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The Police as an Agency of Municipal Government: Implications for Measuring Police Effectiveness

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The changing paradigm of policing: from "first step in the criminal justice system" to "agency of municipal government"

Since the publication of *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society: Report of the President's Crime Commission*, citizens, practitioners, and scholars have viewed police, prosecutors, courts, and correctional agencies as constituent parts of a criminal justice system.¹ What joins these separately administered agencies in a "system" is that their operations are linked in a specific process: the handling of criminal cases. The process begins with the allegation of a criminal offense, proceeds through an investigation to the arrest of suspects, progresses to the formal charging and prosecution of those arrested, and ultimately concludes with the adjudication and disposition of the cases. Viewed from this vantage point, the police play an obvious and important role: They begin the process of criminal justice adjudication by initiating cases with an arrest and a charge.²

This view of the police as the crucial first step in criminal justice system processing meshes seamlessly with a particular view of the overall role of the police in society: the "professional law enforcement model" of policing.³ In this conception, the fundamental goal of the police is to reduce crime by enforcing the criminal law. They do so largely by arresting (or threatening to arrest) criminal offenders. To create the threat of arrest and actually produce arrests, they rely on three key operations: (1) patrolling public spaces, (2) responding to calls from citizens, and (3) investigating crimes.

This view of policing is also perfectly reflected in the measures conventionally used to evaluate police performance:

- The focus on *levels of reported crime* reflects the view that the most important result the police seek is reduced criminal victimization.
- The focus on *numbers of arrests* reflects the view that the most important thing the police can do to accomplish the goal of reducing crime is to arrest offenders to produce deterrence, incapacitation, and whatever opportunity for rehabilitation exists.
- The focus on *response times, clearance rates, and numbers of sworn officers* reflects (more or less precisely) our understanding about the ways in which the police can produce arrests (e.g., through rapid response, retrospective investigation, and—less perfectly—police presence).

What citizens expect is what police departments measure; what gets measured, in turn, profoundly shapes what the police do.

The problem is that this conception of what the police *should* do differs from what they *actually* do and what they *could* do to enrich the quality of urban life.⁴ By viewing the police as the first step in criminal justice processing, we miss the important role that private institutions—such as families, community organizations, churches, and businesses—play in preventing, identifying, and responding to criminal conduct and the role that the police might play in supporting these efforts. Similarly, by focusing exclusively on reducing serious crime, we miss the important role that the police play in managing disorder in public spaces, reducing fear, controlling traffic and crowds, and providing various emergency services. By focusing

attention on arrests, clearance rates, and the speed of response to calls for service, we ignore the important contribution that other kinds of police problem-solving efforts can make to prevent crime, reduce fear, and improve the quality of community life. Thus, our limited expectations of the police, and our limited methods of measuring their performance, result in our failure to recognize the important contributions that police make to the quality of urban life beyond these boundaries and to manage police departments to achieve these valuable results.⁵

The purposes of this paper are essentially four:

- To establish a justification for viewing the police differently, as an “agency of municipal government” rather than as the “first step in the criminal justice system.”
- To imagine (from this different vantage point) the varied contributions the police could and do make to the overall performance of municipal government and the quality of urban life beyond reduction of crime and enforcement of the criminal law.
- To develop ideas about how these contributions outside the boundaries of crime control, law enforcement, and criminal justice processing could be “recognized” (in an accounting sense) through measurement systems that could accurately capture the full public value contributed by police departments to the quality of life in their cities.
- To look at an example of a police organization that appears to be doing in practice what we recommend in theory.

The police as an agency of municipal government

Consider first why it might be appropriate to view the police as an agency of municipal government rather than only an element of the criminal justice system. The most obvious and important reason is that municipal government supplies the resources the police need to do their work. The resources are of two kinds.⁶ One resource is the money the police receive to pay salaries, provide for future pensions, and purchase the guns and computers they need to do their work. That money is raised through local tax levies and appropriated to the police through the processes of local government.⁷

The other resource that police rely on is less tangible: the legal authority to oblige citizens to behave in ways that allow them to live together with some degree of security and order. As the Philadelphia Police Study Task Force explained:

The police are entrusted with important public resources. The most obvious is money. . . . Far more important, the public grants the police another resource—the use of force and authority. These are deployed when a citizen is arrested or handcuffed, when an officer fires his weapon at a citizen, and when an officer claims exclusive use of the streets with his siren.⁸

The police need authority not only to arrest people for serious crimes such as robbery, rape, and murder but also to require citizens to refrain from driving while drinking, to park in places that do not interfere with traffic flow, and to desist from carrying guns in public spaces without a license. They also can require citizens demonstrating against government not to inflict too many costs on other citizens who want to use public spaces for their own purposes.

Much of the authority the police need to do their job comes from sources other than local government. The criminal laws they are charged with enforcing are passed, for example, at the State level or have been developed from the common law. Many of the powers they are granted to enforce the laws (such as the power to stop and search) are granted and conditioned by the U.S. Constitution. But some of the laws they enforce, and some of the powers they are granted to achieve this objective, are created at local levels. Thus, local police are charged with enforcing many municipal ordinances against such acts as spitting, disorderly conduct, or taverns being too loud and open too late.⁹ Many policies regulating police behavior in such areas as use of deadly force or high-speed chases also are established locally.¹⁰

These observations seem important for this simple reason: If local government provides the money and (at least some of) the authority for the police to do their work, then it seems reasonable to conclude that local government “owns” the police. If local government owns the police, it seems reasonable to imagine that local government could direct the police toward whatever valuable purposes it has in mind.

