The rebirth of community policing:
A case study of success
by Deborah S. DeMeester, Donald R. LaMagdeleine and Cari Norton
with Lenny Austin, Erik Johnston and Scott Nadeau
University of St. Thomas
Minneapolis, MN
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Abstract
This paper will explore the case of one local police department that faced growing crime rates, low officer morale and decreasing resources as the focus of policing shifted from community policing to reactive policing after 9-11. Six years ago, after redefining community oriented policing for the department in the 21st century, it re-embraced community oriented policing. Today the crime levels are at a 30 year low and a diverse community is highly satisfied with their police despite the lack of diversity on the police force. The schools are over 70% minority students with an average of 80% on free lunch. The qualitative data in this study suggest the philosophy of community oriented policing as embodied by the department is responsible for the success in police/community relations. The change from controlling crime through arrests, enforcement contacts and threats of consequences to focusing on connections and relationship building contacts has helped the officers know and understand the community they serve in new ways. Rather than reacting to crime, true crime prevention has begun in the community.

“In examining the history of community policing in this country, it’s clear that—
if we commit ourselves to it—positive change is possible,” explains U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder. “Improbable—and once unimaginable—advancements are possible. And even the largest and most persistent obstacles can be overcome.”

(Holder, 2011)

History of community oriented policing

Community policing principles that provide the framework for professional policing are most often attributed to Sir Robert Peel from the early 19th century in London (Alpert & Dunham, 1986). In a context of rising crime, public corruption, and social unrest, Peel advocated changes to policing that were approved by the Parliament in 1829, transforming policing from volunteer constables to a paid professional police, known in London as the Metropolitan Police. At their heart, the principles emphasize preventing crime and increasing police efficiency through proactive policing that is dependent on positive relationships with community members (Scott, 2010). Key Peelian principles include:

- The power the police hold depends upon public approval;
- In order to maintain public respect, police must secure willing public cooperation as well as obey laws themselves;
The cooperation of the public “diminishes proportionately with police use of public force”;

“Police must demonstrate impartial service to the law” in order to maintain the “favour of the public;” and

The ultimate goal recognizes “police are the public and public are police.” (Scott, 2010, 131).

In the United States, Hartmann (1988) describes three distinct periods of policing: the political era from 1840 to 1920s—characterized by the police supporting politicians and their political agendas, the reform era from the 1930s to 1970s—during which time policing reformed in response to abuses of power that occurred during the political era as well as hold police accountable for their actions, and the modern era characterized by community problem solving from the 1970s to the late 1980s (Hartmann, 1988, Greene, 2000). Scott (2010) notes that early policing in the United States faced the same dilemmas that Peel addressed in England. The tie to politicians was so embedded in the Chicago Police Department that all members of the department were expected to make donations to those in political power (Scott, 2010). Giving police job security apart from politicians’ will, promoting trained leaders in police departments rather than having leaders who were political appointees, centralizing the organization and clearly articulating the mission were key components of the reform movement. During the reform era, police used the military as a model in building a agencies that were both professional and accountable for their behaviors. In the course of this bureaucratization the police “drifted away from the public”, focused on speed of response rather than policing neighborhoods, and became

Key events in the 1960s have been interpreted in different ways from a policing perspective. Cao (2001) suggests that President Lyndon B. Johnson’s call for a “great society” in the early 1960’s and the desire to participate in the nation’s prosperity contributed to the growing importance of civil rights for all United States citizens (Cao, 2001). He notes the American public’s support of equal rights created a dilemma for law enforcement whose primary relationship with poor, minority populations was focused on law enforcement and relationships with the middle class were not much better due to the anti-Vietnam war protests and clashes. Greene (2000) articulates that the assault on the “legitimacy of the police” and
legal system came as a result of two groups (minorities and suburban middle class white youth) coming together and confronting these institutions and the police responding in militant ways. Some studies such as the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders “concluded that the spark of most urban riots in the late 1960s was poor or aggressive police action, generally taken in a minority community” (Greene, 307).

Community policing grew in part from a desire to improve those relationships as the 1970s began (Cao, 2001; Ren et al, 2005) and in part due to requirements to change. The Kerner Commission Report of 1968, arising from a study of urban riots in the United States, suggested that police needed to receive training on problems and conditions of the ghettos in order to improve police-minority relations (Harris and Wicker, 1988) and training on issues of diversity became standard (DeMeester and LaMagdeleine, 2015). The need to engage the community in addressing persistent issues in given neighborhoods has kept community policing from being the latest in a series of Starting in the 1980s, some police departments worked to improve relations with minority communities through youth educational or recreational programs while others initiated block and neighborhood watch programs.

Greene (2000) suggests that “Community policing, or variations of it, has become the national mantra of the American police” (301). Language, symbolism and programs related to community policing abound in departments of all sizes. Eck and Rosenbaum comment:

Community policing has become a new orthodoxy for cops. Simultaneously ambitious and ambiguous, community policing promises to change radically the relationship between the police and the public, address underlying community problems, and improve the living conditions of neighborhoods. One reason for its popularity is that community policing is a plastic concept, meaning different things to different people. There are many perspectives on community policing, and each of them is built on assumptions that are only partially supported by empirical evidence. (1994, 3)

There are some who critique community policy as rhetoric (Manning, 1988; Weatheritt, 1988) or the latest attempt to placate community concerns about police brutality (Klockars, 1988). A longitudinal
study conducted of 281 chiefs of police in 1993 and 1996 (Zhao et al, 2001) did not find significant changes in policing practices which would indicate a change in operating philosophy to community oriented policing. However, they recognize that this might not have been enough time definitively judge a COP paradigm shift in American policing; they recognize that it took agencies 30 years (from 1900-1930) to transform from the political to the professional model of policing.

