

The BJA Executive Session on

Police Leadership

2013

The BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership is a multi-year endeavor started in 2010 with the goal of developing innovative thinking that would help create police leaders uniquely qualified to meet the challenges of a changing public safety landscape.

In support of an integrated approach to creating safe and viable communities across America, the project directors recruited 20+ principals from a range of disciplines. The principals, in turn, led national field teams of practitioners focused on the work of policing and the organization of the future.

To gain new insights on leadership, the *BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership* engaged police chiefs in documenting their own paths and invited leaders to participate in various audio and video forums to tell their stories and discuss the future of policing and police leadership.

Please visit our website, <http://bjaleader.org>, to learn more about this project and to access a broad array of interactive, multimedia resources.

The principals are supported in their work by a team that includes project co-directors Darrel W. Stephens and Bill Geller, project strategist Nancy McKeon, and BJA Senior Policy Advisor Steve Edwards.

Creating Leaders for the Future: I. Re-thinking Leadership Development

by
Nancy McKeon, Ph.D.
and Ellen Scrivner, Ph.D., ABPP

From the perspective of the work of the Organization (“Org”) of the Future, a central initiative of the BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership, there is a strong case to be made for re-thinking the way we develop police leaders. As set forth in the initiative’s 2012 and 2013 papers,¹ the future will bring dramatic changes to the police culture as we know it. With an emerging public service delivery model rooted in collaboration and co-production across municipalities and with the community, lateral equality vs. vertical hierarchy, and networked talent models, police organizations of the future will require different ways of thinking and functioning.

Adapting to these changes go beyond simply learning new skills sets. Accordingly, the changes outlined above will upend the police culture which, despite many innovations over the years, still retains a command and control perspective that has been shaped and reinforced by years of training,

internal practices, and organizational procedures that are resistant to change. Consequently, there is a need to develop a different model of leadership development, one that will produce transformative processes that grow and sustain leaders. Within that context, this section of the paper will address how current leadership development must change because we cannot expect to develop the leaders for the Org of the Future if using leadership models of the past.

Clearly, we are seeing that now is the time for change. The public safety Org of the Future is emerging as the world is changing around us and as traditional paradigms of institutions and professions are being transformed in substantive ways. Current drivers of change include:

- Economic pressures and competing interests for limited budget resources
- Demographic shifts
- Change in business delivery systems with a strong emphasis on metrics
- Dramatic changes in electronic communication via social media
- Changing nature of criminality that includes a growing emphasis on global crime, cyber-crime, and internet crimes
- Evolving data-driven policing models and advances in forensic sciences and DNA databases
- Growth in surveillance technology including facial recognition techniques and body cameras
- An expanded role for citizen advocacy in public safety co-production models that are becoming a new way of doing business

Perhaps one of the major drivers of change is that brought about by the expanded use of technology, not just by police but also by criminals and citizens. Batts, Smoot & Scrivner (2012) address these technological innovations as a primary driver of change in policing because of the influence on organizational behaviors, crime trends, individual work behavior, and personal life styles. Social transitions have been facilitated by the innovations in technology, which are quickly being adapted and embedded as symbols of modern life. Social media, instant messaging, blogs, Twitter, and Facebook phenomena all thrive on an urgency for the need to communicate and are part and parcel of the modern day police agency, playing to the strengths of the tech savvy new generation of employees. However, they can also be used to agitate a flash mob or contaminate evidence at a homicide scene, as when officers tweet pictures of dead bodies at a homicide scene, or citizens photograph police shooting incidents. The more recent increase in police wearing of body cameras reflect how technology can be used to set the record straight and technology can assist in other ways, such as with online roll calls as well as online union meetings.

These drivers point to a public safety world that is changing faster than we had imagined, much less prepared for, and they are integral to shaping the platform for the Org of the Future and its leaders. Is it any wonder, then, that leadership development also needs to change?

Law Enforcement Training/Development Models as We Know Them

For years, the law enforcement/training models were fairly consistent and typically were built upon traditional “school book” and “talking head” models. More recently, modifications to those models are including approaches that have been used in private industry such as:

- Problem-Based Learning
- Case Study Methods
- Reality-Based Learning Such as Table Top Exercises
- Communities of Practice and/or Consortia
- Learning Communities

These models represent forerunners to change and lay the groundwork to take leadership development in a direction that will meet the needs of the Org of the Future. Further, they can be incorporated into a comprehensive framework inclusive of varied training, development, and experiential initiatives that will meet a broad range of learning needs and that go far beyond tweaking traditional curricula.