A second reason for viewing the police as an agency of municipal government is closely related to (and partially qualifies) the first: If local government provides the resources to municipal police departments, then it seems plausible to assume that the police are accountable, in the first instance, to *local* government. Of course, the police also are accountable to "the rule of law." Indeed, that commitment is so strong that it would morally and legally oblige the police to resist or challenge local political requests to take "illegal" or "unfair" action against citizens. If they did not resist these demands, the police might well become vulnerable to prosecution for political corruption or civil rights violations. Moreover, due to their functional dependency on their fellow agencies in the criminal justice system, the police are at least powerfully influenced by the expectations of prosecutors, courts, and other State and Federal enforcement agencies, if not directly accountable to them. Thus, the elected officials of municipal government are not the only ones who can hold the police accountable or expect to influence them. Nevertheless, since local government supports the police with local tax levies and local ordinances grant them (conditional) powers, then arguably local government should be able to use the police for whatever (lawful) purposes it chooses.

A third reason is that the police both *can* and *do* take actions that affect many aspects of community life beyond controlling serious crime.¹¹ For example, police reduce signs of disorder that undermine a sense of security, regulate festering disputes that if left unattended might escalate into crimes, and protect the rights of individuals who might easily become the targets of racial prejudice. In doing so, the police enhance security and liberty and enrich the overall quality of life. Moreover, they accomplish both crime control and other valuable purposes through means other than making arrests.¹² In short, the police have capabilities that go beyond their ability to threaten and make arrests; further, these capabilities turn out to be valuable for more purposes than simply reducing crimes. If we conceive of the police as nothing more than "the first step in the criminal justice system," then we might easily miss the contributions that they make "outside the box" of crime control, law enforcement, and arresting people. On the other hand, if we conceive of the police as an agency of municipal government that shares with other agencies the broad responsibility for strengthening the quality of urban

life, then we are in a better position to notice that the police contribute much more to those goals than is captured by the simple idea of reducing crime. We also notice that the police have capabilities that go far beyond their ability to make arrests and that these capabilities are valuable to the enterprise of city government. In short, the police are a more valuable asset when viewed from the vantage point of trying to strengthen urban life than they are when viewed from the narrower perspective of reducing crime through making arrests.

The reason that this last point is both important and difficult to grasp has to do with the way that we think about organizations in the public sector.¹³ In the public sector, an organization typically is viewed as an efficient machine for achieving a set of narrowly defined purposes set out in the organization's authorizing legislation. In essence, in the public sector, management begins with a specific set of objectives and then builds an organization designed to achieve them as efficiently and effectively as possible. In that way, society as a whole maintains effective control over public-sector organizations. If an organization spends money or exerts authority outside the boundaries of its authorization or for purposes that were not included in its initial mission, it is guilty of either "fraud, waste, or abuse" (in the case of misuse of funds) or "abuse of authority" and "malfeasance" (in the case of improper use of authority).

Three difficulties arise from this way of thinking, however. One is that, in building an organization to meet a specific set of objectives, we sometimes build a set of capabilities that are valuable not only for the specified purpose but *for other purposes as well*. Thus, for example, a library can be useful in providing afterschool programs to latchkey children as well as in providing library services to adults;¹⁴ a registry of motor vehicles can be valuable in collecting unpaid parking tickets for local government as well as in distributing licenses and registrations;¹⁵ and the U.S. military can contribute to reducing the supply of illicit drugs reaching U.S. cities as well as providing for the defense of the Nation.¹⁶ The question facing the public and the managers of these organizations, then, is whether the organizations ought to be used for these other purposes as well as for the purposes for which they were originally established. If they have the capabilities, why not use them for valuable purposes?

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A second difficulty is that, because organizational leaders in the public sector are supposed to think of themselves as operating machines that have been designed to achieve specific purposes in the most efficient way, they often think that *the specific things they now do represent the best way to accomplish their mission*. After all, if their specific, current activities were *not* the most efficient means for accomplishing their mission, they would be guilty of fraud, waste, and abuse and undermining their own claims of professional competence. Since that is too horrible to contemplate, it must be true both that the current mission is the right one and that the specific means they have developed to achieve the mission are the only ways to achieve it.

A third problem is that, while the world often changes around public organizations, the changes are not always incorporated into a redefinition of their mandates. Sometimes the piece of the world that changes is the "task environment." Certainly that happened to the police when the crack epidemic hit America's cities. When street drug markets, violent youths, and child abuse and neglect all challenged police departments' enforcement methods, the police were forced to shift the balance of their efforts and develop new methods to meet the challenges. At other times, the world around public organizations changes through the development of new operational procedures that are considered more effective than the old or the development of new technologies. For example, the police have changed their approaches to domestic violence¹⁷ and begun to explore "problem solving" as an alternative to "rapid response."¹⁸ Still other times, citizens' aspirations for the police, and how they would like to use the police, change. For example, many citizens want the police to shift to a strategy of "community policing," in which the police are more responsive to the needs of particular neighborhoods and deploy themselves in ways that make them more accessible to and familiar with local communities.

At some level of abstraction, of course, the overall mission of the police never changes.¹⁹ It continues to be "to serve and to protect," "to ensure law and order," and "to enforce the law fully and fairly." But within the spaces created by these broad concepts, many significantly different ideas—of what the police do each day, what they are rewarded for, and how their resources are allocated—exist. There may be no particular reason for the current constellation of activities

and purposes to be seen as the only ones that are either consistent with these broad concepts or capable of achieving these lofty ends. Thus, there may be more room for innovation of all kinds than is commonly assumed by either the police or those who oversee them.