Community oriented policing received federal bipartisan endorsement under President Bill Clinton when the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act was passed (Zhao, Lovrich, & Robinson, 2001). Through this Act the federal government became the principal sponsor of community oriented policing (COP), federal funding became available to hire COP officers, and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (OCOPS) was established along with regional training and COP institutes.

**Community oriented policing and terrorism**

Significant changes in policing occurred post September-11, 2001, shifting a focus for many departments from community policing to counter-terrorism and homeland security. The passage of the USA PATRIOT Act (the United and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) in 2001 and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) served to refocus policing tactics and shifted funding for programs (Brown, 2007). Brown argues that many counter-terrorism tactics authorized by USA PATRIOT Act and DHS violate the principles of community policing (ie. tapping phones, monitoring internet activity, surveillance, search, detention) which created a rift in law enforcement between community-oriented policing principles and traditional counter-terrorism principles.

Brown also argues that forceful law enforcement does not reduce crime, but rather leads to hostile (even violent) defiance of legal authorities (Brown, 2007). He cites the actions of Timothy McVeigh in the Oklahoma City bombing as revenge for the federal assault on the Branch Davidian compound to support this argument. “There is scant evidence to suggest that aggressive law enforcement tactics are
effective against terrorists, but there are numerous incidents which show that combative counter-terrorism measures generate hostility toward the government and foster public support for terrorists,” according to Brown (2007).

Brown also points out that intense public outrage after aggressive law enforcement tactics in the Olympic Park bombing, Rodney King, or Branch Davidian may be short-lived, but silent distrust of law enforcement can last for generations. Weitzer and Tuch (2002) found that the sharing of stories about police interactions in neighborhoods increases perceptions of police interactions being racially biased. Weitzer and Tuch (2004) note, “People who frequently read or hear about incidents of misconduct, as presented in the media, are inclined to believe that misconduct is a common occurrence.” Stories of aggression and perceived bias further negative expectations about police community relationships.

Brown (2007) and Spalek (2010) both argue that “soft” tactics used in conjunction with community-oriented counter-terrorism could be used more effectively than traditional policing tactics to gather intelligence, with less violation of human rights. Brown cites examples of arrests made with citizen cooperation: apprehension of the Washington D.C. snipers in 2002 and the apprehension of “railway killer,” Angel Maturino Resendez, as a result of cooperation between his sister and a Texas Ranger. “The bottom line is that technologically advanced investigative and intelligence gathering techniques are no substitute for a cooperative public” (Brown, 2007).

In a 2010 study, Spalek specifically examines the trust between police and Muslim communities in consideration of the impact of “new terrorism” policies and practices implemented post 9/11 in the United States and 7/7 in England which tend to construct Muslim minority as ‘suspect” and target young, Muslim men. She points out “new terrorism” challenges community policing models in a counter-terrorism context and notes an erosion of trust between police and the Muslim community due to conflict between “soft” community-oriented policing models and “hard” policing tactics used for intelligence gathering (Spalek, 2010). Her study examines police-community engagement & partnership in the “new terrorism”
context by interviewing police officers from the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU), counter-terrorism policing unit in London formed after 9/11, and community members from the Muslim Safety Forum (MSF), an umbrella organization of Muslim groups who engage with police officers there. Themes that the study uncovered were the need for trust and trust-building activities in “new terrorism” context because British Muslims are skeptical of police and “new terrorism” approaches contribute to diminishing trust between police and Muslim communities.

Police officers stated that an important part of building trust was honesty, openness and transparency about their roles as counter-terrorism operatives (Spalek, 2010). MCU officers pointed out that building trust was to hear and respond to Muslim community members’ concerns, for example answering questions, facilitating peaceful demonstrations, and responding to religious hate crimes. They also spoke of the importance of time spent on focused engagement in the community attending activities and events like wedding or death ceremonies. Spalek (2010) also pointed out the critical role that Muslim police officers played to build bridges between the MCU and the Muslim community because of their ability to promote cultural and religious understanding and build trust.

**Embodying community oriented policing**

Police departments have embodied the concept of community policing in a number of ways. Some have designated an individual or unit to be the community police officer(s). Others have used “Neighborhood policing,” focusing on high crime or low income neighborhoods through a community policing unit and “Broken Windows policing” approaches. The department studied for this paper integrated the practice into all aspects and roles of their department.

Some models of community-oriented policing involve creating community-oriented policing units (which operate separate from other police units) which work in high-crime or low-income neighborhoods to prevent crime (Adams et al, 2002; Allen, 2002; Lord, 1996; Riley, 1999). These community-oriented policing models have presented challenges due to diverse attitudes toward community-oriented policing (COP) between officers and sergeants who are on COP assignments and
those who are not. One study cites officers’ inability to understand, define and articulate community-oriented policing and even their department’s philosophy about it (Riley, 1999). Riley believes the officers’ inability to do so reflects a training “miss” and will impact the effectiveness of the community oriented policing program. This same study of officers’ knowledge of COP also found that despite the new community policing approach in a high-crime, low income neighborhood, there was no revision of evaluation standards for COP officers. Evaluation forms and reports reflected traditional law enforcement rather than community oriented policing which gave a mixed message of its importance to the officers (Riley, 1999).

