

THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN IN 21ST CENTURY POLICING ORGANIZATIONS

By Dr. Merlin Switzer

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Things alter for the worse spontaneously, if they be not altered for the better designedly.
Francis Bacon

The law enforcement profession is again battered by the cyclical fiscal upheaval that comes around every few years. We are not yet ten years into this new century and the issues that confront us, as well as the challenges that lie ahead, threaten to overwhelm us. Yet, many law enforcement leaders do not take time to think and act strategically. As Francis Bacon suggests, "Things alter for the worse spontaneously, if they be not altered for the better designedly." Similarly, a police futurist, Dr. Bud Levin, said of law enforcement, "Short term thinking abounds and strategic thinking does not." What are the forces of change that will challenge your current organizational design? Have you thought about how the design of your organization may need to change as we move into the 21st Century? This article will provide a perspective on both questions and present a framework to consider when making organizational design changes.

When you hear the term "organizational design," what words or phrases come to mind? Is it organization chart and/or organizational structure? Actually, it is much more! Jay Galbraith, author of Designing Organizations says, "The framework of organizational design is the foundation on which a company bases its design choices. The framework consists of a series of design policies that is controllable by management and can influence employee behavior." ¹

Galbraith recommends his Star Model for choosing an effective organizational design. The Star Model provides a framework that identifies five categories for consideration when making organizational design changes: strategy, structure, people, process and rewards. When these five categories are properly aligned, the organization will operate most effectively to guide employee behavior in ways that produce the desired results. This framework will be used to explain the role of organizational design as a tool for leaders to use in improving organizational effectiveness as we move further into the 21st Century.

What forces will be a catalyst for change? The next section will provide helpful insights.

Forces of Change

There are forces at work that are causing significant change. According to Sarah Miller Caldicott, great grand-niece of Thomas Edison and coauthor of Innovate Like Edison, the primary reason for this change is due to the transition of the Industrial Age to the Information Age. “Information is not yet knowledge. Organizations will be charged with taking information sets, looking for patterns, and creating products or services through innovation...Putting information together in new ways is what the Information Age is teaching us.” Caldicott identified these additional forces:

- Increasing complexity in the world, which is shrinking the decision-making horizon to three years or less.
- Social networking that allows one to find real expertise faster.
- The Gen X and Y mindset have been acculturated with technology, social networking and a high level of visual stimulation, which gives them access to real-time information allowing faster decision-making.
- A deeper culture that emphasizes learning and flexibility in light of the developing supercomputing capacity that allows organizations to get information faster, even from the field.

Dr. Bud Levin agreed that social networking is increasingly important in a global community where jurisdictions and crime are morphing as crime increasingly crosses country borders, such as with child pornography. Different networks have been developed that gives officers access to other officers around the world. One such network is “The Big Pig,” which has a couple thousand officers from around the world who use the network to share information and link with officers dealing with similar problems.

Another police futurist, Dr. Gene Stephens, believes lack of resources will put pressure on some departments to move toward public safety agencies tasked with delivering police, fire, and EMT services. This will require a more highly trained staff who will demand higher salaries. On the topic of declining resources, Dr. Levin felt the current fiscal crisis is endemic of the future causing police to scale back to basic service levels. Citizen groups desiring more service will look for other options to supplement the basic police service.

Dr. Greg Warren, Wilmington University professor and retired Delaware State Police Captain, believes litigation over issues internal to police departments is a driving force for change. Many of these issues pertain to character, which relates to who is hired and retained, as well as how employees are developed over the course of their career.

In summary, there are a variety of forces pushing for organizational design changes in police organizations. Examples include: innovation in the Information Age, complexity in an increasingly global community, social networking, technology, shifting employee mindsets, shrinking resources and a litigious society. The next section will provide insights into the role of organizational design.

Organizational Design

The forces described in the prior section essentially communicate that the environment in which organizations operate today, including policing organizations, has changed. Susan A. Mohrman and Ian I. Mitroff in their article, "Business Not As Usual," capture this thought, "The deeper problems...result from America's failure to produce quality products that can compete in world markets. The root of that failure is the inability to realize that the rules of doing business have changed fundamentally and permanently."

You laugh and think, "Yea, but that's business. We don't produce products or compete in the world market." Wrong...you do produce a product and it is called service. Chief Todd Wuestewald, of Broken Arrow Police Department, Oklahoma, had this to say, "We are a business and, as such, are bound to be cost effective and innovative to reduce costs...and bring information from people to the top of the organization."

Organizations...even in policing...are at risk of going belly up. An Ohio study cited by Edward R. Maguire and William R. King found that during a twenty-nine year period ending in 1999, 115 police departments disbanded and only 15 were formed.² Two reasons organizations disband are lack of resources and/or poor use of resources.

