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Police Officer v. Administration Attitudes Toward Organizational Change

An Administrative Research Paper
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by

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ABSTRACT

Organizational change in the public and private sector is interesting and must be handled appropriately, so that all interested parties including the public are provided the best available end product. The manner in which change is implemented makes a difference. Those charged with implementing changes within organizations will be more enthusiastic and will help the process, instead of serving as a progress barrier, if they are included in the planning and implementation stages.

The attitudes of police administrators and non-administrators toward change within police organizations were studied. Several officers and administrators from a small Dallas County suburban police department were surveyed concerning their perceptions of organizational change. The respondents were asked five short questions concerning their perceptions of change, intended to determine if there are differences in the ways administrative and non administrative officers view change. Results indicate there is little difference in the respondents' perceptions of change in the department surveyed.

In conclusion, change should be implemented cautiously and thoughtfully, while encouraging the input and participation of both high- and low-rank officers. The employees who will be carrying out the change process can have a substantially positive or negative affect on the project, depending on their behaviors and views about the change itself Police administrators should include employees in the change process when legally, morally, and ethically possible.

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Introduction

The history of professional law enforcement dates back to the 1800's in the United States, with its style and structure patterned after the London Metropolitan Police Department (Hale, 1994). Over time, American law enforcement has developed a culture of its own. Technology has provided American police officers with tools such as vehicles, radios and computers, to name a few. But one major issue persists; crime continues to be a problem. According to Incident Based Reporting (IBR) data, the southern Dallas County cities of Cedar Hill, DeSoto, Duncanville and Lancaster all experienced increases in their Part I crimes reported for the year 2000 (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2000). Collectively, these four cities represent a population of approximately 120,000 people. Even with the advent of better technology and more educated personnel, crime continues to be problematic for our society.

Social programs and innovative policing ideas are constantly evolving and are being implemented in our communities. Administrative personnel usually design such programs, while non-administrative police officers are asked to fulfill the change mission. The purpose of this research paper is to compare non-administrative police officer attitudes to those of administrative officers on implementing change. It is hypothesized that non-administrative police officers will not be in favor of change, while administrative officers will favor change.

The research methods to be utilized will consist of obtaining historical data concerning the implementation of change in law enforcement and non-law enforcement organizations. In addition, an attitudinal survey of non-administrative and administrative police officers from within a suburban Dallas County police department will be conducted. This survey will be conducted using acquaintances of the surveyor, but each of the responses was kept anonymous

and the respondents were asked to identify themselves only in rank. The researcher is unable to connect the responses with any of the respondents, because of their anonymity.

Ideally, the attitudinal survey should be conducted from a cross-section of Texas police officers, in order to obtain a larger, more accurate picture of how police officers view organizational change; however, fiscal constraints preclude the larger sampling objective. The anticipated findings of the research will indicate that non-administrative and administrative officers have differing viewpoints concerning the implementation of change in the organization. The research will also show that administrative officers support change while non-administrative officers will feel alienated and left out of the change process, which includes developmental strategies for change, resulting in their lack of support of projects implemented by administration.

The implications of this research reach far into police organizations and provide an informal avenue for officers to communicate their opinions of administration's devotion - whether positive or negative - to encourage non-administrative participation and to consult with non administrative officers about organizational change issues. The implementation of programs and modern policing techniques should not be taken lightly. However, in some police organizations, reforms are made without the input and buy-in of the department's most fundamental resource, the employees who will be asked to support the reforms and programs implemented by their respective administrative staffs. There is a price to be paid when the change process fails within our nation's police agencies. Communities are plagued with continued crime and with the loss of tax dollars that could have been used in a more proactive, rather than reactive, way. Governmental agencies charged with implementing programs at taxpayer expense must ensure

these programs are put into place and supported by those who are going to be working on the frontline.

