that even though the police had done their job, they had nontheless failed to produce the result that the citizens seemed to want: the police response, successful though it had been in terms of professional practices and standards, had failed to restore the community's sense of security. The wave of fear the crimes precipitated persisted even after the offenders had been caught.

This result connected, in Behan's mind, to some startling facts he had learned at an academic conference on crime: namely that fears of crime existed in the minds of citizens somewhat independently of the objective risks of victimization. What frightened people, it seemed, was instances of disorder -- not objectively high rates of criminal victimization. This reminded Behan that fear was a subjective state of mind. That, in turn, raised the possibility that police efforts focused on reducing the objective risks of crime by apprehending crimnal offenders would not necessarily reduce levels of fear -- a possibility that would help to explain Baltimore County's continued unrest. Further, it seemed possible that there might be other methods available to the police that could reduce levels of fear. Taken together, these thoughts raised the question of whether it was part of Behan's responsibility as the Police Chief of Baltimore County to go beyond the apprehension of offenders, and to search for other means to restore community security.

Behan was also well aware that the primary tactics American police relied upon to control crime -- patrol, rapid response to calls for service, and retrospective investigation of criminal offenses -- were essentially reactive. They kept the police at the surface of social life waiting for a crime to occur. They intervened intensively and actively only after a crime had been committed. They did not help the police identify situations that could escalate into crimes, nor direct their efforts at preventing them. Moreover, he was aware of research findings that cast doubt on the efficacy of the reactive tactics in controlling crime and reducing fear. To the extent that the fears of Baltimore County citizens were

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linked to vulnerabilities to crime that persisted even after the offender was caught, Behan knew his current operational tactics offered little hope for increased protection.

Taken together, these two observations powerfully indicted the conventional police practices that Behan had relied on throughout his career. There was both too little reassurance, and too little prevention in the police department's conventional, professionally certified tactics. Thus, while Behan could understand and accept the County's desire to have him reduce their fears, and their expressive grant of additional resources, he no longer believed that he could offer a good faith assurance that the funds could be spent well to deal with the problem he was supposed to ameliorate. He had become agnostic about the police capacity to reduce fears, prevent crimes, and restore a sense of community security.

This agnosticism about the adequacy of the core technologies of his organization caused Behan to do something quite different from what many police executives would have done in the same circumstances. He agreed to take the money from the County Executives only on the understanding that he would spend it on something new -- a deliberate departure from the practices of the past. Instead of simply increasing the scale of current operations, he would try to find some means for using police resources to allay citizens' fears through means other than reacting quickly to crimes once they had occurred. In effect, he would try to create a new and risky "product line" in the portfolio of the Police Department's operations. Thus, the COPE innovation was launched.

No doubt, much of what occasioned the COPE intervention is unique and difficult to reproduce. Nonetheless, several features of these events might have wider significance for understanding the circumstances that could occasion important innovations in the public sector.

First, crises alone will not necessarily generate an innovative response. This may be particularly true in the public sector where it generally seems wrong and imprudent to gamble with public money, or to experiment in areas where important public values are at stake. To the extent that a profession has a prescribed response to an operational problem, and to the extent that that response is broadly accepted by the public and expected of the organization's leaders, crises in the public sector will commonly do little more than entrench an existing commitment to the traditional practices. For some different response to emerge, there must be some subversive elements present -- someone who notices the failure of the prescribed methods and is prepared to act on his or her recognition of the failures. Moreover, they must be prepared to pursue an alternative even when they cannot be sure that they have an obviously superior alternative.

Second, it helps a great deal if the subversive element in the situation -- the major skeptic -- happens to be leading the organization that is responsible for making the response! What is remarkable in the Baltimore County case is that it is Behan, the leader of the Baltimore County Police Department, who has come to be skeptical of his own organization's response to the problems that occasioned the crisis. He is no longer content with the organization's traditional responses. That is a quite unusual state of affairs. The far more common situation is one where organizational leaders are among the most ardent defenders of their current methods and operations. After all, learning those methods, coming to believe in them, being able to defend them is how they advanced to positions of leadership. Moreover,

they continue to survive as leaders of the organization by continuing to defend the organization's methods. So, as a rule, one would not expect leaders of organizations to be radical reformers of them.

Still, the Behan case suggests how useful it is to the cause of innovation if it should unexpectedly occur that the leaders of an organization have become skeptical of their operations. Using their authority and position, they can direct people in their organization to begin searching for new methods. They can lend the weight of their authority and expertise to the cause of innovation in general, and to particular innovations that occur. They may even reduce the burden on the overseers with whom they try to share the responsibility for innovating, simply because even though the overseers agree to share some of the responsibility, they know that the major part of the responsibility for failure can be laid at the feet of the manager. As the leader of the organization, the professional expert, he is an excellent scapegoat. Thus, when the leader of an organization becomes a radical, then, a great deal more becomes possible than when the radicals are in staff positions outside the organization, or in subordinate positions within the organization.