The point of these observations is that it is too easy for both the police and those who oversee them to imagine that they are already living in the best of all possible worlds—one in which the purposes of the police (at both abstract and concrete levels) are the right ones, and the means being relied upon (both organizationwide and in response to particular kinds of problems) are the most efficient and effective. The reality, however, may be different. There may be valuable purposes to which the police can contribute that are not recognized or adequately emphasized in the current understanding of the police mission. There also may be valuable new means that could be adopted to achieve either old or new goals. Such a situation could have occurred simply because the world around police departments changed. Thus, it might be important for them to change their operations (at a programmatic or strategic level); yet, they are held back by a rigid conception of their mission and the most efficient means for achieving their goals.

The problems of adapting and using organizations are less severe in the private sector because private-sector supervisors and managers think about their organizations differently from those in the public sector. Instead of thinking about an organization as an intricate machine that has been engineered to achieve a specific, well-defined purpose as efficiently and effectively as possible, private-sector supervisors and managers think of it as an asset whose value is contained in its "distinctive competencies"; that is, in the things the organization knows how to do well. Typically, their conception of distinctive competence is relatively abstract. For example, they might think of a police organization as one that comprises a large number of well-trained, highly motivated, and resourceful people—linked to citizens through telephones and radios, and able to get to most places in a city quickly and to form into different-sized operational groups—who are carrying out the authority of the State. What they ask themselves, then, about such an organization is not whether it is achieving a narrow purpose efficiently and effectively; instead, they ask: *What valuable things could I produce with this*

organization? If one thinks about policing in this way, one sees a remarkably different set of possibilities than if one thinks: (1) that the mission of the police is to control crime; (2) that the best way to do that is to make arrests; and (3) that the best way to make arrests is through (a) patrol, (b) rapid response, and (c) retrospective investigation. Thinking about the police as an agency of municipal government facilitates and to some degree justifies this fundamental paradigm shift toward the private-sector model.

How the police contribute to the quality of urban life and improve the performance of municipal government

Given that it is at least plausibly appropriate and useful to think of the police as an agency of municipal government, what other roles could the police play? What additional responsibilities might they assume? What activities would support these different responsibilities? These questions can be analyzed in three different categories:

- How, in the context of a wider conception of the police mission that focuses on enhancing the overall quality of life in a city, police operations can contribute directly to these broader goals.
- How, in either the old or new vision of the police mission, the police can contribute to more effective operations of other agencies of municipal government or the government as a whole.
- How the police, in their new and expanded mission, might contribute to the development and operation of private institutions such as families, communities, and commerce that cities need to succeed.

Police roles in supporting the quality of urban life

Pioneering work on the roles of the police was done by Herman Goldstein several years after the President's Crime Commission issued its report.²⁰ It is somewhat ironic that at precisely the time society was getting the benefit of Goldstein's accurate and broad vision of what the police do and what they contribute to community life, the Commission was defining a

relatively narrow vision of policing. In *Policing a Free Society*, Goldstein succinctly listed the functions of the police:

- To prevent and control conduct widely recognized as threatening to life and property (serious crime).
- To aid individuals who are in danger of physical harm, such as the victim of a criminal attack.
- To protect constitutional guarantees such as the right of free speech and assembly.
- To facilitate the movement of people and vehicles.
- To assist those who cannot care for themselves: the intoxicated, the addicted, the mentally ill, the physically disabled, the old, and the young.
- To resolve conflict, whether between individuals, groups of individuals, or individuals and their government.
- To identify problems that have the potential to become more serious problems for the individual citizen, the police, or the government.
- To create and maintain a feeling of security in the community.²¹

This was a much broader conception of the police role than the one endorsed by citizens, realized in police operations, or reliably captured through the measurement systems then (and now) being used to measure police performance. More recently, scholars have focused attention on three broad purposes that the police could (and often do) serve that are extremely valuable to communities, but that nonetheless go unrecognized, unsupported, and unmeasured.

Crime prevention. One such purpose is to prevent as well as react to crime. A traditionalist could argue that a great deal of crime is prevented by reacting (and threatening to react) quickly and aggressively to criminal offending. Such actions could deter crime or, by generating arrests and successful prosecutions, allow for the incapacitation and/or rehabilitation of offenders. These mechanisms would prevent future crimes from being committed. Yet, crime prevention emphasizes that there may be other things the police could do to keep offenses from being committed in the first place and if there are such activities, that they would be valuable to undertake.

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Initial thoughts about crime prevention tend to focus on what might be considered "primary prevention": efforts directed toward the broad social conditions that seem to spawn both criminal offenders and crimes.²² These may be further divided into efforts designed to either: (1) ensure the healthy development of children to reduce the likelihood that they will be inclined to commit crimes, or (2) promote the social and economic development of poor communities to create environments that produce not only fewer criminals but also fewer opportunities and occasions for committing crime. Such work often seems like "social" or "community development" work, which is well beyond the capacities and responsibilities of the police.

Many tend to agree with this position. Yet, the police may be able to make important contributions to even these broad prevention objectives. For example, concern for the healthy development of children has long been expressed through police activities. In the past, this was manifested through the (largely, but not entirely) volunteer efforts associated with Police Athletic Leagues.²³ More recently, it has been expressed in the enthusiasm for the D.A.R.E.[®] program.²⁴ Even more important contributions to the healthy development of children may be made by police operations that do not have the development of children as a specific objective. For example, by enforcing laws against domestic violence and child abuse and neglect, by helping to keep routes to schools free from drug dealing, and by reducing the power and stature of gangs, the police may contribute to establishing conditions within which children have a better chance of navigating the difficult course to responsible citizenship.²⁵

Moreover, the police also may contribute to community social and economic development by making themselves available for partnerships with communities that want to develop themselves. Police can be particularly valuable by dramatically improving the level of security in these neighborhoods so that hope is kindled and local residents have reasons for making investments in themselves, their children, and their property.²⁶

