

Building an Organizational Foundation for the Future

by Andrew Harvey

The modern world has become a place of constant change and transformation. In this environment, success depends on how well organizations recognize and adapt to change. Management theorist Tom Peters put it very well when he said that the most successful organizations in the future will be the ones that "thrive on chaos."⁽¹⁾ Those that cannot identify and act on emerging issues are doomed to, at least, inefficiency and ineffectiveness and, at most, disaster and possibly even destruction.

What does this trend mean to law enforcement? With its traditional, paramilitary structure, law enforcement has proven slow to adapt to change. While traditional methods have brought success in the past, relying on these techniques in the future may be dangerous.

To achieve success in the next century, law enforcement agencies must recognize and welcome emerging trends. Part of this means changing the way they operate, from their organizational structures to their management of human resources.

This article discusses the strategies that law enforcement agencies need to implement in order to build an organizational foundation for the future.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND OPERATION

In order to deal with the rapidly changing environment in the 21st century, law enforcement's paramilitary hierarchy, with rigid controls and strict chains of command, must give way to a structure that emphasizes network-type communication and flexibility. The traditional organizational pyramid, with the chief at the top and line officers at the bottom, must become inverted. Instead, the community must sit at the top of the pyramid, followed by line officers, then supervisors, and finally the chief.

Late 20th-century belt tightening has put the squeeze on middle management, and in the 21st century, those middle managers who remain may disappear from the picture entirely. Better-educated employees who require less supervision and technological advancements that make information management easier will allow supervisors to increase their spans of control and supervise more employees at one time.

Organizational efficiency will become critical, as the privatization of law enforcement services increases. Currently, private security firms employ 2½ times more people than law enforcement agencies; this number will increase substantially by the year 2000.⁽²⁾ As a result, the police will find themselves increasingly in competition with private firms for law enforcement services. Without proper preparation, agencies will have difficulty dealing with this newly found competition.

In addition, police departments will acquire new specialized functions in response to both emerging issues and those that continue to require law enforcement attention. These new roles will affect the organizational structure of the department.

For example, the plight of the homeless likely will continue to be a pressing issue in the coming decade.⁽³⁾ Departments will need to create units that deal specifically with the homeless. Additionally, as the population ages, police departments increasingly will be called upon to

respond to the unique needs of the elderly. As a result, departments will require specialists in gerontology. Departments in the future also are likely to change their organizational structures to incorporate more formal partnerships with schools, community groups, and the media. The most effective leaders in these new organizational structures will be situational leaders. They will be flexible in their approaches, adapting their leadership styles to the situation at hand and the individuals involved. They will rise to the challenge presented by well-educated employees who do not submit to authority as workers have in the past.

These leaders will be consensus builders and agents of change. They will empower their employees and accept the attendant risks. They will be the bearers of ethical standards and will devote themselves to training and developing their staffs. Finally, these leaders will look to the future, anticipating trends while they perform day-to-day tasks.

HUMAN RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

Determining Future Staffing Levels

Business experts advise companies to work smarter, not harder. In the coming years, many organizations will see this concept come to fruition, as technological advances allow them to achieve the same or better results with fewer employees devoted to the task.

Technological advances will help law enforcement officers fight crime. Smart cars will allow officers to complete such tasks as checking criminal databases, storing and retrieving offender profiles, writing reports, and communicating with other officers, all from their patrol vehicles. Smart houses will help prevent break-ins by recognizing and admitting only authorized occupants. A single smart card will replace the numerous cards people carry now for identification, banking, and credit purposes. Biological advances, such as the "sober up" pill, will decrease crimes fueled by alcohol, which, according to futurist Gene Stephens, is linked in some way to 50 percent of all street crime.(4)

Perhaps the most significant changes for law enforcement will result from the move toward a cashless society. In such an environment, criminals could no longer rob citizens and banks of their cash. Cash-only criminal enterprises would disappear. At the same time, many lawbreakers will adapt and employ increasingly sophisticated strategies to ply their trades.

While technological breakthroughs will decrease the number of officers needed, other factors will cause exactly the opposite effect. First, changes in demographics have altered the nature of the nation's once-predominantly homogeneous communities. U.S. Census Bureau statistics indicate that between 1980 and 1990, the United States experienced a 13.2 percent increase in the number of African American residents, a 53 percent increase in Hispanics, and a 108 percent increase in Asians.(5)

Unfortunately, a rise in crime has accompanied this diversification, as cultures and values have clashed.(6) In addition, a predicted 14 percent increase in the 15 to 24-year-old population between 1995 and 2005 will raise crime rates, as the individuals in this age group are most likely to commit or fall victim to crimes.(7)

In essence, the demographic trends that will increase crime may cancel out the technological advances that will reduce it. As a result, in order to provide adequate service to the community in the next century, law enforcement probably will need to maintain current staffing levels.