Support for changing current models comes from different sources and includes:

- Profile Data Collected From Law Enforcement Thought Leaders at The BJA Executive Session
- Clearwater Roundtable Examples
- Increased Information Regarding Conditions on How People Learn and the Conditions that Produce Greater Learning Including the Critical Role of Experience
- Neuroscience and Health & Wellness Influence on Learning
- Org of the Future Moving Forward

All confirm how different experiences are important to leadership development and they lend credence to the concept of experiential initiatives as a means to enhance learning across a spectrum of different activities. Further, they differ from the traditions and symbolism endemic to the police culture that creates impediments to change.

Impediments to Change

The Org of the Future, its leaders, and related leadership development experiences will confront a police culture rooted in traditions and symbolism that can impede change, as seen in the following examples.

- **Following the Stripes and Stars...** In the traditional culture, police performance is acknowledged by symbols that represent career advancement achieved through grades on tests and supervisor evaluations that generate the stripes and stars. There is little emphasis on how officers recognize and think through problems and then develop innovative solutions. Rather, one “goes along to get along” in order to get the prized promotion. If engaged in thinking that is seen as too far out of the box, one risks being ostracized and destined to remain a “slick sleeve.”

- **Getting Your Ticket Punched...** Similar to the above and a very common phenomenon in policing. Just manage to get yourself through a police training that is commonly acknowledged as a notable achievement though not so much for what may be learned, or much less brought back to the organization, but rather to be able to say that you were there and got your ticket punched. Those “tickets” are often requirements for jobs as police chiefs in departments across the country.
- **“Copy Cat” Innovators...** result from the above processes. Examples include adapting innovations that work well in another department but with little thought to assessing how they may work in different departments representing different communities. Examples include the rush to adopt strategies such as Hot Spots Policing and/or Compstat. Both reflect how when something is working effectively in one city and generating accolades and recognition of a department, particularly from the press, other departments jump on the bandwagon but with little forethought as to how it may, or may not, work in their jurisdiction. Generally, there is no pre-implementation assessment or preliminary evaluation....takes too much time or requisite skills are unavailable. Rather, there is the tendency to let the public information officer run with it...we’ve created something new!
- **Covering Up Dirty Laundry vs. Learning From Error...** something didn’t go right or mistakes were made. The tendency is to cover up rather than confront the problem and lay out how you plan to learn from it. Recognizing that political blowback and liability suits can be a problem in an age of transparency highlighted by social media, you can no longer run and “cover up” since that will result in even greater problems, particularly when the city attorneys can’t get you out of it. There is no lack of costly policing examples yet experience from other fields shows that learning from error is a powerful resource and it would be an asset to leadership development.
- **Procedures, Procedures...and More Procedures...** just do it as the General Orders tell you to and you do not need to think about it. And we wonder why greater innovation does not occur? The capacity for thinking about new and creative solutions, much less implementing them, can get snuffed out as early as the Police Academy, particularly when all are focused on process in contrast to outcomes.

Generally, none of the above may appear in structured academic curricula. However, they are symbolic of processes generated by traditional trainings that perpetuate a traditional police culture. If not acknowledged, they risk impeding the development of the Org of the Future and can tie the hands of leadership when trying to take the Org of the Future forward. Moreover, they are clearly at odds with what we have learned from the leadership profiles developed from the participants in the Executive Sessions.

Findings from the Leadership Profiles

The BJA Executive Session provided an opportunity to learn about the types of developmental experiences that had a significant impact on leadership from the police chiefs who

created their career profiles for the BJA Executive Session. The findings reinforced the importance of diversity of experience and the need for experiences that promoted reflection and critical thinking. Examples of findings include:

- The importance to their development of diverse experiences that occurred in addition to, and often more important than, their classroom experiences.
- Involvement in non-tactical policing experiences including: Educational, Volunteer, and Special Assignment experiences.
- Importance of the examples of leaders they worked for.
- Recognition of the need to understand the local political world and the belief that future leaders will need a better understanding of how to navigate the political landscape.
- Recognition of the critical need for leaders to develop self-awareness.