How many times in the past week did you receive scam related spam? Have you found human-trafficking in your city? Are the tentacles of networked organized criminals spreading through your city, such as the Russian Mafia? Have jobs in your city been displaced due to moving jobs off-shore resulting in higher unemployment rates? The potential list of globalization issues is a long one...and getting longer.

Jay Galbraith writes, "The business world has changed. The solutions to many of today's issues have their roots in new organizational designs."³ In other words, the role of organizational design is to help an organization achieve its mission. When the operational environment changes, so must the characteristics of the organization's design.

Using Galbraith's Star Model, let's look at how each category plays a role in organizational design.

Strategy – Strategy refers to the organization's vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives. Pursuing these is critical for organizational success. For example, many policing organizations began to gravitate to community policing in the 1980's. This switch from traditional policing to community policing reflected a change in strategy, one that put a priority on building community partnerships in order to address crime and quality of life issues in the community. Community policing fundamentally involved a philosophical mindset shift from a perspective that police are solely responsible for fighting crime to one of partnership to address not only crime, but quality of life issues.

In order to accomplish the strategy, the other categories of organizational design...structure, people, processes and rewards...should be adjusted in ways that will support the strategy. Failure to develop this alignment will undermine a successful transition.

Structure – Structure primarily refers to how power and authority are dispersed in the organization. Typically, structure is manifested in four ways: specialization, organizational shape, distribution of power and departmentalization.

Using the community policing example, when organizations adopted a community policing strategy, many of them developed specialized Community Policing Units. This not only signified a move to specialization, but changed the organizational shape by adding another box to their organizational chart. Part of the success of community policing was pushing decision-making to lower levels of the organization by empowering officers to enlist assistance from staff in other divisions internal to the police department, as well as enlisting help from external stakeholders to facilitate problem solving.

The role of structure is to support the organization’s strategy. Dr. Bud Levin says of the typical police hierarchy, “Policing is an industrial-age, linear, hierarchical, centralized, specialized, and tradition-bound enterprise. It is paramilitary, having adopted the least functional characteristics of the military (e.g., command, hierarchy, tradition, and rigid structure) while abandoning the most vital characteristics of the military (e.g., quality training, research, team orientation, leadership development, and mission/values consciousness).”⁴

According to Caldicott, “When you have complex decisions, you have to go higher up the organization. You lose a lot when you have to go to the top of the pyramid to get a decision...Information, knowledge, and passion is lost along the way.” As a result, Caldicott maintains that organizations need to be flatter to make faster decisions and speed innovation.

Chief Todd Wuestewald, Broken Arrow Police Department, implemented a structural change to empower officers at varying levels of the department to participate in a shared leadership program called Leadership Team (LT). He described it as a parallel organization comprised of 12 people who make important policy decisions about the organization. The Chief’s Office does not participate and all decisions made by the LT are supported by senior management. According to the article “Shared Leadership: Can Empowerment Work in Police Organizations?” written by the Chief Wuestewald and Brigitte Steinheider, organization commitment, employee productivity, and labor relations have improved as a result of implementing the LT. The LT approach served to “flatten the organization” by involving frontline employees in this decision-making process.

Chief Richard Myers, Colorado Springs Police Department, suggests that a networked structure, which is a matrix type of organization, could be more effective. In this type of structure, an employee might answer to more than one boss depending on the type of reporting relationship. He provides this example:

Neighborhood beat officers receive the “big picture” (mission and values) from the chief. They receive fiscal and human resource direction and support from local governmental resources. They identify priorities through the direction provided by their Neighborhood Advisory Council. Intelligence is received from local intelligence centers, and the beat teams consult the analysis center to identify strategies in problem solving. Problem identification is developed with input from intelligence, neighborhood citizens, beat officers, and the chief and local elected officials. Expert and specialized input comes from community-based resources such as universities and business leaders.⁵

The crux of the matter is this: what structure will optimally support an organization’s strategy? Policing organizations in the future will likely be different than today if leaders are to meet the needs of an increasingly complex environment.

People – This aspect refers to the human resource policies in an organization and pertains to recruiting, selection, rotation, training and development of employees. Developing a high performing, engaged workforce does not happen by accident.

In her article, “Designing Organizations for Growth: the Human Resource Contribution,” Susan Mohrman says, “...given the shortage of talent and the increasingly competitive environment there. Organizational approaches must foster extremely high levels of employee engagement and customer focus. Motivational and talent issues can be addressed in part through selection, training, and rewards, but also through the design of work systems characterized by integrated and seamless customer experiences.”