“Neighborhood policing” is a model which is common in England and Wales and involves walking a beat in a specific neighborhood, but the focus is not on building trusting relationships but on building awareness of suspicious activities (Spalek, 2010). “Broken windows” policing, a concept articulated by Wilson and Kelling in 1982, called for increased police officer attention to low-level misdemeanors like trespassing, public drinking or urination, car window cleaners, and graffiti with the hope that these early encounters with the crime-prone would not only solve immediate problems but also stop future more serious offenses (MacDonald, 2013). Part of the theory is that broken windows can give the perception that people don’t care much about the neighborhood with the consequence that there might be greater vandalism and increasing crime in the neighborhood. In addition, Wilson and Kelling’s study noted that such nuisances as broken windows raised the level of fear within the community, leading people to retreat in their homes more, thus, theoretically opening the door to more crime to move into the neighborhood. The perception of the residents about safety led residents to feel more secure when there were police foot patrols in the area whether crime was actually reduced or not.

In New York City crime rates plummeted but so did unemployment and crime nationally resulting in scholars questioning the effectiveness of the Broken Windows theory. This approach has become controversial as some police departments have embodied it as a “zero-tolerance” policy, arresting people for all offenses, both minor and major. (Center for Evidence Based Policing, 2015). Harcourt and Ludwig (2006) reviewed crime data from New York City as well as evidence from five major cities
regarding the effectiveness of broken windows policing theory and concluded there is “no support for a simple first-order disorder-crime relationship as hypothesized by Wilson and Kelling, nor for the proposition that broken windows policing is the optimal use of scarce law enforcement resources” (Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006, 271). Noah (2012), citing a reaction paper by Harcourt and Ludwig, notes an increase in marijuana arrests between 1993 and 2004 in New York City: “the per-precinct number of misdemeanor arrests for smoking marijuana in public view zoomed from 10 per year to 644. African Americans, who constituted about 25 percent of the city's population, accounted for 52 percent of the arrests. Once arrested, blacks were twice as likely as white arrestees to be convicted.” There has been no scientific evidence of the positive impact of these marijuana arrests on serious crime and Noah warns of the negative impact on community of such “minor” crime leading to prison (Noah, 2012). But for many communities the end result of policing nuisance crimes has been an increase in a sense of safety by its residents.

A final model for community oriented policing might be that which is employed by the Columbia Heights police department, in which, community-oriented policing is the responsibility of all officers within the department. “Community policing is supposed to be a department-wide effort; it is not intended to be a community relations unit or other specialized unit. All officers—especially detectives, who have the dimmest view of community policing—should be rotated in and out of the substations and assigned community policing functions” (Lewis, Rosenberg, & Sigler, 1999). A careful review of the literature indicates that this is a unique approach to community-oriented policing and not one which is employed by many other departments. Goldstein (1987) recognized the importance of community policing being the “organizing philosophy” of a department rather than simply another initiative of the department. He articulated key components of successful implementation of community policing based on this philosophy that include:

- The management and practices of a police department need to reflect the values of community policing rather than traditional policing (enforcing law through arrests and threats thereof).
• The power of the police subculture that focuses particularly on issues of danger and authority and resist change would need to be overcome.

• Solving substantive issues and problems in the community that contribute to crime and disorder.

Greene cites Skolnick and Bayley suggest, “[C]ommunity policing should be said to exist only when new programs are implemented that raise the level of public participation in the maintenance of public order.” (1986, 5) Such partnerships are key to community policing.

**Symbolic Interactionism**

In addition to the overall philosophy of community policing, this study was informed by Symbolic Interactionism, a school of thought articulated by students of George Herbert Mead at the University of Chicago. This approach to everyday experiences explores social objects and symbols that mean something to those who interact with them. It is this interaction that determines culture. “People are autonomous, interpretive beings who have the ability to negotiate, modify, or reject the meanings they learn, thus actively shaping culture. From a symbolic interactionist perspective then, human beings are active creators of symbols and culture” (Williams, 2008, 848). The symbolism of policing and what it means to be a police officer are impacted by attempts to reform practice. This study includes how culture is shaped and reshaped by meanings attributed to everyday interactions with members of the police department and citizens. According to Herbert Blumer (1969), the fundamental units for analysis in symbolic interactionism are the social interactions in which officers engage, including their own thoughts and emotions from the interaction and the meaning that results from it.

**Methodology**

This study of the Columbia Heights Police Department (CHPD) is a qualitative case study. Qualitative research probes the “meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37), in this case the experience and challenges of policing a highly transient community whose racial and socio-economic composition is significantly different than the police...
department. Qualitative research promotes a complex and detailed understanding of the case and incorporates the unfiltered voices of the participants in sharing their experiences, thus taking a descriptive and narrative form (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The focus in this qualitative case study is to understand the meaning the officers of the CHPD have constructed around community policing and how they make sense of their experiences as police officers engaged in community policing. This emphasis on the construction of meaning and sense making are traditional emphases for qualitative case studies according to Merriam (1998).