Attracting and Selecting Personnel

In the 21st century, employee recruitment will remain the cornerstone of organizational success, just as it is today. In order to attract the best candidates, law enforcement agencies will need to continue to offer competitive salaries and benefits; however, these financial rewards will become less important. Employees will be less motivated by financial incentives and will look more for an organization with concern for employees. Future job candidates will seek out employers who offer such perks as flexible working hours, housing assistance, alternate work schedules, employer sponsored child care, and telecommuting options.

Police departments also will recruit a different type of employee. In the past, agencies have sought aggressive, "hook and book"-type officers. This one-dimensional approach to law enforcement will not suit the community and service oriented agency of the future. Thus, recruiters will seek candidates who understand the total concept of how they fit into the organization and the community.

Although some of today's testing methods still may have some relevance, personnel officers will need to study and employ testing procedures that identify the type of individual best suited to deal with the broad array of community issues that will exist. For example, departments might consider including community members on their employee selection committees.

More than likely, tomorrow's officers will have college degrees, not only in criminal justice but also in the social sciences. As a result, these officers will have a better understanding of how to serve their communities.

In addition, police departments will need to recruit employees who can help them understand and use the technological resources available in the years ahead. Finally, police agencies will hire according to the needs of the community, and their employees will reflect the diversity of the citizens they serve.

Making a Good First Impression

As they concentrate on selecting new employees, agency recruiters often forget that the reverse is true: new employees select the organizations where they work. The orientation process represents the first step in helping employees see that they have made the right choice.

Chances are, even the most senior employees remember their first days on the job. Truly, first impressions can last a career. As a result, employees must be exposed to organizational values right from the start, and agencies must treat orientation programs that instill these values as a priority, not an afterthought.

Placing New Employees

By the year 2000, employee placement may be quite different. In the future, law enforcement agencies will place greater emphasis on determining the individual skill levels and potential their police officers possess. Employee placement will become more of a science, with agencies matching officers to positions that take advantage of their unique abilities.

Training Employees

In a knowledge-based society, lifelong learning is a necessity,(8) and in the future, continuing education and training will become mandatory. In order to cultivate employees who can adapt to the ever-changing environment of the future, agencies will need to make a commitment to staff training and development.

Such training will take many forms. Although specialized expertise will remain important, cross-training will receive added emphasis.(9) Cross-training will help agencies deal with decreasing budgets and the call to do more with less. Employees trained in this way will benefit not only by becoming more versatile but also by broadening their overall perspective of the organization.

Furthermore, in order to benefit from new technology, agencies will need to implement training programs that teach employees how to use their new tools. In fact, managers must involve employees in the process from the very beginning, perhaps even before choosing the new procedure or equipment. As futurist John Naisbett has pointed out, high-tech approaches must be tempered with equal amounts of "high touch."(10) Employees control the destiny of new technology; unless they feel comfortable with it, they will abandon it.

Measuring Performance

Traditionally, evaluations have measured officers' performance in quantitative terms-the number of tickets written and arrests and field contacts made. In today's era of community policing, police departments find that they have a difficult time evaluating their officers. This will remain true in the future, as agencies ask even more of their staff members. Officers will become problem solvers and caretakers of the communities where they patrol. As such, their performances will be difficult to measure.

Management theorist Tom Peters says that what gets measured gets done.(11) If this theory is correct, then police departments will need to develop effective measurement systems that quantify patrol officers' achievements in tangible ways. Allowing community residents to evaluate officers with whom they have had contact may represent a viable evaluation method.

In addition, the annual evaluations that most employees now receive must give way to a process that generates continual feedback. Although once a year may suffice for a formal performance appraisal report, too often, employees hear nothing all year long, then get surprised by their supervisors' assessments of the quality of their work. If something in an employee's yearly evaluation comes as a surprise, then perhaps the boss needs a performance review.

Supervisors need to use the evaluation process to create a road map for employees that not only will assist them in their current roles but also will guide them into areas in which they express interest. This means that supervisors will be responsible for providing career development assistance to their employees on almost a daily basis.