Third, it seemed important in this case that academic social science had undermined professional confidence in the professional methods then being used by the police. It mattered to Behan that social scientists, acting in a classic basic research mode, had exposed the surprising gap between fear on one hand and objective risks of victimization on the other. That undermined comfortable operational assumptions that he had made throughout his career: namely, that the goal of reducing fear was identical with the goal of reducing risks of victimization. These findings also helped him to understand what would otherwise have seemed anomalous in his immediate circumstance: namely, that the citizens of Baltimore County remained afraid despite the fact that the police had caught the murderer. This raised an important question about his responsibilities as a police executive: namely, whether there were ways to reduce fear other than by arresting offenders, and if so whether he was authorized or obligated to pursue them as a fundamental part of his mission?

It also mattered that other social scientists working in more applied program evaluation efforts had discovered some important limitations in the conventional methods of policing; namely, that none of the important tactics of policing could be relied upon either to reduce fear or prevent crime. These findings made it seem less irresponsible and reckless for Behan to consider an unconventional response to the crisis in Baltimore County. Since the traditional methods were not obviously successful, perhaps there was room to create an alternative.

Of course, these findings alone could not lead directly to a conclusion about the new methods of police work. That would require some creative engineering, and some hard work by practitioners to realize the newly engineered solution in concrete operations. And this, in turn, would require Behan to take risks with the public's money, and with its desire for certainty and competence in the pursuit of important public purposes. These risks could be (and in fact were) shared to some degree by negotiating an explicit grant of authority to experiment from his elected overseers. But this could not entirely eliminate Behan's own sense of personal responsibility and liability. The fact remains that it is always a hard decision for a public executive to reject the tried and true for the untested when important values such as personal security, victims' lives, and justice are at stake. Still, this decision gets easier if doubts have grown up about how well current operations are performing. And it is precisely

these doubts that social science research had sown. Given the research findings, it became more plausible for Behan and his overseers to imagine that the path of prudence lay not in the apparently safe continued reliance on the tried and true, but instead, in the apparently far riskier course of rolling the dice in search of a better method of policing.

Fourth, it may also help that, at least at the outset, Behan's innovation can be seen as a limited one: one that uses relatively little of the department's resources, leaves most of its operations undisturbed, and that is well within the conventional understanding of the mission of a police department. Early on in COPE's history, Behan can claim that his innovation is nothing very new in policing. From this perspective, it has always been an important part of the police mission to enhance feelings of security and prevent crime. The methods being developed and investigated by COPE are simply new ways of achieving those old goals. Arguably, it should be a routine part of policing to be continually searching for better ways to achieve traditional goals.

There are some strains in this claim, of course. If the conventional methods of policing are patrol, rapid response, and retrospective investigation are efficient and effective in achieving police objectives, it is difficult to justify using even a small part of the organization's resources on something different, since even that small diversion may degrade the organization's performance in these other tasks. Moreover, the idea that the police might devote resources that would otherwise be devoted to the hard work of responding to crimes and catching offenders to "feel-good" efforts to reassure citizens seems a bit flakey. It smacks of public relations efforts, and fraudulent efforts to claim an unearned result rather than a valuable substantive achievement. And, the idea that the police might wander around looking for circumstances that could lead to crime but haven't done so yet seems like a dangerous expansion of the police mission -- something that might at least cost a great deal of money if not threaten privacy and freedom.

So, even from the beginning, Behan's innovations strain at the boundaries of the police mission as traditionally understood. But it probably helps that these disturbing features of the innovation are obscure at the beginning. The innovation starts as a programmatic innovation -- as a search for an improved way of achieving old objectives -- rather than as a strategic innovation -- a search for new ends as well as new means.

Fifth, it is important that Behan has confessed his doubts about his organization's effectiveness to his overseers, and negotiated with them an explicit right to experiment. Through such efforts, he has implicitly "capitalized" his risky search for a more effective response to citizens' fears of crime. Such efforts to negotiate an explicit authorization to experiment is perhaps rarer than it should be in the public sector. Once undertaken, however, it overcomes one of the important obstacles to innovating in the public sector: namely, the expectation that public officials are supposed to know the answers, and to have available to them well tested and proven methods for dealing with the problems in their domain.

In any case, Behan was given a mandate to experiment. The next important issue is to examine what Behan did to capitalize on that opportunity.

III. Stimulating Innovation: Exposing the Organization to Pressure

Behan's efforts to force an innovation in his organization also began in a conventional way: he created a special unit charged with the responsibility for developing and fielding the organization's innovative new program. Special units have almost irresistable appeal as a device for managing innovation in the public sector. Creating a special unit has the enormous political advantage of allowing the manager to get credit for having taken a dramatic action long before any real results have been achieved. It also begins the hard work of building the innovation by focusing the attention and efforts of a specific group of individuals on the task. At the same time, it limits the threat the innovation creates politically and organizationally by limiting it to a particular piece of the organization, and setting it apart from ordinary operations, thereby reassuring both citizens and other employees that the organization will, for the most part, continue to operate in the future as it has in the past. Creating a special unit and charging it with the responsibility for an innovation also helps to maintain accountability by making it easy for overseers to determine how many resources have been committed to the effort, and by creating the conditions under which a reasonably serious program evaluation could be completed.

