



Aspects related to community policing

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Content description:	The article presents the characteristics of the community policing and how this concept should be implemented and assessed within police departments. It highlights the fact that community policing is not just a philosophy or just a police marketing strategy, but also a program that leads to results, actions and different behaviors.		
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a. Introduction

The concept of community policing is not a new one, it can be traced back to some of the oldest policing traditions. It is all about the idea of reinterpreting and considering it the dominant philosophy within a department, and not just a specific program.

b. General issues

The first component of the community policing philosophy is an orientation towards problem solving. We can talk about problem identification, problem analysis, as well as problem resolution; however, this concept relies heavily on the articulation of policing values which include citizen involvement in the problems regarding the safety and quality of neighborhood life.

Community policing urges the need to adopt the problem-solving orientation towards policing, instead of the incident-oriented approach that has tended to prevail in conjunction with the professional model. Emergency calls will still be handled right away and the police officers will still spend a lot of their time handling individual incidents. However, police officers should still try to identify the underlying causes that give rise to the single and multiple incidents. When the causes are identified, officers should use them in order to control and prevent future incidents. Basically, they should strive and have a more substantive and meaningful impact that occurs from 15-minute treatment for individual call for service.

Another characteristic of the community policing is the understanding of needs, concerns and priorities of a neighborhood life, in order to meet its' requirements. And this can only be achieved by focusing on the interaction and communication between police officers and residents on a routine basis, in order to develop a mutually beneficial relationship.

In this sense, it must be highlighted the fact that police officers are expected to identify innovative ways of community solving problems. Therefore, it is inherent to develop their

communication abilities and interaction behavior with the people that live and work in their beats; by definition, the community policing represents the interactive process between the police and the community to mutually identify and resolve community problems. The community policing lays stress on the union that should exist between the police and people in order to improve the quality of their life. The partnership between the two forces should rely on confidence, empathy, reliability and peer-trust, in order to work in tandem and tackle community problems.

And in order to reach that communication, more face-to-face interactions should be brought in front, rather than the use of a patrolling system. Neighborhood meetings can be of real help. Also the school-based policing concept is not to be neglected; this implies going into schools and interact positively with the youngsters, teachers and other school staff.

Emphasis should be placed on more interactive and effective practices, instead of effective and isolated operational practices (e.g. motorized patrol and rapid response to law priority calls). Some re-oriented methods can be the foot patrol, bicycle patrol, scooter or horse patrol, also parking the patrol vehicles and engage in foot patrolling periodically in shopping areas, parking lots, malls, business parks or residential areas. Police patrols should interact more often with the citizens during their patrol and not just limit to watching or observing while patrolling. The important role in the community policing is taken by the verbal and non-verbal communication with the residents, which also include the stopping and talking to people while patrolling.

This way, every police officer could have the opportunity to deal with the people in a friendly, open and personal manner, designed to turn them into satisfied customers, bearing in mind the fact that police are public service providers. And this can only be best done by eliminating as many artificial bureaucratic barriers as possible and incite people's interest in dealing directly with their officers.

Citizens' interest can be awoken by means of personalized service. Such services include: personalized business cards that police can distribute to the victims, complainants and other citizens with whom they are in contact with, use of re-contacting procedures for all the victims/complainants/citizens in cases where the police had handled their situation in order to see if further assistance is needed, adopted slogans and symbols, mission or value statements and other devices designed to reinforce the importance of providing personalized service to the public.

But community policing is also about learning and applying methods of transforming the police actions with a negative connotation in peoples minds' into positive ones, bearing in mind the fact that police work is also based on people arrests, fines and stops for suspicion, desists, inability to help more the victims etc. In such cases, the officers must have a different approach and consequently engage in different positive interactions as often as possible, whenever possible. Such interactions include neighborhood meeting or civic meetings that can create a large spectrum of non-enforcement interactions with a majority of the community.

Alongside, partnerships bear a prominent position in the area of community policing as well. Active partnerships are a must-have where the civil society, the citizens and other parties cooperate in order to identify and solve problems. Nowadays, the concept of citizen-patrol is widely used; citizens actively patrol their neighborhoods, usually in cooperation with the police and often in radio communication with the police dispatch. Also, reunions such as citizen police academies explain to the citizens the organization and the roles of each police department, preparing them for a volunteer role or citizen patrols.

Notwithstanding, of paramount importance is also the power sharing between police and community. The responsibility for making decisions must be divided between officers and residents based on a mutual legal partnership that can encourage an active citizen involvement in police efforts. A passive involvement of the community is not sufficed as a matter of fact.

The prevention component must be also highlighted in terms of community policing. The main idea resides in that although citizens appreciate and value rapid police response, the reactive

investigations and prompt apprehension of the wrongdoer, they would also prefer the education of the victims in the first place. That is why police departments should devote lots of financial, human, technical and intelligence resources to the preventive component. Anyways, prevention should be interlinked with the police officer or at least a part of every officer's job.

The above-mentioned component is based on preventive measures that must be tailored to each specific situation, depending on its characteristics. Firstly, the environmental design is important based on the fact that police should focus on the physical elements of the locations that make them conducive to incident/crime. Secondly, the closely working with individual residents and groups of residents in a cooperative manner is of utmost importance. In addition, the youth oriented-prevention is part of the preventive component and focuses on programs and projects designed to prevent youngsters from committing offences, such as tutoring, recreation and mentoring programs. Alongside the youth oriented-prevention stands the business crime-prevention that is centered on the cooperation between the police and business representatives, the latter being in the position to recommend personnel practices, retail procedures or other security measures designed to prevent crime.