Review of Literature

Most people, from all occupations, have experienced positive and negative change in the workplace. Positive change may be as simple as receiving a much-deserved promotion after years of service with a company. Negative change might be the restructuring of an employee's work hours without consultation of the personnel affected. Police organizations are no different in regard to implementing change. Some police organizations implement change in a positive way, while others fail to do so. This research paper will compare non-administrative police officer attitudes to those of administrators, toward the implementation of change in police agencies.

An example of a police administrator's attempt to inspire positive change within an organization can be found within the Madison, Wisconsin Police Department. According to Sheehan and Cordner (1995), quality leadership is an approach to management that allows managers the opportunity to foster a positive process for implementing new ideas into their respective organizations.   Sheehan and Cordner list the following 12 principles of quality management that the Madison, Wisconsin Police Department adopted:

1. Believe in, foster, and support teamwork.
2. Be committed to the problem solving process; use it, and let data not emotions drive decisions.
3. Seek employees' input before you make key decisions.
4. Believe that the best way to improve the quality of work or service is to ask and listen to employees who are doing the work.
5. Strive to develop mutual respect and trust among employees.
6. Have a customer orientation and focus toward employees and citizens.

7.   Manage on the behavior of 95 percent of your employees, and not the 5 percent who cause problems.

8.   Avoid "top-down," power-oriented decision making whenever possible. Improve

9.   systems and examine processes before placing blame on people. Encourage

10.   creativity through risk-taking, and be tolerant of honest mistakes.

11.   Be a facilitator and coach. Develop an open atmosphere that encourages providing and accepting feedback.

12.   With teamwork, develop with employees agreed upon goals and plan to achieve them.

The Madison, Wisconsin Police Department's philosophy looks promising on paper, but unless it is followed by the administration, its verbiage will ring hollow with its employees. Departments across the country have implemented programs that should be universally thought of as on the cutting-edge of law enforcement. However, not all agencies implement these programs with the same care and forethought. A good example of such a program or philosophy is Community Policing, which has been around for several years, but still thrives or fails, because of the way it is implemented within a community. According to Stojkovie, Klofas and Kalinich (1994), the issue of implementing Community Policing is not merely directing police officers to provide a service, but instead is an innovative way of doing business. Police chiefs who are planning such a departure from the normal routine must understand that they will have a monumental task ahead of them. This is just one example of the difficulties that lie ahead for police administrators who plan to implement new programs in their organizations and communities.

Other changes that may, and probably will, affect police agencies are not always accepted by law enforcement. These changes are typically implemented at the legislative level or as public reforms relating to law enforcement. Currie (1989) explains that criminal justice practitioners have reached a point in time where sweeping changes and reforms have to be made in the

system, and such changes will involve changing laws, family values and social programs, all in

an attempt to deliver services that will be required in the 21st century by criminal justice

agencies.

According to Baker (1976) police administrators must realize that open minds will prevail and

they should allow new philosophies and approaches to be explored in their agencies. He also

cautioned that change is a two-way street and employees must remain optimistic toward change.

Another issue concerning the implementation of change involves communication.

Communication between management and the line officer is arguably the most important

element in affecting positive change in an agency. According to Lee (1990) public sector

employees have differing roles and values than do their counterparts in management. Lee argues

that public sector employees and managers actually gain from these conflicting roles and as such

the conflict helps to facilitate communication between all involved. Lee (1990) also argues that

public sector employees are expected to support the values and political views of management

along with organizational goals and objectives. These issues may be in competition with the line

employee's personal interests, such as better pay and status.

Approaches have been made to assist administration and influencing change. One such

approach involves the use of "Quality Circles." According to Melancon (1984) police officers

are more educated and come from more diverse backgrounds than ever before. As a result,

Melancon contends that administration should involve the employee in the change process

through group discussion, which are called "Quality Circles."

The change process is no stranger to private sector businesses. There is a multitude of books

and help programs available to business owners and managers, describing how to communicate

change within their respective organizations. According to Klotter (1996) public and private sector businesses have attempted the change process without success because they fear change. Through his experiences with change, Klotter has found that change does not have to be painful. In fact he maintains that, historically, attempts at change may meet with better results if we prepare ourselves for change by communicating the process in a manner that is not threatening.