For all these reasons, the natural way for an innovation to be incubated in the public sector is through the creation of a special unit. Behan unsurprisingly follows this path. COPE -- the Citizen Oriented Police Enforcement Unit was a special unit comprised of 45 patrol officers, divided into three teams, one for each of the Department's patrol areas, each headed by a Lieutenant who reported to the patrol commander for the three areas. To set them apart from the department's regular patrol force and make them more easily accessible to the public, they were given motorcycles to ride, and distinctive uniforms and emblems. They were insulated from the ordinary obligations that patrol officers faced to respond to calls for service, and could, within limits, set their own schedules. Their mission was not to fight crime, but to fight fear.

Once having created this special unit, however, Behan manages it in ways that seem far less conventional. First, Behan gives the members of the newly established COPE unit a substantive problem to work on rather than a solution. As Behan explains, he wanted to "give them a focus; try to see if we could have them attack fear". In effect, he makes them accountable for a result not an effort. Because no one knows how to produce the desired result, however, making the new unit responsible for the problem pushes a significant amount of risk onto them. He "empowers" them (i.e. gives them the responsibility) to solve a problem that no one had yet solved.

Second, Behan himself disclaims any particular knowledge about how best to reduce fear. Indeed, he claims he had only one idea about how to proceed based on one patrol commander's experience a year or two previously. After his officers had caught a man responsible for several local murders, this commander had taken officers off patrol and sent them door-to-door to talk to citizens rather than returning to business as usual. That turned out to calm the community. "We learned from those killings that you could go in and give good information to the public, and quell their fear, and have their lives quickly back to normal," Behan reported. "That was kind of an amateurish example of what we had in mind, but it was very effective. We learned that, yes, there are things you can do. So I

thought the way to proceed was, if we had a point in a neighborhood that had a disturbance of some magnitude, we would start right at the incident and then keep branching out. Knock on doors, talk to the people in the houses about their concers and their knowledge of the incident, and keep going until you reached the point where you didn't find any more fear. Very simple."

Third, even though he had this rudimentary idea, he was unwilling to impose it on the department. "My management style is to direct people toward an idea and let them develop the how-to", he explained. "One, they can do it better than I can, and two, then they have the ownership. The ownership's got to happen, and if they're just following orders, it's not going to happen, or only with great difficulty." Instead, as he had on other occasions, he formed a project team composed of officers of varied ranks and backgrounds and charged them with defining a mission for the new unit.

The project team, he soon discovered, however, was uncomfortable with the idea of fighting fear by any means other than fighting crime. It wanted to continue to catch bad guys. Over and over again, the committee sent the chief one variation or another of what most police departments call a "tac force": a special squad, separate from the regular patrol force, aimed as conditions require at the high priority crime of the moment, be it robbery, assault, street drug dealing, or what have you.

This caused Behan to take a fourth unconventional step. Behan instructed the COPE unit that in seeking to find means to reduce fear, they could rely on anything except approaches that are too close to current practices. Moreover, while Behan continued to disclaim any personal knowledge of what would, he set himself up as the arbiter of what practices are too close to conventional methods to be worth trying. The instructions turned out to cut deeply, for many of the first proposals made by the COPE unit were rejected by Behan as being too close to current practices. Over and over Behan sent them back to start again. "It took a long time before they could get themselves to put fighting fear as such as a mission," he says.

The rejections quite naturally caused some resentment among COPE personnel: if Behan had such a clear idea about what wouldn't work or shouldn't be tried, why wouldn't he tell them what he thinks would work so they wouldn't waste any more time trying to guess what Behan had in mind? Nonetheless, Behan continued to deny that he had any answer to the problem. He simply had a clear idea of what won't work, and it was up to the COPE unit to develop a better means of reducing fear -- something that lay well beyond current practices.

Fourth, Behan kept the COPE unit in this unhappy state for many months as they went through a series of initiatives that seemed to fail for one reason or another. It is easy to imagine that this created a significant political vulnerability for Behan. He has put 45 officers to a difficult and uncertain task. He has refused to give the officers any constructive advice, only told them to look beyond their current experience, and rejected proposals on what feel to the officers like arbitrary grounds. Since he is violating ordinary expectation about how public managers are supposed to behave, and since his troops are restless, it seems only a matter of time until some enterprising reporter breaks the story of the "stalled" efforts to reduce fear that began with much fanfare, but is now being badly mismanaged leading to a waste of resources and poor morale within the force. That would be the tangible sign of Behan's fading political capital, and would accelerate the further erosion of his position. Nontheless,

despite this growing risk, Behan stands firm behind his initial policies. He holds open the space to innovate for nearly a year while his subordinates are "groping" for some solution to the problem he gave them.

Fortunately, the COPE unit eventually stumbled into some activities that seem to them successful, and more importantly, to point their work in new directions. The seminal event involved once COPE unit that was facing a nasty racial conflict. "We had a project where we had a private religious school, almost all black, in a white community, and the school buses for the all-white public school was letting its kids off in the same place where the private school's bus was letting out," Lieutenant Kenneth Krouse, the local COPE commander, explained. The white kids were behaving badly. "They were having confrontations: kids were getting shot with BB guns, and knives were starting to be displayed, and the school didn't know what to do, they just couldn't handle it," said Krouse.