A case study methodology allows for the use of a variety of data. In this case the data included semi-structured interviews of ten sworn officers, review of survey data from 32 full and part time employees of the police department, 33 additional City of Columbia Heights employees, 292 community residents and 104 community leaders, as well as review of CHPD documents and media coverage of the department’s work. Department documents include the strategic plan, community policing reports, application for the International Association of Chiefs of Police Community Policing Award from 2012, and feedback received from citizens.

The interviews were solicited by posting an announcement and signup sheet in the roll call room. Interview possibilities were set up for two different shifts on two different days with the option of meeting at another time if neither day worked. The announcement noted the desire to speak with as many officers as possible in order to “hear all perspectives” on their experiences with community policing. Ten of the 27 officers participated. They were offered the opportunity to use their real name or to choose a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. Participants chose each of these options.

The data was collected in the summer of 2014 in the private conference room at the CHPD. In presenting the consent form to each participant, each person was questioned to make sure they understood the voluntary nature of their participation and that they could refuse to address any question and ask that their data not be used in the study up and until September 14, 2014. Interviews averaged between 30 and 40 minutes with the exception of the Chief whose was longer. Although each participant brought different stories and experiences to the table, the key themes began to be repeated, noting the presence of saturation.
and, thus, an adequate sample size. “Saturation occurs when new information obtained from interviews does not provide additional insight” (Creswell, 2007, p. 160).

The audio recorded interviews were transcribed using Rev.com, reviewed for accuracy and observer comments by the interviewer and coded for themes based on the question, “How has a primarily Caucasian police department achieved both a historical reduction in crime as well as extremely high levels of community support in a very diverse, urban community?” Key narratives were highlighted and initial themes, insights and processes emerged from the data. Codes were developed accordingly that identified themes and patterns.

In addition to the interviews of individual officers, we reviewed the 2014 survey data from 32 full and part time employees of the police department, 33 additional City of Columbia Heights employees, 292 community residents and 104 community leaders, as well as review of CHPD documents and media coverage of the department’s work. Department documents included their strategic plan, community policing reports and documents, the CHPD application for the International Association of Chiefs of Police Community Policing Award from 2012, and media coverage of the CHPD. These additional sources of data allowed triangulation of data. Merriam (1998) described triangulation as “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (p. 204). The end result of exploring multiple data points is a fuller understanding of the matter being studied. Merriam (1998) stated, “Especially in terms of using multiple methods of data collection and analysis, triangulation strengthens reliability as well as internal validity” (p. 207). The findings themselves were substantiated through additional meetings with the Chief of Police, Captain of the CHPD and the Sergeant who was responsible for the internal study of the effectiveness of the CHPD to ensure clarity of interpretations.

**Setting**

The city of Columbia Heights, Minnesota is a first ring suburb of Minneapolis officially founded in 1921. The 2010 U.S. Census shows a population of 19,496, 80% of whom are under the age of 60.
Whereas the 2010 U.S. Census shows 69.7% of the population is White, the public school demographics show just 28% of the students enrolled are White. 38% are Black, 26% are Hispanic, 5% are Islander/Asian Pacific and 3% are Native American. There are over 38 languages spoken in the schools (including Spanish, Somali, Arabic, Tibetan and Oromo) and 79% of the students are in the Free or Reduced Lunch Program. About 33% of the properties in the city are rentals, leading to a potentially transient community.

One of the officers described the community as follows:

We are small. It is more like a village even though we are urban. We have a lot of problems that come from Minneapolis and St. Paul. We’ve had issues with people moving up here from Chicago and Gary, Indiana and some of the tougher cities.

He summarizes the work setting as “small town policing in an urban, tougher environment.”

The first paid police officer in Columbia Heights was hired in 1921. In 2007, when Scott Nadeau began his tenure as Chief of Police of Columbia Heights, “the Police Department faced ever-increasing crime rates and shrinking resources. Entire neighborhoods seemed plagued by crime and disorder. Many of the department’s proactive programs had been discontinued or curtailed as the city struggled under steadily decreasing LGA funding from the state” (CH IACP submission (2012).

In August 2014 there were 27 full time licensed officers and seven civilian employees in the Police Department. The mission of the Police Department states, “The Columbia Heights Police Department is committed to active partnerships with the community in order to protect life and property, innovatively solve problems, and enhance the safety and quality of life in the communities we serve.” Embodied in this statement is a focus on community relations, the importance of partnerships, an emphasis on problem solving and innovation, as well as enhancing quality of life. This mission of this police department is focused on improving life within the community. Notably absent is a statement on enforcing laws. Crime is down 50% across the board and citizen satisfaction is high (Nadeau, 2015, pp. 2 and 20). As a result, there is a growing pride within the department about the work they are doing with and for the citizens of the community. Getting to this point has not been a smooth road but this case
provides insights that may be helpful for other communities seeking similar positive relationships with the community.

In 2012 the Columbia Heights Police Department received the Community Policing Award from the International Association of Chiefs of Police for small agencies. In 2013 they received their school district’s “Above and Beyond Award” that typically goes to an individual with significant investment in the children and youth of the school district. Chief Nadeau describes the latter as his “most proud moment professionally.”

Every school and district employee was there .. and they’re cheering for our police officers. I was driven to tears just about. This is when you’re hitting the homerun: when our educators, who are in my book, community heroes for helping build up our youth and future leadership, are looking to and appreciative of the police in the community. … You know, we’re not perfect but we’re doing something right here. This is pretty neat.