This implies a more holistic approach involving workforce planning...a cradle to grave perspective about the employee lifecycle. A sub-set of workforce planning is succession planning, which is preparing employees to accept greater levels of responsibility within the organization.

When organizations made the transition to community policing, many changed their selection process to recruit and hire officers who would be a better fit with the organization’s new strategy. New and existing officers were trained in community policing and problem solving concepts. Some organizations changed their promotional processes to promote leaders who embraced community policing. These are examples of appropriate steps to align people with the organization’s strategy.

As the strategy and structure of organizations change in the 21st Century, human resource practices will play a critical role in aligning people to support these changes. Susan Mohrman and Edward Lawler III support this assertion in their article, “Transforming the Human Resource Function,” when they write, “Clearly one of the most important challenges every human resource function faces is to reinvent its structure and organization so that it can deliver in the future the kinds of systems and business partnership behaviors that will make its organization more effective.”

Process – Process refers to how an organization functions. Some processes are vertical, such as planning. Other processes are horizontal...or lateral...and are designed around workflow, such as the handling of a citizen's call from the initial call to the final resolution.

Both vertical and horizontal processes are important. As organizations grow, in an increasingly chaotic environment, lateral processes become more important as a means of coordinating activities. Lateral processes help an organization speed decision-making, build stronger networks, and enhance problem-solving. Policing organizations benefit from effective processes that can deliver these kinds of results.

In community policing, officers often work collaboratively to solve crime and quality of life issues. Crime analysis was added as a tool to provide officers with up-to-date information about emerging crime trends. Armed with this information, officers work together across shifts to collect additional information and develop strategies to stop the problem. Frequently, they involve citizens, community-based organizations, other city departments, and/or staff in other areas of their organization, such as investigations. This is all part of the problem solving process.

If Chief Myers is right about the emergence of networked policing, for example, what processes will be needed to support that kind of structure? Where there is a matrix type of relationship, identifying and implementing processes that support the structure and strategy are essential. Without them, people will have problems making the network function properly.

Rewards – Rewards provide the incentive and motivation to attain the organization's strategy. Rewards serve to reinforce the desired behaviors – behaviors that will support the organization's strategy. Rewards can be extrinsic, such as monetary incentives, promotion, and/or formal recognition, or intrinsic, such as by providing a feeling of accomplishment or esteem.

Early in one organization's foray into community policing, a team of officers identified and solved a very challenging issue. Their excellent work was submitted for the Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem Solving Award. Their project was selected as a finalist for the award, one of the final five. Though they were not selected for the award, a manager submitted them for recognition within their organization. The recognition was initially denied. After a passionate appeal, the officers received recognition. The point of this example is that the reward system of the organization was not structured to reward behavior consistent with the newly adopted community policing and problem solving strategy.

Too often, organizations shift aspects of strategy, structure, people or processes, but fail to align rewards with the change. When this occurs, rewards become ineffective or counter-effective by rewarding behavior that is at odds with the shift.

The right rewards will be essential in the redesign of organizations as we move further into the 21st Century. Rewards also answer the question of, “What’s in it for me?” for the individual, team, and organizational workforce.

Conclusion

In the words of R. D. Laing, “We live in a moment of history where change is so speeded up that we begin to see the present only when it is already disappearing.” If this is so, it is essential that leaders and managers understand and employ organizational design effectively. A good design starts with strategy and then appropriately aligns structure, people, process and rewards.

The demands of the 21st Century cries out for progressive leaders who are willing to take risks with organizational design and let go of the security and tradition of the hierarchical police pyramid. Those who successfully answer the call will be the ones who understand these five categories of organizational design and can align them optimally.

Bio

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¹ Jay R. Galbraith, *Designing Organizations*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 9.

² Edward R. Maguire and William R. King, The Changing Landscape Of American Police Organizations, in *Policing 2020: Exploring the Future of Crime, Communities, and Policing*, ed. Joseph A. Schafer, (Police Futurist International and Futures Working Group, October 2007), 340.

³ Galbraith, 7.

⁴ Bernard H. Levin, Human Capital In Policing: What Works, What Doesn't Work, What's Promising, in *Policing 2020: Exploring the Future of Crime, Communities, and Policing*, ed. Joseph A. Schafer, (Police Futurist International and Futures Working Group, October 2007), 416.

⁵ Richard W. Myers, From Pyramids to Networks: Police Structure and Leadership in 2020, in *Policing 2020: Exploring the Future of Crime, Communities, and Policing*, ed. Joseph A. Schafer, (Police Futurist International and Futures Working Group, October 2007), 506.