His unit started handling the problem just as they always had: by posting officers at the bus stops to squelch the trouble. This time, though, they didn't stop there. Reasoning that it would be wise to sidestep the problem while figuring out how to address it more fundamentally, COPE officers went to the county transit agency and had it reroute the buses so that they no longer stopped near each other. They used the peace this bought to make it plain that race hatred would not be tolerated. COPE motorcycle officers stood picket at the public school stop, talking to students and letting them what would happen if the violence didn't stop. Krouse personally addressed the school at an assembly to make the same points. When the time seemed right, the bus stops were restored, with COPE on the scene for a time. There was no further trouble, either then or when COPE left. COPE had solved the problem.

The incident made an enormous impression within the department. "I thought it was wonderful," Behan says. "I never would have thought of moving the bus stops." The COPE team was delighted. "This was different," said Kirk Higdon, one of the COPE officers. "When I was a patrol officer, I never would have done that. I'd have gone back to that corner every day and fought the problem, whatever it was, instead of moving the bus stops."

This project could have been enjoyed as a success with no further implications. Or, it could have been written up as a special kind of program to be used generally in dealing with racial strife in schools, and to be recalled and used whenever the problem reappeared. In the event, though, neither of these things occurred. Instead, with the help of Herman Goldstein who offered them some training, their success in dealing with the racial strife was treated as a particular concrete example of a more general approach to policing that had come to be called "problem-solving policing."

Fundamental to problem-solving policing were two key ideas: first, that the police were too "process oriented" and too focused or organizational arrangements, and not focused enough on achieving substantive results; second, that the work tended to view their work as a series of "incidents" to be evaluated relative to legal standards to determine whether an arrest was justified, and that a more valuable way for them to think would be to look behind the incidents to determine what underlying

problems were creating the incidents, and to think broadly about how the problem might be solved through means that included but were not limited to the arrest of criminal offenders.

This general set of ideas was quickly used by the COPE unit to solve a series of other frustrating operational problems to which the police had had no adequate response including _____. The officers in COPE were delighted. They had figured out something to do that was different than the police had traditionally done, and that seemed to produce results in terms of reduced crime, enhanced security, and increased community satisfaction within the police.

What lessons are here for the stimulation of innovation in the public sector? Three seem particularly important.

The first concerns the location of innovation in the public sector. Many public sector executives charged with the responsibility for stimulating an innovation would have tried to solve the problem themselves using their own substantive knowledge and experience. Others would have turned the problem over to a policy planning or program design staff to plan the organization's response in detail before committing themselves to action. In the event, Behan did something quite different than either of these, and in many ways much riskier: he turned the problem over to his own operating organizations to solve. He trusted the operators in the organization not only with the implementation of someone else's plans, but with the creative, thinking part of the job. He relied on the line to innovate rather than the staff.

The second involves the particular method a public sector executive can use to stimulate innovation: namely, staking his own authority on some particular problem to be solved rather than a solution. In doing so, the leader of an organization opens an exposed hole in the organization's operations, and creates powerful pressures on people within the organization to fill the hole with an intelligently designed response. That is what Behan's commitment to reducing fear and denying the COPE unit the comfort of traditional responses does: it deliberately creates an organizational vulnerability.

Behan's method in forcing an innovation is similar to some managerial processes I observed in Japan, and it is worth looking at these in some detail. Like everyone else, I had heard a great deal about the vaunted Japanese style of decision-making. I had heard that it depended a great deal on developing a consensus, and that it took a long time, but that the payoff for the elaborate decision-making processes came in a rapid and reliable implementation of the ideas that had been developed in the process. I also heard some polite asides that disparaged the pressures to conformity in the process, and the lack of individual creativity.

What I observed in Japan was something quite different, however. What happened in the typical meeting I attended was something like the following. The meeting would begin with a statement from the most senior person in the room. (Typically, the person was senior both in age and in status.) He would begin with some self-deprecating remarks: He was old and tired and did not know much and had to make room for the energy and skill of the younger generation which he admired greatly. After this modest introduction, he would then say something like, "Still, even with this blurry vision, it seems

to me that the problem we must face is this: ........" And he would then describe a problem that was the focus of the meeting. Then, he would stop talking.

This speech would be followed by a long pause. Then, the less senior people in the room would begin to speak -- not in any particular order. They would commonly say something like, "Well, if that is the problem, then this is what I could do to contribute to the solution." Such responses would be greeted with nods of approval -- more or less enthusiastic depending on the quality of the idea, but never critical or dismissive. It seemed pretty clear that in making this statement, the person was taking responsibility for acting on his own proposal. What seemed to determine whether someone would stand up and speak was whether they had an idea, to which they were prepared to commit themselves, and that seemed responsive to the problem that had been defined by the senior authority figure.

Significantly, there was no discussion about whether the senior person had defined the problem correctly. Nor was there any general discussion about the quality of a particular person's response. It was as though that individual alone was responsible for the quality of his own contribution, and could be expected to make it a high quality response, or face the usual consequences of being viewed as unsuccessful or unhelpful.

This method of having senior authority figures identify key problems to be solved, but not the solution; and to establish an open-ended invitation for subordinates with line operational responsibilities to contribute to the solution; seemed to me to partially account for two important things about Japanese organizational life. One was the fact that they seemed to be able to live more in the future than American organizations. The other was that they could innovate very rapidly. Let me explain how I think these worked.