2014 engagement with the community included Neighborhood watch, Business Watch, Youth Open Gym, D.A.R.E., Senior Citizen Academy, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Anti-bullying Reading Program, National Night Out, community picnics, and Coffee with a Cop.

Findings

The three themes that emerged from the data in response to the question “how has a primarily Caucasian police department achieved both a historical reduction in crime as well as extremely high levels of community support in a very diverse, urban community?” are leadership initiatives, internal cultural change, and external partnerships. Each of these themes will be discussed in detail below.

Leadership initiatives

The critical opportunity for change came with the arrival of Chief Nadeau in 2007. Coming from another suburb, Nadeau brought the ability to see the department as an outsider. Within the first year he developed leadership initiatives that addressed the need for change and introduced his expectations for
community policing. The need for change was based on reactive policing, low morale, lack of strategy to reduce crime, and the stress of being short staffed and short on supplies.

**Need for change**

Chief Nadeau notes that when he first came to Columbia Heights policing was very reactive. “They waited for a crime to be committed and then they tried their best to rush there and follow up after the fact. There wasn’t really a coherent strategy for how to reduce crime or how to work residents.”

Matt, an officer on the force for 10 years prior to the Chief’s arrival, reflects, “We ran on calls constantly, we were completely reactive. Violent crimes, street robberies, shootings just seemed to be out of control at times.”

The few initiatives that they once had to build relationships with the residents had fallen to the wayside. As he asked questions of the officers they would tell him, “We used to do that, but you know we got cut somehow budget-wise or something wasn’t supported and so we kind of gave up on it.” Working with youth at the time the Chief arrived was essentially related to enforcement. “The officers really saw their role as to try and control youth offenses through arrests and threat of consequence.” The school officials reflected to him that the youth perspective of the police was adversarial. It was “us versus them.”

The Chief identified a sense of powerlessness among the officers. “I would say that many of them had even lost the belief that they could do things that would be impactful on crime.” He described the morale of the officers when he arrived as “terrible.” “Instead of officers being what I like to call ‘empowered problem-solvers’ they would wait for a task to be assigned to them. They would then go out and carry out that task.” Alan described their style of policing at the time as “call cars.” They essentially arrived at a crime scene and made a report. They took calls and filed reports but did little to clear the cases. He remembers early on during Chief Nadeau’s tenure when after describing the scene the Chief asked him, “Well, then why aren’t we going to find this guy?” Alan reflects, “Somewhere along the line we somewhat lost our way.” They began to “push back” on some of the crime issues using heavy enforcement. Once the crime rate began to drop there was room to look anew at community relations.
At the time the Chief arrived the department was also running intentionally short staffed so that they could have money for supplies, but the impact of working shorthanded was increased stress on the officers as well as difficulty getting off for vacation or compensatory time.

The combination of high crime rates, low morale, and reduced resources presented a culture in need of change and the Chief was able to provide a compass to the organization with the philosophies of community oriented policing. But unlike many other agencies that had “adopted” community policing, the Chief lead the initiatives to integrate the philosophy into everything they did within the community and to engage others in the efforts.

**Community oriented policing as everyone’s job**

For many departments, hiring a community service officer is the extent of their engagement and that is frustrating to Chief Nadeau:

I can point to any number [of agencies] that say, “We’re a community policing agency” … and they’ve got one non-sworn person that’s typically a crime prevention officer who works on a neighborhood watch. …they don’t really have their staff committed to the ideals. Frankly, you know, most of the time the staff doesn’t really understand what that is. They probably think it’s being nice to people and waving to people; the ‘wave and grin’ version of community policing versus what it was truly intended to be – organizational transformation that incorporates community members and shared responsibility in decision-making and connection and trust and all of those other things.

The heart of community oriented policing for Chief Nadeau is that it is a philosophy that involves the entire police department as well as the community. This includes him. Reflecting on the changes within the department, one of the officers speaking of Nadeau said, “Where he gets the buy in [from the officers] is he practices what he preaches. He doesn’t lead from his office. He leads from the street. It’s not uncommon in the summertime or on a Friday night to see the Chief out there making stops… He’s out there making contacts but also enforcing the law.” The Chief was one of the first department members to become a Big Brother, spending his lunch hour once/week at the local school.
The emphasis for the department moved from reactive law enforcement to proactive problem solving with the community. “You can’t just continue to be out in the community and hope that you’re going to arrest your way out of a problem. You know, you have to be more proactive than that. You have to build those relationships.” The Chief explains the unique opportunity police have to impact the community:

You can either drive through that neighborhood, understanding that you know you’ve got a third or fourth generation Northeast Minneapolis or Columbia Heights senior citizen couple living next to a Hispanic couple, living next to a Somali couple and you think, “Well, good luck!” OR you can get out of your squad car and help build those connections and help people understand that everyone wants safe neighborhoods and great schools. … We may look a bit different but 99% of the things that we all think are important or that we have in common go across cultures.

The emphasis on building the relationships within the community for the Chief is not just between the police and community members but also between the community members.

Jeffrey, who has had assignments that gave him the opportunity to work with other law enforcement agencies, articulates the difference between what they do in Columbia Heights and what some other agencies do as, “it’s almost like finding a cure for an issue and arresting it away isn’t going to fix it. … Sending someone to jail isn’t going to fix the problem.”