Still, many of the most valuable contributions the police can make to crime prevention are the results of activities that often are considered more superficial than these primary preventive efforts. For instance, police engage in a wide variety of efforts focused

on controlling the situational factors that seem to contribute to crime. Ron Clarke has both developed the theory of "situational crime prevention" and presented many examples of its success.²⁷ His colleague, Marcus Felson, has demonstrated the role that "routine activities" play in shaping the observed patterns of crime.²⁸ Presumably, if the routine activities that contribute to crime could be disrupted, some crime could be prevented. Lawrence Sherman has added to these ideas both by investigating the methods that would be most effective in preventing future domestic violence and by showing the possibilities of identifying and responding to "hot spots" and reducing the incidence of gun possession and carrying.²⁹ William Bratton, guided by a theory developed by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling,³⁰ has shown that it is possible to reduce serious criminal offending by focusing on less serious criminal offenses.³¹ All this suggests that controlling serious crime through means other than arrest is a plausible and important police activity.

Fear reduction and order maintenance. In addition to crime prevention, scholars have focused on the police capacity to reduce fear and enhance security. This line of work began with two findings: (1) levels of fear seem to be curiously independent of the objective risks of criminal victimization and are influenced more by signs of disorder than by changes in the real risks of criminal victimization;³² and (2) some police activities, such as foot patrol, reduce fear but not necessarily victimization.³³

These findings create an interesting strategic problem for police leaders and those who oversee their operations: Should they expend resources to reduce fear even if the actions they take leave actual victimization rates unchanged? On one hand, such efforts may seem insubstantial—a cheap public relations effort that produces a subjective rather than a real effect. Even worse, such actions might tempt citizens to behave in ways that would expose them to real criminal victimization. On the other hand, promoting security in the general population clearly is a police responsibility, and at least some portion of the fear that citizens experience is exaggerated—for example, they react more to fear of criminal attack than to other risks in their lives, such as the risk of traffic accidents.³⁴

Although the issue is still being debated, the argument for police acceptance of responsibility for reducing fear is growing stronger. This movement is partly a

recognition that fear is an important and costly problem in its own right. However, citizens' reactions when they are afraid also exacerbate the real crime problem.³⁵ When they abandon the streets or arm themselves, the streets may become more dangerous. Thus, managing citizens' responses to fear may make an important contribution to enhancing security and controlling crime.

Emergencies and calls for service. Finally, partly because the police department is the only agency that works 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and makes house calls, police will continue to be the "first responders" to a wide variety of emergencies. These emergencies can be medical (although ambulance services increasingly take care of these) or they can be social, such as deranged people threatening themselves or others, homeless children found wandering the streets with no parents to care for them, or drunks at risk of freezing to death after falling asleep on a park bench.

At various times, it has been declared that such problems should be viewed as social problems rather than law enforcement problems and that social work agencies, rather than the police, should respond to them. Generally, the police would not disagree. This work is dangerous, dirty, and sometimes heartbreaking. The police would be happy to be rid of it.

The difficulty, however, is that emergencies happen on the streets late at night. Even though social work agencies have tried to build up their emergency response capabilities, many of their resources still are expended on people who work in offices from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. rather than on the streets at night. As a result, much of this work falls into the hands of the police.

In addition to handling emergencies, the police must immediately be available and accessible to citizens for rapid responses to serious crime calls. Therefore, they also are available for a wide variety of other less urgent and perhaps less important purposes. It has been estimated that less than 5 percent of calls coming into 911 systems of city police departments are for serious crimes that could be interrupted by a rapid response.³⁶ The vast majority of calls are for crimes that were committed several hours earlier and for problems that citizens feel are urgent or important but do not necessarily involve crimes. Many citizens want someone to hold their hands, listen to their stories, mediate their

minor disputes, help them deal with troublesome friends and associates, and find a way to get into their locked apartments and cars.

When one views the police primarily as a component of the criminal justice system—focused on arresting people for serious crimes and starting the process of sending them off to prison—such calls seem like an enormous waste of police resources. Thus, the task becomes minimizing the occurrence of nuisance calls and finding ways to make the minimum response.

When one views the police as an agency of municipal government—with responsibilities for preventing crime and reducing fear as well as for arresting criminal offenders and achieving other purposes that local government considers important—the status of nuisance calls changes. Such calls may represent real opportunities for crime prevention. For example, loud noise in an apartment may be a prelude to a domestic homicide; if reports of the noise are heeded, a preventive intervention could occur. Similarly, reports of gangs of rowdy youths could foreshadow serious gang violence. Courteous responses to these calls could build relationships with individuals in the community that would increase the likelihood that they would trust the police enough to call when serious offenses occur and serious offenders threaten them.

These are reasons to take nuisance calls seriously, even if the police are focused only on crime control and crime prevention. So if we think about the more general purposes of local government and recall that the police are among the most visible representatives of it, then we might conclude that the police should take citizens' nuisance calls seriously simply because the police are the most frequently encountered representatives of local government. Just as citizens form their general views about State government through their experiences with the Department of Motor Vehicles, they may form their views about local government through the activities of the police. If the police are responsive, courteous, and helpful, citizens will have a favorable view of government in general. If the police are indifferent or rude and dismiss their concerns, citizens will form the opposite view. They might conclude not only that less government is better than more but that private security is better than public policing, which has important consequences for the quality of our collective lives.³⁷

So far, we have observed that if the police rightly understand their own mission and the operations that contribute to it, they will make contributions to the quality of urban life that are far broader than reacting to crime with arrests. The importance of their contributions becomes even more evident when we think about the role they play in supporting the operations of other government agencies and the work of private institutions such as families, communities, and commercial enterprises.