The great challenge in preparing to meet the future is learning to take the demands of the future seriously for today's life. The reason this is hard, of course, is that the future is inevitably an abstraction. One must imagine what it will be. One cannot feel it and touch it today to establish its reality.

Compared to the tangible, concrete pressures of today, that abstraction inevitably feels weak as a discipline. The current pressures cannot be resisted and argued about. They are undeniable present and compelling. The future, on the other hand, can always be argued about, and therefore avoided.

One doesn't need much experience in organizational life to learn the power of today's concrete demands relative to the weak demands that are projected backward from an inherently speculative future. As the head of Planning and Evaluation for a government organization, one of my responsibilities was to try to outline and make vivid to the organization predictions about the future to which the organization should begin responding today. I worked hard on the assignment, trying to ground my projections of future challenges in the best information we had about how the world was developing in our domain of responsibility. I even learned to spice the presentations up with vivid images and anecdotes to try to make the future reality more compelling.

Nonetheless, these efforts were routinely defeated by the most casual dismissals. "That's very interesting, but now let's get back to the real world. Here's what we have to respond to now, or there

won't be any future to worry about." It was only in dealing with today's problems that the organization's emotional and intellectual energies could be really engaged. When we talked about the future, we argued about whether the projections were right, not what we should do if they were right.

No doubt, there is much wisdom in responding to today's problems rather than to speculative visions of the future. It sometimes is true that if we do not deal with today's problems, some opportunity in the future will be mortgaged. It is also true that it is hard to be right about the future; it has a way of continually surprising us. And it is also true that it is both intellectually and emotionally difficult to take the claims of a speculative future sufficiently seriously to do the hard work of calculating the implications of the future demands for one's current actitivities, and to make the commitment to changing those activities before the future has shown the "whites of its eyes."

Still, it is sometimes important that organizations learn to with a longer future organization than they able to muster, and it is this problem that it seems to me that Behan and the Japanese managers I saw seem to have solved. They have used something that is very concrete and powerful and exacting in organizational life -- namely, the power of authority -- to focus the attention of the organization on a problem that would not be a behaviorally significant or compelling problem but for the attachment of the authority's commitment. In short, the commitment of the boss to a course of action is used as the bridge between the abstract, uncertain future, and the concrete, current, undeniable reality.

Obviously, this puts a great deal of pressure on people who are in positions of authority. It is important that they be right about the demands of the future. It is worth noting, however, that in the images presented here, what the managers have to be right about is not the solution, but in defining what the problem is. They have to have the courage of their convictions about the definition of the problem, and the wit and skill to turn the development of the solutions over to the rest of the organization. They don't have to be right about the solution. The reason they might be expected to be right about the definition of the problem is that they are more often in contact with the external environment than their bureaucratic subordinates.

Moreover, it is also possible that it is less important to get the future problem exactly right than it is to get it roughly right, and to get people acting on the solution. We may be able to find out relatively quickly whether the problem is right. Or it may be that there are many problems that are worth working on. The important thing may be to continue to stimulate thought and action. Indeed, one interesting feature of the Behan story is that his organization invents a response that does not solve the particular problem he posed, but solves a far more important one instead. In short, the big enemy may not be error, but simply inertia.

This brings me to my third observation about what public sector managers can do to stimulate fast innovation and learning. There are very strong pressures in the American political system to try to do a great deal with planning before taking action. The general notion is that it is wrong for the government to go off half-cocked and to experiment with grudgingly surrendered public resources, or with the fortunes of people who might be affected by misguided governmental action. As a result, when the government wants to innovate or make a change, it spends a great deal of time checking

whether the problem has been properly defined, and whether there are strong reasons to believe that the proposed actions will be successful.

It may be that it is partly for this reason that policy analysis -- which tries to get the answer right before a decision is made -- is relatively more popular than program evaluation which is consigned to the apparently less urgent task of finding out what happened after a decision was made. It may also be for this reason that large policy staffs have been created in the government, and that endless rounds of planning proceed before any decision is ever made.

What is important and interesting about the vignettes presented above, however, is that these managers do not fall into this trap. They establish a definition of the problem through the use of their own authority. They do not invite much comment or participation about their definition of the problem. Then, once the definition of the problem has been established, they demand a solution not from a staff that has no responsibility for implementation, but instead from operational units that would be expected to implement any solution they nominated. This means that the process of devising the solution and implementing does not go through the painful steps of being worked out in committee and then handed off to reluctant, ill-informed, and resentful operational units who get none of the credit for being imaginative and resourceful if they are successful, and lots of the blame for failed implementation if the program does not go well. Instead, the people who will have to implement are the people who are also responsible for developing the proposal. They are committed to acting in the moment they suggest the solution.

These observations are quite close to those made by Peters and Waterman in Chapter __ of In Search of Excellence in which they describe the virtues of a "bias toward action." They capture the essence of their idea in a memorable phrase. Successful companies, they argue, follow the principle of "Ready, Fire, Aim", not "Ready, Aim, Fire." They use this provocative phrase to argue for the importance of having "firing" follow closely on to "aiming". And that is valuable for all the reasons alluded to above -- the implementing parts of the organization become intertwined with the planning parts, action is speedy, a can-do spirit is built, and so on.