Rewarding Achievement

Today's leaner budgets limit the monetary rewards available for deserving employees. In fact, in some departments, even yearly cost-of-living raises have become a distant memory. Furthermore, in the future, one of the most sought-after rewards will be praise and recognition from the boss for a job well done.

Although monetary incentives, educational bonuses, and specialized assignment pay will remain viable rewards, they will not take the place of sincere praise. As a result, department administrators will need to develop innovative ways to reward employees.

Some departments already are experimenting with unusual bonuses. The City of Helper, Utah, has a system in place that allows officers to receive up to 25 percent of the money they seize in drug forfeiture cases.⁽¹²⁾ Although some may contend that this type of incentive is improper, it represents "outside the lines" thinking, something police departments should strive to achieve.

Retaining Quality Employees

Employees have become less inclined to spend their entire careers with one agency. They will expect and demand certain things, or they will leave. In order to retain the best employees, agencies will need to go beyond the traditional enticements of salary, benefits, and retirement plans. This may mean allowing officers to serve part time and providing or supplementing day-care services.

Matching employees to positions, providing them with state-of-the-art tools and training, including them in the decision-making process, helping them grow within the organization, measuring performance regularly, and rewarding good work all help to keep employees satisfied and productive. In addition, department managers will need to develop creative ways to deal with employee burnout to help those who have lost their zest for their jobs.

Redesigning Job Descriptions

In the 21st century, jobs will need to be redesigned continually, as job descriptions become obsolete.⁽¹³⁾ New events and emerging issues will come so fast that the nature of individuals' jobs will change on a regular basis.

As part of the job design/redesign mechanism, law enforcement agencies must involve line-level employees, who will have firsthand information on how their jobs are evolving. The key to success will be a system where employees can give honest feedback without fear of reprisal. This should not be difficult in an organization where job enhancement, enrichment, and cross-training have become the cultural norms.

Maintaining Ethical Standards

In recent years, ethical concerns have come to the forefront in law enforcement. Now, ethical issues loom even larger as advances in technology place tremendous amounts of information literally at the fingertips of police officers, thus increasing the potential for abuse.

With every technological step forward, police departments must enact commensurate mechanisms to ensure that employees properly use their new tools. Still, the controls must not impede employees unnecessarily. This will require a delicate balancing act.

CONCLUSION

The Nordstrom Company has a one-page policy manual that instructs employees, "Use your own best judgment at all times."⁽¹⁴⁾ If only law enforcement could adopt this as its own policy manual. With the United States' possessing 5 percent of the world's population and 66 percent of its lawyers,⁽¹⁵⁾ law enforcement agencies no doubt will arm themselves against litigation with more detailed and complex policies.

Yet, while law enforcement will be held accountable as never before for both departmental actions and use of resources, agencies can do more to prepare for the future than write voluminous policy manuals. Instead, they can properly select, place, and train employees and ensure their success through appropriate job design, good organizational structure, and an emphasis on strong ethical values.

Finally, law enforcement leaders must recognize and act upon emerging issues. By doing so, law enforcement agencies can control their own destinies, rather than merely react to forces that have spun beyond their control.

Endnotes

- (1) - Tom Peter, *Thriving on Chaos* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987; HarperPerennial, 1991), XIV.
- (2) - Hallcrest Systems, Inc., in "Defining the Future," California State POST Command College Training Manual, January, 1995.
- (3) - The U.S. Census Bureau reported a total of 228,621 homeless people as part of the 1990 census, but due to the inherent difficulties in counting the homeless, this number most likely is very low. In *Universal Almanac* (New York: Universal Press, 1992), 215.
- (4) - Gene Stephens, "Drugs and Crime in the 21st Century," *The Futurist*, May-June 1992, 19-20.
- (5) - In *Universal Almanac* (New York: Universal Press, 1992), 199.
- (6) - Gene Stephens, "The Global Crime Wave," *The Futurist*, July-August 1994, 23.
- (7) - Cheryl Russell, "True Crime," *American Demographics*, August 1995, 30.
- (8) - Tom Peters, *Liberation Management* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 757.
- (9) - James R. Metts, "Supercops, The Police Force of Tomorrow," *The Futurist*, October, 1985, 31.
- (10) - John Naisbett, *Megatrends* (New York: Warner Books, 1984), 35.
- (11) - Supra note 1, 605.
- (12) - Newsbrief, *USA Today*, February 1, 1995, 3.
- (13) - Supra note 1, 605.
- (14) - Supra note 1, 454.
- (15) - Marvin Cetron, "An American Renaissance in the Year 2000," pamphlet, World Future Society, 1994, 11.