Police roles in supporting other government agencies

In addition to the police, many other government agencies and their workers contribute to the quality of urban life: for example, garbage collectors, firefighters, teachers, recreation staff, and social workers. The police contribute to overall government effectiveness and the quality of urban life by making the world a bit safer for these people to do their work and by creating an environment in which their efforts can be more efficacious and last longer than they would without the police.

In the past, we took it for granted that these workers would be safe and their contributions could endure; firefighters and social workers would be willing to visit all areas of the city, schools would be violence free, and playgrounds would deteriorate only from hard use rather than from vandalism. Now it seems that we have to work harder to ensure the conditions that we used to take for granted. The police play an important role in helping to create the conditions under which these agencies can be effective.

Much of the work the police need to do to support the work of these organizations is simply more of what was described above: more effective responses to serious crime, more imaginative efforts to prevent crime by working on situational factors, more attention to the conditions that produce fear, and greater willingness to respond to calls for emergency social services of various kinds and deliver quality services to citizens. Insofar as the police do this, they will make contributions to the performance of other city agencies.

Another part of police work is supporting other agencies' work without interfering with it. This is particularly important in dealing with school security, but it might also be important in dealing with child

protective services and recreational activities. In all these cases, the "face" of government should be a primarily *civil* face: students should see the teacher, desperate parents should see the social worker, young athletes should see the coach; they should not need to see the police. Yet, it might be important to both city workers and their clients to have a sense of the police being there in the background—to guarantee their security and remind them of their responsibilities. Constructing a presence that is reassuring and authoritative probably requires extensive discussions between the police and the other agencies. It is not easy to learn how to "buttress" and "backstop" without entirely usurping the function of another agency; yet, supporting without taking over is required when the police operate as an agency of municipal government.

Another important role of the police as an agency of local government is helping the government as a whole identify and respond to problems. Because the police are on the streets and in close touch with citizens, they are in a position to identify some of the key problems facing a local community and have a sense of their importance to the community. The Washington, D.C., Police Department has sought to institutionalize and exploit this capability by developing a form that the police fill out when they see a neighborhood problem that is threatening the quality of life in a local area. The completed form is forwarded to the relevant city department for action, and a copy is sent to the Mayor's Office of Operations.³⁸ This system takes advantage of the police as problem finders and creates the organizational conditions across the agencies of government that allow them to work collaboratively to solve local problems. Baltimore County, Maryland, saw the potential of a county-based "problem-solving government" after the police became involved in problem-solving activities that went beyond the usual police interests in preventing crime and reducing fear.³⁹ Once other agencies were brought into the system, the police could do a little less of the organization of problem-solving initiatives and more problem identification and assessment. Wesley Skogan has reported on the significance of this kind of work for the success of community policing in Chicago.⁴⁰

For the police to become effective problem solvers or problem identifiers, some kind of capacity must be created for the central government to mobilize other

government agencies in response to problems identified by the police as needing attention. Otherwise, the problem-solving efforts eventually fall flat. Thus, an effective local government is critical to the success of problem-solving policing, as well as the other way around.

Police roles in supporting private institutions

Finally, the police make important contributions to the quality of life and local governance by supporting the work of private institutions as well as other public agencies. This is crucial for achieving some of the primary preventive effects described above. For example, when the police act to prevent domestic violence and the abuse and neglect of children, they support a key private institution in its important function of raising children. When the police reduce burglaries, they give families a reason to invest and save. When they reduce fear, they create the conditions under which local merchants can succeed economically.⁴¹

As in the case of the support the police can give to public institutions, much of the success of the police in supporting private institutions may depend on learning how to work effectively with them, not only in general but on a case-by-case basis. The police capacity to help develop and sustain local community organizations may be particularly important.⁴² The police have an advantage in their efforts to support community organization development because their line of work is of intense interest to most citizens. Controlling crime and enhancing security is often one of the best organizing issues for communities. The police also have an advantage because they have access to resources—including people, vehicles, and an authoritative and reassuring presence—citizens need to accomplish their goals. With these capabilities, the police often are in a strong position to help struggling communities build “social capital” in the form of explicit understandings about the responsibilities and commitments citizens have to one another.⁴³ In this respect, the police can play an important role in accomplishing a purpose that U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno seems to have constantly in mind: “reweaving the fabric of community.”⁴⁴

A case example: the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, Police Department demonstrates an understanding of what the role of the police as an agency of municipal government should be. In Charlotte, both the police and city government as a whole recognize that what the police do not only affects crime but also contributes to the economic vitality and overall quality of life in the city’s neighborhoods. The police and other agencies are convinced of the connection between environmental decay and crime—and find in this connection further motive for pooling resources in the planning and implementation of problem-solving strategies at all levels across all city agencies. This is the philosophy of the 1990s in Charlotte.

To implement this philosophy, municipal government changed its structure. In 1993, the municipal government streamlined 29 departments into 9 “key businesses” and 4 “support businesses.” The consolidation of the city and county police departments coincided with this reorganization.⁴⁵ In addition to reducing costs, the reorganization was intended to enable a more customer-focused delivery of services to both individual citizens and neighborhood groups in the Charlotte area.

Charlotte also has adopted an ambitious neighborhood revitalization plan. In 1990, a group of influential leaders from business and government toured the city and found, just beyond the robust downtown center (called Uptown), neighborhoods in serious decay. In response, the city adopted the City Within A City (CWAC) initiative. CWAC is composed of 73 neighborhoods within a 4-mile radius around Uptown. Within CWAC, selected neighborhoods are targeted by local government for integrated service delivery and neighborhood capacity building.⁴⁶ In this reorganization for neighborhood improvement, the police play a critical role.