One aspect of the community oriented policing mentioned by several officers is how they interact with landlords. Given that 33% of housing is rental, working with landlords became a priority to ensure that they provide good tenants, don’t cut corners and run a “good business.” The police and landlords share a common goal of having long term tenants in the city. When a police call is made on a property, the landlords are notified. Several years into these relationships, the landlords will call the police department before a police report is even filed to assure the officers that the situation is already being addressed and won’t happen again. Working the landlords is a place where the attention to relationships by the small measures of getting names and apartment numbers and writing detailed reports can give landlords the information they need to take action. For example, if the police report that Jane Doe in
apartment four reported this and the landlord has rented that apartment to Bob Jones, this information
gives the landlord what they need to enforce the ordinance about who lives in the apartment and to avoid
unwanted transients. The police offer to assist landlords with background screening if they have
questions about a potential tenant because “we want to make sure they're making an educated decision …
as that business owner.” More detailed police reports give landlords the documentation needed in courts
to get evictions. In the departmental survey of employees when asked “What is the most important change
that you have seen within the Police Department?” the work with the landlords was noted with comments
such as “Holding owners accountable for behavior on their property” and “Increased efforts to identify
target hot spots/properties and follow up ‘til problem is corrected and/or eliminated.”

With the common goal of long term tenants, one officer described his approach as asking,

‘What’s going on? … What can we help you fix so you don’t have to move?’ … How can I make
people feel safer, regardless of where they live? Or be more successful, regardless of where they
live? … Community policing is inviting, I would say, if it is done properly. It is ‘Let’s come
build a neighborhood together and make it what you want it to be, what we all want it to be.’

**Internal cultural change**

**Administrative integrations**

With the adoption of the philosophy of community oriented policing, this new priority was
integrated into the department through hot spot policing, the strategic plan, budget, use of language, use
of a COP coordinator, hiring strategies, accountability strategies, transparency, training and continuous
assessment/improvement.

The national COPS office included several components, one of which is Problem Oriented
Policing (POP). In Chief Nadeau’s first year, the department implemented “hot spot” policing, in which
they targeted areas of crime and focused on them. It was a successful approach. “At the end of that one
summer, this city was noticeably different.” Two officers were taken off of routine patrol and given
authority to address and solve the problems that were identified. “The word got around (to the bad guys)
to take your dealings elsewhere.” There was a small group of “bad guys” who were responsible for a large number of crimes. Not only did the community begin to feel safer, the other officers noticed the difference in the community as well. When one problem was worked, they asked, “What is the next best thing we can do with our time and money?” and they put a “laser focus” on another particular problem or area. These early victories built credibility for the COP strategy within both the department and community.

The Columbia Heights Police Department actively engages its strategic plan. It is not simply reviewed or revised once a year. Every month it is discussed and there are quarterly items of accountability. Initially the strategic plan focusing on community oriented policing and problem solving was brought forward by the Chief and adopted by the leadership team. In 2011 the leaders went to each roll call and work group to discuss the plan. In 2014 it was primarily developed by the officers on the street. Having the officers involved in planning for what they want to do as an agency is important for the Chief. He notes, “sitting in my office I have a feeling for what we want to accomplish but it comes down to the practical who, what, where, why and when on that community level and they are the experts.” It is important that the leaders “create the atmosphere where people feel like they’re empowered to bring up suggestions or to maybe spitball some ideas.” The results of the current process according to Nadeau is “we’re working harder than we ever have. … When you involve them in the strategic planning process, what they did was they took the old strategic plan, kept most of it, and then added a bunch of things to it.” He shared the example of the anti-bullying reading program the police do with the public elementary schools. In the process of strategic planning the question was raised about why they weren’t also doing the program in the charter schools and private schools within the city. Reflecting on this, the Chief noted, “I think it gets back to that point that … when it’s your idea, you are willing to commit yourself to even more things.”

Putting money into priorities is another strategy for the department. “Resources are directed based on our strategic plan.” (Effectiveness Study, 2014) For example, the employees are paid overtime if they come in on a day off to mentor a student. Reflecting on this the Chief said, “When you look at our
arrest statistics, we arrested less than half as many kids last year as we did in 2007… And so prevention pays off, and it pays off huge.” The department is supported by a city that doesn’t question such expenditures. The emphasis on prevention is sometimes hard to quantify but the Chief is firm about its importance: “If we’re paying overtime dollars to go do seatbelt enforcement, how is having positive role-modeling and mentoring a kid any less important?” Most employees do their community engagement during work hours with the blessing of the department.

Some of the seemingly minor changes include use of language. Columbia Heights has seen a large increase in new residents in recent years. Rather than referring to them as immigrants, the police department refers to them as “new Americans.” This simple change recognizes that which is shared between community members and the police employees rather than setting up a potential “us versus them.”