It is also worth noting, however, that there might also be some significant advantages in aiming after one has fired rather than before. After all, one of the best ways to aim for effect is not to keep sighting the rifle, but to fire a tracer bullet and see where it hits, and then adjust one's aim. The experience one gets by actually firing and seeing what happens may improve one's aim far more dramatically than trying to imagine where the bullet might land. This recommendation contrasts, of course, with the usual practice in government which is "Ready, Ready, Ready, Aim...., No, Ready, etc."

One interesting implication of this observation might be that the glamorous activities of policy analysis -- simulation models, linear programming, and so on -- that are focused intensively on trying to get the answer right before one fires should yield their pride of place to the more nitty gritty activities of program evaluation. I understand that there are many areas -- such as nuclear war -- in which this is an unreasonable expectation. But the vast majority of government programs are not of this type.

The point, then, is that one of the most important ways that managers can both focus their organization's attention on the future, and stimulate innovation and investment to face that future in the present, is to stake their authority on a definition of a problem that the organization is then committed to solving. They can do that by re-negotiating a mandate with their overseers that challenges them to accomplish a goal that they do not yet know how to achieve. Or they can do that internally during their own strategic planning processes. Or they can do it on a more ad hoc basis by putting a particular challenge to an organization, and creating an organizational unit whose job it is to solve the problem.

Note that the success of these strategies must ultimately depend on the effective authority of the leader. If the leader looks vulnerable, the organization will simply ignore the challenge. They may even use the exposure to undermine the manager. On the other hand, if the leader looks powerful, they will eventually respond. This means that managers must have ways of building credibility with external overseers even as they are spending it (or testing its limits) with speculative ventures. Thus, just like private sector managers have cash cows, stars, and developmental possibilities in their portfolios, and must keep them balanced, so might public sector executive hold portfolios of solid performance, challenges, and organizational holes.


## IV. Becoming an Innovative Organization

One of the most interesting aspects of the story of Behan and the Baltimore County Police Department's COPE unit is the way in which the COPE unit seemed to take on a life of its own. Indeed, it is interesting to note that what began as an innovation to reduce fear ended up as something entirely else. It is not clear, at the end of the case, whether the COPE unit has found a reliable way to reduce fear. What it has found instead is a broader concept about policing that affects understandings about ends, means, and key working relationships inside and outside a police department; in short, a vision of how a police department as a whole might be transformed into a different, more valuable, more responsive public organization. "All the pieces are there," Behan says. "A bigger and more flexible role for individual officers, the deemphasis of military structure, and a more thoughtful analysis of the problem police are expected to handle. If you fit all these pieces together, you have the beginning of a new vision of what police work could become."

The fact that the COPE unit ended up solving a different problem than it was commissioned to solve raises some important questions about managing innovation. The first is that the case reminds us that if an organization starts down an innovative path, it is not at all clear what one will find, or what the results will be. Failure, of course, is one possible result. But the COPE case suggests that serendipity is also a plausible result. In searching for the solution to one problem one might find the solution to a different problem. Both failure and serendipity seem at the outset as plausible as the result that one might actually end up solving the problem one started to solve. At any rate, because innovation by definition is an uncertain course, managers must recognize that it is at least as important for them to be alert for unexpected results as to try to plan the process in detail, or to keep pressing for the solution to the original problem. If they find something valuable that they did not expect or intend to find, that is as important a result as if they had eventually produced what they hoped to produce. To get the most out of innovative efforts, managers must be opportunistic and flexible as well as careful

and accountable. It might be particularly important to develop the skill of spotting an unexpected value creating opportunity in an expected set of events.

The fact that the COPE unit produced some unsettling effects in the Baltimore Country Police Department, and that its philosophy and style began challenging other parts of the organization reminds us that virtually all innovations inserted into an operating organization have rippling effects on the rest of the organization. The reverberations can be caused by technical linkages between one part of the organization and another; for example, the COPE units initial reliance on motor cycles might have increased the total number of these vehicles available to the Department, and increased the likelihood that they would be used in traditional patrol units as well. Or, the fact that COPE officers were on duty in particular times and places might have reduced some of the schedulling constraints on the traditional patrol units.

The more common and potentially important linkages between the innovative unit and the rest of the organization, however, is the impact that the innovative units have on the culture of the organization. Almost by definition, innovative units in an organization introduce foreign cultural elements. They have different purposes and different methods. Since they are organizationally separated from the traditional units, they develop a distinctive identity, and a kind of competitiveness. The differences and conflict that are created inevitably have an impact on the culture of the organization, if for no other reason that it now houses a new subculture that has to integrated.

Whatever the mechanism that causes an innovative unit to have an impact on the rest of the organization, it is possible to view those effects in terms not only of their existence and size, but also in terms of the direction they are tending to push the organization. What is so interesting about the COPE unit is not only that it is different, and that its difference challenges the organization technically and culturally, but also that it tends to push the Baltimore County Police Department towards a strategy of "community policing." Like a breeder reactor, it tends to create the materials out of which a strategic transformation of the organization as a whole can be made. This makes it very different than an innovation that had no larger implications for the organization, or that instead of challenging an organization to move forward, tended to anchor it in its existing strategic position.