An agency of municipal government in action

How does the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department realize its self-concept as an agency of municipal government in its day-to-day operations? It starts at the top of the organization. Shortly after the municipal reorganization, city managers sought new leadership for the police agency that could fit within their program. In 1994, they hired Dennis Nowicki to serve as agency head. Since Chief Nowicki's appointment, the police department has pushed forward with Charlotte's Community/Problem-Oriented Policing (CPOP) strategy and worked closely with the Neighborhood Development Key Business⁴⁷ and other city agencies to ensure a coordinated approach to solving problems of economic vitality and safety in Charlotte's distressed neighborhoods.

Initially, Chief Nowicki found himself in charge of an agency that perceived itself, and was perceived by others, as existing outside of the municipal government structure. Rarely, if ever, had the police chief participated in the twice-a-month executive meetings between the city manager and the heads of the city departments. Early on, Nowicki made clear his willingness and desire to be included in municipal decisionmaking processes. As one manager in city government observed:

Chief Nowicki clearly sees himself as an agent of city government. He articulates an expansive definition of what police can do for neighborhoods. He understands the links between economic conditions and crime. And he has been an advocate in City Council of investment in *nonpolice* resources that impact safety and community vitality. That's an unusual position for a police chief to take in this zero-sum game of resource allocation—and in the current political dynamic around the issue of police resources.⁴⁸

Under Nowicki, members of the police department are realizing the advantages of participating in the city's team-based approach to neighborhood revitalization. Consider, for example, Officer Michelle Preston, a community coordinator in the Baker One district. Officer Preston is a member of one of the city's four experimental Code Enforcement Teams.

(Each of the four teams is assigned to one CWAC neighborhood.) The Code Enforcement Teams include city housing and litter code inspectors, job training and community empowerment field workers, and inspectors from the county's zoning and social services departments. Officer Preston's team includes a representative from a nonprofit mental health agency and three community residents. Working with the combined resources of this team, Officer Preston is able to quickly and easily bring the enforcement resources of the city to bear on the problems on her beat.

Officer Preston's Code Enforcement Team is targeting Grier Heights, a neighborhood in need of better housing and programs and strategies to address drug abuse and teen pregnancy. After a child fell through the floor of a house into the kitchen below, the team got the owners of the housing complex—dubbed "the hole" by officers—to agree to an inspection of all vacated units before new tenants move in. The team also hopes to push through a change in the city's litter ordinance that would require property owners to trim trees and clear up the brush in empty lots, which are frequently used as dumping grounds and also pose a safety hazard for police and residents. On her own, Officer Preston sought support from the Alcohol Beverage Control Board to revoke the liquor license of a neighborhood store that had been the source of numerous nuisance complaints.

The Code Enforcement Teams are clearly an effective way to clean up neighborhoods. They facilitate relationships and communication among agency workers (thereby enhancing accountability) and enable coordination of activities. Since only a few neighborhoods at a time can receive the benefit of these Code Enforcement Teams, perhaps their most important contribution is the heightened awareness they engender about the connection between the physical conditions in a neighborhood and crime. The police, in addressing chronic crime problems in other neighborhoods, are exhibiting higher levels of attentiveness to visible signs of neighborhood disorder and a willingness to act as the catalyst for a concerted municipal cleanup strategy.

Using measurement systems to guide operations and recognize their value

To maximize efficiency in resource allocation and service delivery, more than structural changes and interpersonal teamwork are required. Measurement

systems that can support analysis and decision making and record the contributions of police operations also are key. In Charlotte, several tools and systems have recently been developed to support the government's coordinated neighborhood revitalization strategy. The Quality of Life Index serves as a tool to measure neighborhood "wellness" and guide the allocation of resources. A citywide problem-tracking system ensures that no complaint gets lost in the maze of city agencies and that city resources are not wasted through lack of planning and analysis. A third system developed by the police department helps the police identify the physical conditions that foster crime. Each of these tools also contributes to the conception and functioning of the police as an agency of municipal government.

The Quality of Life Index. A few years into the CWAC initiative, city leaders began to ask about the impact of the resources being poured into targeted neighborhoods. Were the neighborhoods becoming better places to live? The city contracted with the Urban Institute of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), the university's primary public service outreach arm, to develop an index to measure neighborhood wellness. They wanted the index to serve as a performance assessment tool for the team of city agencies involved in neighborhood revitalization and as a diagnostic tool to help the team determine where the city's resources were most needed.

With input from all the key city and county agencies, UNCC created the Quality of Life Index, which provides indicators of a neighborhood's stability and sustainability along four dimensions—social, economic, physical, and crime. The index is based on measures of the health of a neighborhood's population; performance of youths in school; cultural and recreational opportunities; economic growth and opportunities; condition of the infrastructure; housing quality; accessibility to parks, commerce, and transportation; environmental quality; levels of crime; and other variables. Because U.S. census data are soon outdated, the developers of the index collected most of the data from city, county, and State agencies and selected private organizations.

The crime dimension includes data on juvenile delinquency, violent crime, and property crime. Each variable is a comparison between the rate of crime in the neighborhood and the citywide crime rate. The

number of hot spots, or clusters of crime incidents, in a neighborhood is another component of the crime dimension. Finally, data on the number of open-air drug markets are incorporated.

The Quality of Life Index does more than serve as a guide for resource allocation and a baseline for measuring progress. It also contributes to the conception and function of the police as an agency of municipal government in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. For example, by identifying the specific components used to measure the quality of life in a neighborhood, it encourages the police to think about what they can do—independently or in concert with other agencies—to affect each of those components. If school performance matters for the measure of a neighborhood's quality of life, then the police may be encouraged to think about what they can do to help improve the learning environment for children. The police might want to consider what they can do to motivate neighborhood institutions such as churches, schools, and libraries to offer more youth programs. Finally, the police may decide to be more attentive to conditions they observe that affect the health of residents, once they understand the importance of those factors to the overall stability of the neighborhood.