According to Maxwell (2000) people and organizations must have a willingness to change. Maxwell maintains that some people are entrenched in their beliefs and therefore are unwilling to change. He found that an organization's unwillingness to change was one of the top ten reasons why the task fails.

Another author on the subject of change and becoming and effective leader has written a book that outlines how people and organizations can become successful. According to Covey (1989) synergy is an important aspect of becoming effective. Covey maintains that synergy means "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." Restated, there may be many parts to an organization, but if all of the parts are not working together, the organization may not be successful, or at least not as successful as it could be if the parts were performing as a team.

Administrators or those in power implement programs without including all of the stakeholders in the planning of the program. The literature seems to recommend that those who are implementing programs should reach out to the people who will be tasked with implementation. Law enforcement agencies are like private sector organizations when it comes to implementing ideas and new programs: they want to succeed.

Police administrators must be mindful of their greatest resource - their employees - and allow them to become involved in the change process while undertaking such a venture. According to

Crane (1999) the leaders of any organization who intend on changing its culture must fully support the change. Crane insists that leaders accept accountability for the successes and failures of the change process and its results.

The literature seems to agree that fundamental change is not an easy endeavor. Organizational change deals with human interests, particularly employees on the job who have a vested interest in the implementation and outcome of the change. All of the authors cited, whether specifically stated or implied, eluded to the proposition that change should be carefully planned and the administrative personnel implementing change should seek the participation and opinions of their most valued asset - the employee.

Methodology

This research paper will identify factors that affect the change process and the attitudes of administrators and non-administrators involved in the process. A review of the available literature on the subject of change and implementing change within organizations will be conducted and certain important areas of discussion are pointed out and included in the Review of Literature section of this report.

It is hypothesized that non-administrative police officers are resistant to change while administrative police personnel support it. The hypothesis is supported by the suggestion that administrative personnel in organizations tend to be the ones responsible for implementing change and therefore they are supportive of their own ideas and projects. The opposite exists with the line personnel. Line personnel are usually required to submit to administrative ideas

and as such, they may become resistant to the thought of implementing something about which they were never consulted.

The method of inquiry used during this project was a questionnaire. Administrative and non administrative police officers from a small suburban Dallas County city were surveyed concerning their perceptions of change. The respondents were assured that they would remain anonymous in an attempt to gamer truthful answers to the questions. A total of 32 administrative and non-administrative police officers were surveyed. Five of the 32 officers were considered administrative. That is, they were classified as Lieutenant, Commander and Chief. The remaining 27 officers were non-administrative police officers. The response rate for this research questionnaire was 100% for the administrative officers (all five administrative officers responded), and 62% of the non-administrative officers responded (27 non-administrative officers surveyed, 17 responded).

Findings

The respondents were asked five short questions concerning change. Question number one asked, "Does your department encourage feedback from non-administrative officers before implementing change?" All five administrative officers answered yes. Ten of 17 responding non-administrative officers answered yes to this question (see Figure 1).
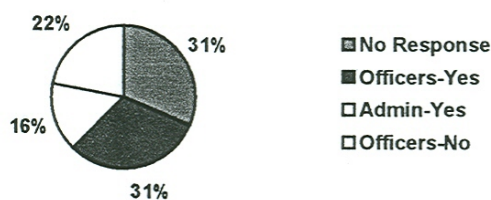

Figure 1

Question #1
Does your deparment encourage feedback from non-administrative officers before implementing change?