The obvious implication of these observations is that if particular innovations have reverberating effects via technical and cultural linkages; and if those effects can be calibrated in terms of their strength and impact on the future development of the organization; then it becomes as important for managers to manage and exploit these indirect effects as to produce the particular innovation in the first place. This is particularly true if, as is often the case, a particular programmatic innovation is introduced as a way of signalling and facilitating an important change in the overall strategy of an organization. For innovations intended as the cats paw of a major strategic re-orientation, the reverberating effects of the innovation may be far more important than the direct effects.

The fact that an innovation, incubated within a special unit, could plausibly become as important a "product line" as the organization's traditional practices, or could even threaten to replace the organization's traditional practices as the dominant activity carried out by the organization, confronts innovating managers with a third interesting problem: namely, how they can "take the

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innovation to scale." Thus, at the end of the Baltimore County case, Behan faces the question of whether and how he can increase the scale of "community problem solving" as an activity carried out by his organization.

Generally speaking, Behan (like other managers who have created an important innovation by establishing a special unit) has two alternatives in taking the innovation to scale. He can increase the scale of the activity by keeping the activity exclusively within the sphere of the special unit, and then building the special unit to the right scale. Or, he can seek to spread the new functions and methods to the traditional units and let the special unit "wither away."

Faced with this choice, the dominant temptation is to stay committed to the special unit and achieve the desired scale by increasing the size of that unit. That path seems to guarentee the survival of the new and valuable capabilities. It also seems to insure that continued learning and development can take place. It also typically satisfies the aspirations of those who have committed themselves to the development of the special unit, and lived through all the times when their future seemed threatened.

The difficulty with this approach, of course, is that it tends to set limits on how significant the new function can become in the organization. As the special unit approaches parity with the traditional units, conflicts within the organization will grow. Which function is "core" and which "peripheral" will be hotly debated as a question of organizational identity. To keep the conflict within bounds, managers will typically keep the new unit small relative to the traditional units. That may or may not be the proper scale of the new activities. It also tends to keep the innovative piece of the organization in a vulnerable position. Should outside support for the innovative piece of the organization ever falter, the traditional piece of the organization will find a way to destroy it. And, in any case, conflict continues in the organization to the detriment of both morale and operations. Those are the problems Behan will confront if he chooses to stay with a "split force" concept.

Seeking to integrate the new capabilities with the traditional operations, on the other hand, presents a different set of risks and opportunities. The risks are the most obvious. If Behan were to disband the COPE unit in the interests of authorizing and requiring everyone in the organization to adopt COPE methods of policing, there is the risk that COPE's methods and people would vanish without a trace beneath the operational requirements and cultural commitments of the traditional units. Without the special protection provided by the boundaries of a special unit, the capabilities the COPE unit has worked so hard to develop might simply wither away. On the other hand, the advantage of trying to grow the new activities outside the boundaries of the special unit is that this is ultimately the only way Behan and the Baltimore County Police Department can exploit the full advantages of their important innovation. It is the only way they can get the activity to the appropriate scale; the only way they can ensure an effective operational co-ordination among the different parts of the organization; and the only way the conflicts over organizational identity can be settled and the long run future of the practices COPE pioneered assured. Room must be created in the minds and operations of the organization if the innovations are to flourish and survive over the long run.

What these observations suggest is that the right solution is to use the COPE unit as a platform for changing the operations and culture of the Baltimore County Police Department. The managerial

aim should be to use the continuing operations of the COPE units as a training ground for other officers and managers throughout the Department. The techniques and values of COPE should be spread throughout the organization by rotating many people through the COPE unit (always assuring that there are enough effective people in the COPE unit to ensure not only its operational integrity, but also its value as a training ground). It might even be wise to make experience in the COPE unit a particularly valuable credential for promotion in more traditional units. As those with experience in COPE operations spread throughout the Department, it will become important to authorize the traditional units to operate like COPE units, and to adapt organization-wide technical and administrative systems within the organization to create room for such operations to be initiated, and to recognize administratively that such activities are taking place in units other than the COPE units. Thus, for example, it may be necessary to adjust the dispatching system to create more room for pro-active activities. It may also be necessary to develop some administrative system that can recognize the amount of time being devoted to problem-solving initiatives, and the impact that they are having on the community even when these are not initiated and run by the COPE units. Thus, the skillful development of a particular programmatic innovation can be widened into an important strategic innovation in the organziation's operations through a sequence of administrative innovations that allow the organization to widen its capabilities for problem-solving, and to recognize and account for this activity, and thereby create political and organizational room for such capabilities to be used.

Note that if Behan and the Baltimore County Police Department could ever arise at a place where community problem-solving was occurring at a scale comparable to reactive policing, and where the work was being done throughout the organization rather than in a special unit, then Behan and his colleagues would have succeeded in building a police organization whose overall strategy of policing differed significantly from the conventional practices that were the source of Behan's frustrations and disappointments at the outset. Instead of being focused primarily on dealing with serious crime, and doing so through reactive methods, the organization's focus would have broadened to include minor offenses that could lead to crime and in case caused a great deal of fear, and its methods would have shifted from reactions to incidents to investigating the causes of incidents so that they might better be prevented. This creates a much wider front on which to engage community problems. Instead of being primarily focused on using internal police resources to make arrests, the organization would be focused on using both external and internal resources to solve problems. Arrests would become one of the available means for accomplishing results, not the only thing that justified police interventions. This creates a much wider set of means that could be used to deal with community problems. Instead of seeing itself as the first step in the criminal justice system, the police department might begin thinking of itself as a agency of municipal government that had important responsibilities towards and operational partnerships with schools, recreation departments, welfare agencies, and highway departments. Thus, key working could have changed as part of the new overall strategy of the organization.