However, the Quality of Life Index does little to identify or motivate specific community- or problem-oriented policing activities. Only the hot spot and drug market variables provide some guidance for the police on where to focus their activities. If the Quality of Life Index included variables that measured actual police activity, it could serve both as an effective motivator for the police and as a research tool for exploring whether selected police activities are linked to desired outcomes. In its current form, the index represents only the potential for measuring what matters in Charlotte.

Problem assignment and tracking. Another mechanism for improving the response and coordination of city agencies in the delivery of services to neighborhoods is a citywide electronic problem-tracking system currently being implemented by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission. The system was designed by a team of representatives from each key business. The goal of the system is to ensure accountability, efficient problem solving, and regular feedback to citizens.

In this new system, any city department that receives a complaint from a citizen becomes responsible for ensuring that the problem is addressed. So, even if a complaint received by the Transportation Department is a Solid Waste Department responsibility, Transportation is required to take the lead role in coordinating the response. The receiving department enters the complaint into the citywide electronic database, searches the database for similar problems or complaint patterns, ensures that a team is assembled to address complex problems, and contacts and regularly updates the complainant about the city's service delivery plan. The system is supported and maintained by the Planning Commission's new Neighborhood Problem-Solving Office.

Once the problem-tracking system is fully operational, it is likely that the police will take responsibility for a wide range of complaints. It also is likely that these complaints will not be much different from the complaints that police already handle. However, the electronic record, easily retrievable and analyzable, will be a valuable source of information about the level and range of contributions the police make to the quality of life in the city and to other agencies.

Geographic Information System. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's Research and Planning Division has developed a Geographic Information System (GIS) to support officers' analyses of problems. GIS is based on the idea that disorder—the physical conditions in a neighborhood—is associated with the level and concentration of crime incidents. The system, once it becomes accessible to officers through their laptop computers, will permit the visual identification of possible environmental reasons for the high incidence of crime or complaints in a specific area. Based on their analysis, officers can begin planning strategies and organizing municipal resources to address the problem.

GIS provides several layers of information. It shows the location of crime incidents as well as ordinance violations. Through windshield surveys, the system's developers plotted the location of pay phones, bus stops, trails, abandoned buildings, and other neighborhood features. GIS provides information about property ownership, owner occupancy, zoning, demolition orders, and the condition of curbs, gutters, and sidewalks. Finally, the developers, with information from the power company about the lumination value of the

street lights, approximated the lighted areas on the streets and sidewalks. The developers are waiting for the completion of a planimetric database, which will provide a layer of information for the entire county, including the outlines of buildings, pavement, footpaths, tree lines, and all other physical features that can be digitized from an aerial photograph.

Though still in its pilot stages, GIS already has served as a problem analysis tool in selected neighborhoods. The police in some districts, unwilling to wait for the automated citywide expansion of the system, are building the database for specific neighborhoods manually, based on an address-by-address survey. The enthusiasm for the system among officers is further evidence of the broad concept police have of their responsibilities and scope of activity.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg police and measuring what matters

In addition to the measures that have been developed at the city level to support the overall strategy of improving the performance of municipal government and that have been used to understand and shape the police contribution to this broader goal, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department has developed its own systems for measuring its impact on the lives of citizens in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area. These include (1) surveys of citizens to determine levels of victimization and attitudes toward the police, and (2) evaluations of district-level efforts to reduce crime and solve public order problems.

Surveys. Surveying residents to assess their perceptions of safety and police services is a frequent, though not yet routine, activity of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department. Starting in 1995, a general public opinion survey, a survey to measure public perceptions of safety in Uptown, a survey of burglary victims, and a survey of domestic violence victims were administered. The surveys were developed and administered for the city by the Department of Criminal Justice at UNCC or by the police department's own Research and Planning Division.

The general survey measured residents' opinions about their neighborhoods and their problems; priorities for the police; perceptions of safety in their own neighborhoods and in other parts of the city; levels of victimization; and perceptions of police performance and satisfaction with police service, including traffic

enforcement, visibility, community policing activity, and courteousness of police officers. The Uptown survey was designed to help identify the factors that led residents to feel safe or unsafe in Uptown.

The surveys of burglary and domestic violence victims assessed their experiences with police handling of their cases, including how frequently the officers arrived in the amount of time the telephone operator told the victim it would take; whether the victim felt the responding officers gathered all of the available information relevant to the case; and whether victims felt the telephone operators, responding officers, and followup investigators were courteous and helpful. For the burglary victim survey, respondents were asked whether they thought the burglary incident could have been avoided through some action of their own or by the police.

Individual districts also developed and implemented customer satisfaction surveys of their own. One district conducted a telephone survey of individuals who had contacted the police. Another distributed postcards to citizens who had contacted the police that were designed to be mailed back to the district. Both of these district-level surveys focused on the respondents' perceptions of the courteousness, professionalism, and helpfulness of the police officers who responded to the call for service.

An ideal package of surveys, according to Richard Lumb, Director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's Research and Planning Division, would include surveys of four individual districts a year on a 3-year rotation cycle. Before the police department makes such an extensive investment, however, more results are needed from the surveys that already have been conducted. Problems identified in the surveys should be addressed and the strategies implemented to address them should be evaluated, Lumb says.

District evaluation. Evaluating problem-solving activities is as much a challenge for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department as it is for every other police department. The department's goal, however, is to develop a system not only to measure the results of past activities but also to stimulate further problem-solving efforts. To this end, the department has institutionalized a district evaluation that is submitted monthly to the chief. This evaluation is used not to compare one district's progress to another but to measure the progress in each district over time.