With the encouragement of the federal government, Columbia Heights was one of two Minneapolis/St. Paul suburbs that received a three year grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009 to hire another police officer to help them with community policing. In April 2010 Terry Nightingale was assigned to be the community oriented policing coordinator for Columbia Heights. He describes his responsibilities as “putting myself in the shoes of the people that I interact with. See what they need, what they are looking for, and take things further down the road.” This is both police as well as community residents. Others in the department describe this position as being the hub of the wheel that recognizes a variety of opportunities and invites others to participate in addressing the needs. For example when they had an increase in pedestrians struck by cars on a major street, the department not only increased enforcement of pedestrian laws but also developing educational materials and events to prevent further injuries and deaths. He sees a key aspect of his job is to help the residents pay attention, be alert and not create opportunities for crime. Prevention is key, particularly in the juvenile community oriented policing efforts. The officers recognize that “anything that could fall into a miscellaneous category gets thrown on his desk, and he does a beautiful job dealing with it.” Many of the relationships he has built as the department coordinator are with landlords, the adult education center in the community
as well as the churches and mosque. The institutions have become resources for each other; “I may go to them; they’ve come to us. ‘Hey, can you tell us about this and have someone come and talk with us?’ or ‘Come to our barbeque.’” Several officers commented on how Terry made it easy for them to be involved because they could just show up and don’t have to do all the organizing.

As Chief, one of the first changes Nadeau made when the opportunity to hire additional officers arose was to hire people with at least a four year degree. He wanted to find officers who were interested in more than “getting the bad guys off the streets.” He wanted officers who had problem solving and critical thinking skills as well as applicants who had a desire to partner with members of the community to address crime and improve the community of Columbia Heights.

Initially the opportunities to engage in community oriented policing were encouraged: “We’d like some officers to be involved in this.” The same 5-10 people kept showing up for such events. So the leadership of the department tried a more persuasive approach: “We really want you to be involved in this (particular project). It seems like a good fit for you.” In 2014 the department began to require that all employees (both sworn and civilian) spend a minimum of 10 hours annually doing community oriented policing. The average hours spent on community oriented policing per employee is estimated to be 60-70 hours annually.

Transparency, both with the department and the community, is a central part of the strategy. The officers are actively engaged in key decision making processes as noted with the strategic planning process. With a decision to implement body cameras, a committee composed primarily of officers was establish to research both instruments as well as policies. Several cameras were purchased and made available to officers to field test and critique. “The end result is that they came up with a great solution and a policy they can live with.” (Chief Nadeau).

With the community, a weekly crime analysis is published on the city webpage in order to inform and empower the public. Transparency includes a webpage with current crime maps, as well as Facebook and Twitter accounts that inform the community about police engagements and services. One officer noted that such transparency led to improved relationships with city council and believes there is a direct
correlation between transparency and funding. “Some people saw it as bragging but really it wasn’t. You’re paying taxes for a police department and these are the services we’re providing.” He noted since these practices have started that there are more compliments on the street and it seems the community is happier with the work the police are doing. Another officer commented, “Knowledge is power. I think that getting information out there to the public so that they can be our eyes and ears and that they can take steps” to protect themselves is critical. As one officer put it, “When it comes to crime reduction and public safety, it’s everyone’s responsibility. It just happens to be that we’re the ones that get paid to do it as professionals.”

The core training philosophy implemented in the department reflects adding training components throughout an officer’s career, not just when they begin. One of the questions the leadership asks is, “What are we doing to intellectually challenge (the officers) or gather their ideas so we can make this a force for greatness?” One of the innovations is an annual reading program during which the whole department reads a book chosen by the leadership team. They are given time on duty to read. One officer reflected on this experience,

I was like, ‘Man, this is ridiculous.’ I didn’t outwardly say that. I just kind of sat back. I read the books. I did my assignments. The first one that we read was by Chief Bratton. … I went into this book thinking, ‘This is bullshit,’ like every cop says, right? By the time I closed the …last page of the book, it really laid the foundation for me for the vision of our department. … That kind of started me on my positive trek… We can now prove five years later that it’s not bullshit.

In the era of budget cuts, training was one of the first things cut from the budget. Now it is a priority – not sending individuals around the country for training but rather supporting educational degrees and encouraging participation in local training opportunities as well as in house conversations.

Because successful community oriented policing is dependent on relationship with the citizens, continuous assessment and improvement is a part of the department strategy as well. In 2014 the department engaged in a comprehensive study of the effectiveness of its programs and efforts. The first
stage was a survey of the employees of the department. Stage two engaged business and community leaders. The final stage was a survey of citizens. Key results of that survey include:

- 94% of community respondents reported they feel safe from crime in their neighborhood. In publishing this item the police department reiterated the value of working together: “This is a great accomplishment brought on by the collaboration between the police and the community. This is evidence of the close eye the residents are keeping on their neighborhood and calling when needed.” (Columbia Heights Police Department, 2015)

- 92% responded that they feel safe using city parks.

- 99% reported feeling the police will respond to their problem or need when they call the police.

- 89% believe the Columbia Heights Police Department has a good relationship with the residents (with 2% disagreeing and 9% undecided). In their report to the community, the department commented, “We don’t want to meet you for the first time when you call as the victim of a crime or you are involved in an accident. We also want to meet you on good days and hear how well things are going and we want your feedback on where we can help and what we should be watching for in our community.”

- 69% agree that the CH police have been responsive to the changing demographics of the community (29% undecided and 2% disagree).

- 93% believe the CH police behave respectfully and professionally (4% undecided, 3% disagree).