Perhaps the largest change, however, would be in the character of internal working relations with the department, and the ways in which citizens and their representatives would have to oversee the Department's operations to hold them accountable. Traditionally, police departments have organized themselves internally in traditional hierarchies characterized by strict lines of authority, written operational procedures, and narrow spans of control to ensure close supervision. This is justified at least partly in terms of the importance of ensuring the accountability and consistency in

operations that citizens and their representatives demand of police departments. But this form of organization is also justified operational as a way of ensuring consistent quality in police operations. The idea is that if there is a good way of dealing with a particular operational problem, that method will be codified in policies and procedures, officers will be trained in this method, and supervisors will be instructed to ensure that everyone uses the method. Thus, the best practices of the organization will be spread throughout the organization's operations.

One way to characterize this form of organization and operation is as a "production line organization." The quintessential production line organization is an automobile manufacturing company. In such companies, the organization's basic technology remains constant across all its work. It is embedded in the capabilities of the machinery along the production line. The analogy in policing would be to imagine that its operating technology was embedded in its operational procedures, and it used those standard procedures whenever a particular situation arose. When an improved method for dealing with a particular kind of problem was invented, it was turned into a new standard process. Typically, in production line organizations, much of the invention and thinking is done at the top of the organization (in the minds of the chief executives) and at the side of the organization (in the engineering staffs). The line managers and officers are simply implementers, not inventers; doers, not thinkers.

This can be contrasted with a different kind of organization; a "job shop." Examples of job shops include architectural firms, hospitals, and custom machine tool manufacturers. In such enterprises, there is no standard technology. Each new building, each new patient, each new tool must be designed to meet the special challenges of the new project. Of course, the organization has knowledge and experience that it uses in meeting these unique challenges. But the point is that this knowledge has to be constantly adjusted and adapated to meet new circumstances rather than applied rotely and consistently to the same circumstances. In these organizations, the thinking is typically done in the line -- not at the top or in the staffs. Invention is a necessary part of production. Typically, then, such organizations give a great deal of status and discretion to those on the line.

An important strategic question for policing (and perhaps other public organizations as well) is whether we should continue to think about them and organize them as production line organizations, or to experiment with thinking about and organizing them as job shops. It is pretty clear that we have tried to organize many public sector organizations as production line organizations, and feel most comfortable with them when we can make them fit that form. That is thought to ensure consistency, accountability, and efficiency -- all highly valued attributes of a public sector enterprise. Yet it also seems pretty clear that this model does not really fit the reality of either policing or other public sector activities such as education, or social work, or child protective services. In all of these fields, the tasks the organizations face are highly varied -- not similar. The people charged with the responsibility of enhancing security, or educating the children, or helping a struggling family find a way to meet its obligations to its children and to the broader society, operate with a high degree of discretion -- at least de facto if not de jure. The best workers used that discretion to adapt their responses to the highly varied particular circumstances they encountered, and then presented themselves after the fact as having used proper procedures to reconcile demands of the task with the demand for close accountability in the way that money and authority were being used to achieve the results.

It is important to understand that in policing the new strategies now being developed make a virtue of discretion. They encourage adapativeness -- partly to accommodate varied circumstances, partly to search for better ways of handling important recurring kinds of problems, partly to be responsive to local neighborhood concerns. In short, the new strategies of policing call for police organizations to become continuosly adaptive and innovative organizations. It is that path that Behan's COPE unit has started us down.

The difficult problem we face in the future is that the celebration of discretion, and the adaptive and innovative responses that such celebration allows, threatens some important values such as accountability and consistency that have, in the past, been very important in guiding public sector organizations. To allow policing to continue to develop, some means of satisfying the demands for accountability and consistency will have to be found, for the demand for these values to be realized in police operations will not go away. When the police are using money and authority granted to them by citizens, citizens want to be sure that these resources are being used both efficiently and fairly. It was that demand that was served by organizing the police as paramilitary production line organizations, and it is that demand that will be frustrated if the police are reconstructed to operate as continuously adaptive and innovative organizations.

Police executives will simply have to find some other ways to feed these demands for accountability. That will almost certainly involve making the operations of police departments far more transparent than they now are, and exposing their operations to far more regular, honest after-the-fact audits than is now routinely performed. This "after-the-fact" accountability for performance rather than "before-the-fact" accountability for adherence to form and procedure is a form of accountability that is more consistent with emerging practices. But it is by no means clear that this form of accountability will be acceptable to either the public or the police. If such forms of accountability that would allow continuous adaptation and improvement cannot be developed in a satisfactory way, then the prospects for the continually adaptive and innovative police organizations that seems so promising today will have receded, and we will have chosen the values of consistency and accountability over the values of customization and performance as desireable features of police organizations. It is finding a way not to go down that path that is probably now the greatest innovative challenge facing police managers, and perhaps other public sector executives as well.