Originally, the district evaluation report was to include a broad collection of factors measuring safety conditions, citizen fear of victimization, social well-being, crime trends and patterns, and police staffing and performance levels. However, most of the proposed elements were dropped due to difficulties in collecting the data, both internally and from other agencies. The final district evaluation form focuses on staffing and personnel data, including the number of letters of appreciation and use-of-force and other complaints received by officers; workload data, such as calls for service and the number of community meetings attended; and data related to problem solving, such as the number of problems identified and solved (by type), volunteer hours, and open-air drug markets identified and closed.

Deputy Chief Bob Schurmeier, who heads the department's strategic planning group, believes that a truly relevant and workable district evaluation system will depend on automation of data collection and recordkeeping and the willingness of officers to observe and record information. "We have to sell the officers on the value of collecting, tracking, interpreting, and using the data to the benefit of the city," he says. "If they don't understand the usefulness of the data, they won't collect it properly or they'll make it up." According to Captain Jackie Maxwell of the Baker One district, the real successes of Community/Problem-Oriented Policing are "small wins" that usually go undocumented. "They're passed on verbally, if at all," she adds. "No one yet has come up with an adequate way to quantify qualitative things."

Summary and conclusion

In sum, it seems appropriate to view the police as an agency of city government as well as an important part of the criminal justice system. By doing so, however, the vision of how the police can contribute to city life is enlarged, thereby expanding the conception of the police mission. Since measures of police effectiveness must be designed to match the mission (i.e., the understanding of how the police might make important contributions to their cities), it follows then that the measures now used must be complemented by others. No one wants to relieve the police of responding to crime. Thus, all current police performance measures should be retained. The important question is what *new* measures should be added both

The Police as an Agency of Municipal Government

to remind the police that these other contributions are important and to properly account for the full value they contribute to their cities.

We are convinced that the police should add two new capabilities to their current measurement efforts. The first is a large, continuing capacity to survey citizens. A set of surveys should focus on different populations, ask different questions, and be designed to serve different purposes. For example, a general population survey should capture information about criminal victimization, reasons for not reporting crimes to the police, general attitudes toward the police, levels of fear, and types of self-defense citizens rely on to supplement the protection they get from the police. Such a survey is important, partly to develop a more accurate picture than we now have about the real level of criminal victimization, partly to measure levels of fear as well as victimization, partly to measure citizen satisfaction with the quality of police service, and partly to discover the level and type of self-defense that is being used to complement police efforts.

A customer survey should be administered to a sample of individuals who call the police (or ask officers on the streets or in station houses) for assistance. This survey would focus primarily on the quality of the service they received as well as the type of service they requested. This is most useful in gauging the performance of the police as representatives of city government. Perhaps this survey could be extended to include other government agencies and private institutions with whom the police work.

Finally, serious consideration should be given to conducting regular surveys of people stopped or arrested by the police. It might be important to learn what citizens who encounter the police as enforcers think of their experience. For example, such surveys occasionally have revealed evidence that some police were systematically victimizing citizens through extortion. Conversely, in some places where this technique has been used, the police have been surprised to discover that many people they arrest give them high marks for their professionalism and courtesy. Such surveys could provide a sense of how economically and carefully the police use the authority they are granted to do their job. This is at least as important as knowing how well they use the money entrusted to them.

The second capability the police should develop is a continuing process for evaluating their own proactive problem-solving efforts. In 1987, John Eck and William Spelman offered a vision of this process in *Problem Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News*, in which they describe the Newport News Police Department's overall problem-solving initiative: how many projects were initiated, what motivated them, and what resources were committed. All the efforts were at least informally evaluated through reports on whether the problem was solved and through letters from citizens who were satisfied. In addition, a few of the initiatives (those that were relatively large and seemed to have more general significance) were evaluated more formally through the use of statistics and other measures.⁴⁹

The Newport News report was produced as a research document designed to show whether problem-solving policing could be implemented and, if implemented, would be effective. Ideally, however, such a document would become part of a police department's regular reporting system. Indeed, it is *only* through a document of this type that proactive problem-solving efforts of the police can be measured accurately. Furthermore, these are the kinds of efforts that are likely to be important as the police turn their attention to preventing crime, reacting to it, and working cooperatively with other agencies to help solve a variety of city problems.

In addition to institutionalizing these kinds of reports, police agencies could join with other municipal agencies to develop measures of overall community well-being, much as Charlotte-Mecklenburg has done. If the police believe they control crime not only to ensure justice and enhance citizen security but also to contribute to the broader goal of improving the quality of community life, then they must find ways to measure factors such as levels of citizen satisfaction, confidence in the future and government, and the economic and social health of the city. It is no accident that the word "police" comes from the root word *polis* (the Greek word for a city or state, especially when characterized by a sense of community), for the police make important contributions to the quality of life in the *polis*. That is what they can and should do. Therefore, the value of the police should be recognized through their contributions to the quality of life, both politically and in the measurement systems the polity constructs to hold its agents accountable.

Notes

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44. Moore, "Security and Community Development."

45. Although a consolidated city-county agency, the police department is under the authority of the city manager. The combined Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police

Department has 1,600 members, 1,300 of whom are sworn officers.

46. Since the start of the CWAC initiative, the city also has identified, through a Neighborhood Statistical Area Assessment, clusters of neighborhoods outside CWAC that show signs of distress.

47. Neighborhood Development Key Business is a consolidation of the former community development, community relations, employment and training, economic development, and neighborhood services depart-

ments. The Community Empowerment Division is charged with building neighborhood capacity and, in so doing, provides auxiliary support for community policing. The division provides leadership and conflict resolution training for neighborhood residents and leaders, supports neighborhood problem solving, and finds ways to increase citizen participation in government.

48. Personal interview with Lynne Jones Doblin, Neighborhood Development Manager, January 29, 1997.

49. Eck and Spelman, *Problem Solving*.