Roundtable Examples of Development Experiences

In a more recent BJA Executive Session, roundtable participants were asked to describe experiential learning examples. Though a relatively brief exercise, their examples supported the leadership profile findings in that all discussed dynamic learning experiences where the results may have gone beyond the intent of the actual curricula and were much in contrast to their re-telling something that someone told them/taught them in a classroom, or what they read in a case study. Rather, they related experiences that turned their thinking around and expanded their capacity to change how they thought about things ranging from organizational systemic issues and organization dysfunction to reframing critical incidents that so that they became crucible learning experiences. Moreover, all reported on how the experiences opened their thinking to valuing change and to recognizing how the command and control style of law enforcement management can limit leadership effectiveness. Finally, they demonstrated how different models may be effective for different outcomes but clearly the “one size fits all” approach is totally outdated.

Given more time, others at the RT may have enriched these examples. However, taken together with the profile findings, they provide us with a good foundation for creating leadership development models that incorporate a range of experiences that enhance critical thinking, competency, and the capacity for coherently connecting the dots.

Moreover, their accounting of how diverse experiences changed the thinking of the Learner/Leader demonstrates that the learning experience and subsequent outcomes were clearly important not only to the learner but also to their organizations.

Developing/Growing the Learner

The re-positioning of both experience and learning so that ultimately the power of the learner, in contrast to the power of the teacher, begins to change will be important to developing leaders for the Org of the Future and will present fundamental changes to the developmental process. Within that context, the “experiences” of the Executive Session participants provide significant guidance on the critical need of creating dynamic interactions of the individual, the organization, and leadership... interactions that are shaped by:

- Promoting reflection to guide interactive dialogue
- Mutual sharing of reflections
- Developing insights based on reflections and sharing the insights

- Applying the insight within a problem context
- Testing it out

Within the context of the change in balance between the learner/teacher, the requisite interactions are somewhat similar to the five factors developed by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) that define an experience as a learning experience. They were developed with a goal of improving practice outcomes, in contrast to getting good results on evaluation forms.

The IOM's five factors are as follows:

1. Incorporate needs assessments to make sure that material is relevant to learners' needs.
2. Emphasize interactivity and group reflections as well as opportunities to rehearse.
3. Use feedback to engage participants in learning.
4. Use multiple instructional formats and allow time for the learner to process the content.
5. Simulate the workplace in contrast to classroom instruction.

All point to the need for a model that places the learner versus doctrine first, and which is shaped by the following parameters:

- Participants learn about themselves as “learners”
- They learn how to apply learning and then test it out
- As the leaders of the Org of the Future, they support the application of learning by the learners and support life-long learning as an organizational goal
- They recognize and value the importance of learners interacting with experience in all developmental activities across their life span
- Learning is not restricted to a classroom and, as such, will require fewer talking heads
- In fact, learning will take place in the workplace, teaching policing departments, collegial bus tours, exchanges with other departments, shadowing experiences and/or time limited fellowships
- The model allows for many possibilities for other venues and while it does not exclude the classroom it also does not prioritize the classroom
- Finally, the model differs from traditional training in that it is ongoing and not a one shot experience. The bus tour training concept is a good example of how participants can continue to learn from each other as they traverse the route of the tour and continue their collaboration through a networked process that follows that bus tour experience.

In summary, these learning models differ from Command and Control and the previously referenced entrenched symbols of performance that create impediments to change. As such, they will need to be designed to challenge the thinking of leaders in ways that will improve actual performance of the leaders and their organizations. Within that context, they will provide a platform for innovative practice outcomes to be achieved throughout an organization. The time for reflection as to what you are learning and how it applies to what is really happening in the real world is key to positioning the learner to be the critical change agent needed for the future.

References

¹Organization of the Future, BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership, Part 1 (Gascon, Manheimer, O’Neill et. al., 2012), Part 2 (Bronson & O’Neill, 2013).

The authors are Nancy I McKeon, Ph.D., project strategy consultant for the BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership, and Ellen Scrivner, Ph.D. ABPP, Executive Fellow at the Police Foundation, Washington, DC, a Subject Matter Expert on Police Reform.

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