Question number two asked, "Do you feel that administrative personnel want police officer input concerning change?" Again, all five of the administrative officers answered yes, while 13 of the 17 non-administrative officers answered yes (see Figure 2).

| Figure 2	Question #2
	Do you feel that administrative personnel want police officer input concerning change?
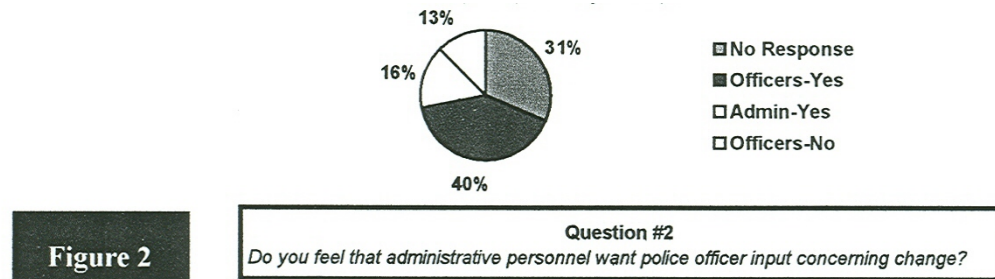
Question number three was only to be answered by non-administrative officers and it asked if non-administrative officers would like to be consulted before change was implemented. All 17 respondents expressed that they would like to be consulted (see Figure 3).
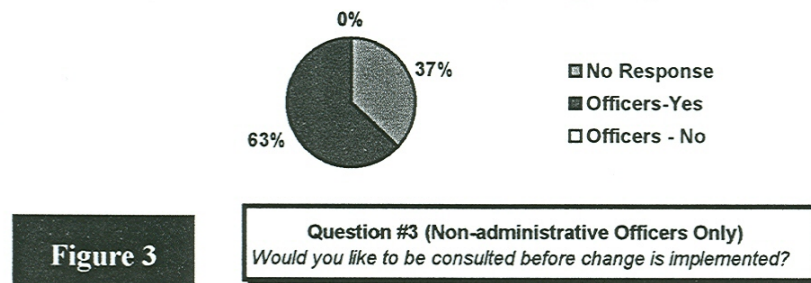
Figure 3	Question #3 (Non-administrative Officers Only)
	Would you like to be consulted before change is implemented?

Question number four asked, "What percentage of time do you feel the administration spends facilitating the change process in your organization?" All five administrative officers answered with ranges of 6-10%, while the non-administrative officers varied in their answers from 1 to 20% or more.

The final question, number five, asked, "Given your experience, do you favor change in your organization?" All five administrative officers answered yes, and 16 of the 17 responding non-administrative officers answered yes. An interesting aspect to point out concerning this research questionnaire is that the type of change was not specified to the respondents (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Question #5
Given your experience, do you favor change in your organization?
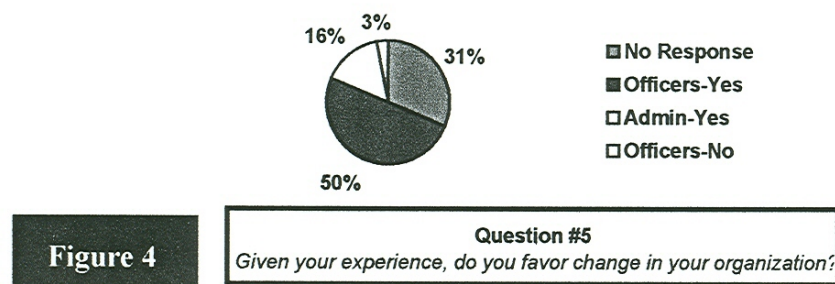
The findings of this research indicate that police administrators and non-administrators share the same perception or attitude toward organizational change. The literature review provided a look at the importance of including line personnel in the change process. Evidence was found in the literature review that supports the idea that change is an important aspect in organizations and it should be implemented in a manner that will allow the personnel charged with carrying out the mission of the organization to feel as if they are stakeholders.

This particular research project focused on the attitudes of police administrators and non administrators concerning their perceptions of change. A small police department in southern Dallas County, Texas was the focus of the survey. The respondents were asked five short questions concerning their perceptions of change in the organization. There were no definitions given and no specific change ideas relayed to the respondents.