The geographical element is another characteristic of community policing. This means that police officers should establish stronger bonds between them and neighborhoods in order to augment mutual recognition, identification, responsibility and accountability. We acknowledge the fact that beat patrols are temporally allocated with police for the term of their shift and not necessarily geographically. But in terms of community policing, stress should be laid on places and neighborhoods, rather than on time or functions.

Therefore, the redesign of the beat is necessary and desired. The beats must be reconfigured based on the neighborhood's necessities, not on the police department needs. In this respect, the beat assignments must be issued on a permanent basis, rather than on a rotating one. In this respect, the success of a geographical patrolling system can be reached by assigning patrol officers to a geographic beat for extended periods of time, rather than being frequently rotated. In addition, since several different officers will be assigned to a beat across 24 hours/day, 7 days a week, one officer is designated to be the lead officer responsible for the problem identification and coordination of all officers' efforts. Also, the patrol beat can be divided into smaller areas of individual accountability, so that every patrol officer has general responsibility for a beat and special responsibility for a smaller area. In this respect, each beat can have its own facilities such as mini-stations, storefronts that enhance the geographic focus for officers and residents. Notwithstanding, police specialists can be assigned to a geographic area, instead of to their specialties, meaning that a police officer should handle all, or at least most of the crimes occurring in a neighborhood area, instead of handling car thefts from all over the area of jurisdiction. In fact, this should lead to a more efficient management of the police work and to a better knowledge of the neighborhood issues.

Also, in order to nurture a healthy community policing system, the organization's structure should be redesigned and the police departments should be reorganized as to facilitate and support the implementation of this concept. That is why authority and responsibility can sometimes be delegated more widely so that officers can act more independently and be more responsive. In addition, the number of layers of hierarchy in the police organization can sometimes be reduced in order to improve communications and reduce waste, rigidity and bureaucracy.

Bearing this in mind, beat officers should be empowered by their chiefs to take action and make the decisions they consider fit for the given situation; they should have the authority to move freely and perform independently at the scene. In order to reach performance in terms of community policing, police patrols should become the managers of their beat, while the supervising officers must focus on the training, coaching, coordinating and evaluating officers under.

Also, in terms of independent policing, police officers should be able to decide on their own if they would rather use an alternative method for the patrolling car or not; such alternatives are taking

the incident report over the telephone, by mail or in person at the police facility, walk-in reporting in cases where there have only been damages, without victims, hold lower priority calls or even organize appointments with an individual or a group, whenever possible and appropriate. Such methods can be of real help for the professional development of the officer, as well as for the financial, human and technical resources saving, not least the opportunity for the police officer to prioritize their actions and handle really important issues that require an on-scene response.

Community policing is often associated with styles of leadership, management and supervision that give more emphasis to organizational culture and values and less emphasis to written rules and formal discipline. The management is to be addressed to the citizens' problems and concerns; it must be flexible and appropriate.

The statements of police missions and values should always be used in the decision-making process, in the guidance of the employees and training of new recruits. Also, police departments should engage in continuous strategic planning aimed at ensuring that resources and energy are focused on mission accomplishment and adherence to core values; otherwise police organizations tend to get off track, confused about their mission and about what really matters. In addition, subordinates should be coached and guided more, instead of being restricted to their roles of reviewing of paperwork and enforcement of rules and regulations.

It is also relevant that a police officer must be trained in the spirit of community policing. This means that he has to have leadership abilities; he must be prepared to develop skills such as exciting citizens in embracing the concept of the community policing. During the evaluation process of a police officer, it must be taken into consideration his ability to involve and implicate the residents in crime fighting and solving efforts. The performance evaluation will be then considered in terms of lack of incidents such as criminal offences, traffic accidents and repeat call-for-service.

Consequently, young employees need mentoring from managers, supervisors and not just learn how to do their job right. They need to learn about ethics and values and what it means to be a good police officer. In terms of community policing, employees are encouraged to be risk-takers, to demonstrate imagination and creativity in their work; this kind of empowerment can only succeed, however, when employees are thoroughly familiar with the organization's core values and firmly committed to them. In what it concerns the discipline, police departments should make distinctions between intentional and unintentional errors made by employees and between employee actions that violate core values versus those that merely violate technical rules.

Community policing stands also for the quality appraisal, instead of quantity. This way, officers can be evaluated on the quality of their community policing and problem solving activities, and perhaps on results achieved, instead of on traditional performance indicators such as tickets, arrests, calls handled etc..

In terms of departmental assessment, police departments can measure their overall performance based on of a wide variety of indicators, such as customer satisfaction, fear levels, problem solving etc., instead of a narrow range of traditional indicators including reported crime, response time etc..

This article has no intention to clear all the aspects of such a complex concept like community policing, rather than to provide some basic information on its' practical relevance, on the importance of it's' implementation and consequent results. Police management should focus on the advantages of the implementation of the concept, its benefits and its payoff and act correspondently.

Based on the synergy of the police and residents' actions, the community policing is a program that helps boosting the prevention activities and the participation of the civil society in the activities circumscribed. In addition, the concept focuses on the community cooperation with the police in order to reach a coherent, integrated conception, with regard to the neighborhood problem-solving, based on an adequate coordination of the joint actions and deployed forces.

During the implementation of the concept, a high level of crime-related information can be reached by the community. Alongside information, the residents can get a high level of awareness with regard to the causes and the consequences of crimes committed in their neighborhood, as well as a high level of self-protection capacities, especially for the vulnerable ones. These are all practical results that can be obtained after the implementation process.

c. Conclusions

Community policing is a concept that folds into the responsibility of each police department management; it is not just an independent activity for every police officer, it must be seen as a total concept applied in its assembly. The holistic approach is the successful method for the implementation of the community policing concept, where the police and the community are the main actors that are to perform on the scene of a safety and secure life because the aim of it is to support the delivery of confidence and satisfaction through personal, professional and protective policing.

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