Interestingly, all five administrators answered the same on all five questions. Answers to question number one indicated that all five of the administrative officers feel the department encourages feedback from non-administrative officers before implementing change, while ten of the 17 non-administrative officers feel the department encourages feedback. It was determined on question number two that 13 of 17 non-administrative officers feel the department wants non-administrative officer input concerning change. All 17 non-administrative officers indicated in question number three that they would like to be consulted before change is implemented.

Question number four asked what percentage of time the respondents feel administrative spends facilitating the change process. The answers varied from 1 to 20% for the non administrative officers and between 6 and 10% for the administrative officers. The fifth and final question asked, "Given your experience, do you favor change in the organization?" All five administrative officers answered yes to the question, while 16 of 17 non-administrative officers answered yes.

The findings indicate that administrative and non-administrative officers have some small differences of opinion in this department; however, the difference is minimal. The non-administrative and administrative officers appear to be in agreement with each other about consultation of personnel and their sense of urgency regarding change. The most interesting finding in this research is that none of the respondents were given any idea or concept about what type of change may be involved, yet they all answered that they favor change. The following graphs will illustrate the results of the research survey:

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to obtain some idea of the differences between administrative and non-administrative police officers concerning the implementation of organizational change in police agencies. It was hypothesized that administrative officers would favor and support organizational change, while non-administrative officers would not.

Based on the findings of this research, it was determined that the police agency that participated in this study has more continuity than anticipated, across the board for police agencies in general. This study revealed that all five administrators who responded to the survey agreed that they favored change. Sixteen out of 17 non-administrators who responded to the survey favored change. The findings show that an overwhelming majority of the department supporting change, although the type of change was not identified in the survey instrument. These findings did not support the hypothesis of the researcher and they may not be the same for all agencies.

Due to time and budgetary constraints, this study was hindered by certain limitations. One major limitation was funding. An adequate, more comprehensive survey of a cross section of police administrators and non-administrators statewide or nationally would require a relatively large budget, not to mention the longer timeframe required.

Another limitation was the development of the research instrument. The researcher developed an instrument that was believed to encourage honest answers to the questions; however, like in many surveys, the questions may have been misleading. The answers in the survey depend on the respondent's interpretation of the question's meaning.

The final limitation involved the group that was surveyed. The police administrators and non-administrators that were surveyed were acquaintances of this researcher. All attempts to reduce bias in the survey were made by making sure the respondents did not identify themselves by name or badge number. The fact remains that the respondents were known to the researcher, which may have created bias in the responses submitted.

Findings of this research contradict the hypothesis and show that the opinions of the police officers surveyed concur with the opinions of their administrators.

In addition to police agencies, the results of this study may be applied to organizations in the private sector. Many times administrators or those in power implement programs without including all of the stakeholders in planning the program. The literature seems to recommend that those who are implementing programs should reach out to the people will be tasked with its implementation. Law enforcement agencies are like other private sector organizations when it comes to implementing ideas and new programs: they want to succeed. In conclusion, police administrators must be mindful of their greatest resource - their employees - and allow them to become involved in the change process.

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APPENDIX

ATTITUDINAL SURVEY

This survey instrument is designed to compare police officer attitudes to those of administrative level officers concerning organizational change. Please answer the following questions by circling the answer that best describes your feeling:

1. Does your agency encourage feedback from non-administrative officers before implementing change?

    YES   NO

2. Do you feel that administrative personnel want police officer input concerning change?

    YES   NO

3. Would you prefer to be consulted by administration prior to the implementation of change in your organization? Only to be answered by non-administrative officers.

    YES   NO

4. What percentage of time do you feel the administration spends facilitating the change process in your organization?

    1-5%   6-10%   11-15%   20% or More

5. Given your experience, do you favor change within your organization?

    YES   NO

Please indicate your rank:_____

Thank you for participating in this research project. Please return this survey to:

Commander Patrick Stallings
Lancaster Police Department
1501 North Dallas Avenue
Lancaster, Texas 75134