- Between 2009 and 2014 crime has declined 35% in the city, a number that outpaces crime declines both regionally and nationally. Yet the surprise of the 2014 survey was that only 41% of the citizens felt that crime had decreased. The department leaders recognized two opportunities in this data: one, a need to better communicate what is happening with the residents; and two, to become more aware of the issues that are important to the citizens that aid their perception that crime is not decreasing.
94% of residents rated the overall performance of the police department as good or very good, 4% said average, and 3% responded poor or very poor.

The survey of employees (both sworn peace officers and civilian employees) was conducted in the spring of 2014. Key findings included that employees had a much stronger understanding of community policing and believed it had a direct impact on the reduction of crime in the city. They also noted the importance of community partnerships in reducing crime. There were only three employees who were “outside the norms” for the agency. All three were sworn police officers with 12+ years in the department (Nadeau, et. al. 2015, 17).

Resistance

The Chief acknowledges that getting the officers to embrace the importance of reaching out into the community was more challenging than he expected it to be. “The officers didn’t really see the need for it. They didn’t see it as … their job. There was a good amount of resistance particularly with some of the veteran people that had been here maybe 10-20 years that hadn’t really been challenged to do these types of things or really didn’t want to do these types of things.” This perception is reinforced by the survey of employees that show less support for COP strategies and skills among those with a 12-15 year tenure than those with 1-11 years of service. When asked, “Compared to five years ago, do you have a better understanding of COP strategies?” on a scale of 1-5 the average response from those with a 12-15 year tenure was 3.0 whereas those with 0-3 and 8-11 years averaged 4.5 and those with 4-7 years averaged 4.67. Addressing the question of whether the Chief and leadership team provided them the skills to appropriately understand COP, those with 12-15 years averaged 2.75 while those with 0-3 had 4.33, those with 4-7 years averaged 4.5 and those 8-11 averaged 4.25. The group with over 15 years of experience consistently expressed more positive perceptions than those with 12-15 years of tenure. This difference could be attributed to more of them being a part of the leadership team that is setting direction for the department.
The most common complaint was that community oriented policing was being added to an already full job description. The police are busy in Columbia Heights with a variety of calls (see Appendix X). The Chief notes that “people are being told, many of them for the first time in their careers, that they need to do more. And, as you might imagine, it wasn’t entirely popular.” But he also acknowledges, “busy-ness can be the soft, warm blanket that you wrap yourself up in and use that as your excuse not to go out there and do what you can do to make it a better, safer, more connected community.” He asks that officers spend an average of one hour of their typical twelve hour shift to build relationships within the community, whether that be working with business owners, working out with the youth at open gym, having lunch with a Little Brother/Sister or something else that reflects their interests.

The officers, however, did express a concern about burn out. Giving up personal time on days off, despite being paid for it, means that they are still doing work related activities rather than “recharging” for their next shift or tending to other priorities in their lives. The emphasis on problem solving means that officers are thinking more about their work and have a greater investment whether they are on the clock or not. One employee commented on the department survey, “We need to reduce the number of programs to a manageable level and then perfect them.” Along the same vein, another said, “Sometimes it feels like the quantity of programs is more important than quality. We should evaluate programs and events after they have been implemented and decide to change, improve or stop them.” This notion was reinforced, “Be cautious of doing too much as opposed to doing some core programs well.”

As noted previously, those hired by this Chief have been hired with a focus on their ability to solve problems and interact with the community. Many of those in place prior to Nadeau understand that their primary responsibilities to be enforcing the law. Some perceive a sense of competition between traditional policing and community oriented policing. “We need to have the resources to police the community. All our resources have been placed in COP at the expense of patrol and protecting the public.” (Effectiveness Study, 2014) Another commented in an interview:
I signed up to be a cop. I didn’t sign up to be a mentor to some young kid. I didn’t sign up to be a neighborhood watch partner. I didn’t sign up to go talk to businesses about how to prevent theft. I didn’t sign up for that. I signed up to arrest the bad guy.

Some have chosen to leave the department rather than change their habits or wait to see the results of the changes.

The other difficulty expressed by officers was the reality that there are times they must go into a situation, “be the boss and take control of the situation.” Building relationships is not on the radar screen in the midst of a crime or crisis. As Mark said, “you go into everything with a mindset of trying to be friendly and there are just certain situations where that’s not effective.” He noted that for himself and several other newer people they were less prepared to really take control of a situation when that was needed. “You get so much less exposure and practice that it’s really hard, but it’s an extremely necessary part of the job.”

**Reframing policing**

In moving from simply reacting to crime or calls for service, the department has focused on problem solving rather than just treating symptoms. For example, a call comes in on a run away and the officer learns it is the fourth run away in the past year. Instead of just taking the report and turning it in, the officers are expected to look beyond the symptom. “Do we have an abuse issue? Do we have a neglect issue? Is there a chemical dependency issue? Is this kid still in school or are they truant?” The Columbia Heights officers are expected to ask, “Geez, what’s going on with this kid?” Looking beyond the symptom to identify the problem recognizes that such crises are times of vulnerability as well as an opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of community members.

“Mark,” an officer on the force for about six years, remembers that when he began there was a “huge problem with juvenile crime.” Not only did the police enforce curfew and truancy laws but they addressed the problem by developing alternative activities for youth through a variety of Cops-N-Kids programs. The youth receive a significant portion of the community oriented policing efforts including an
anti-bullying reading program in the elementary schools, Big Brother/Big Sister programs, and an after
school open gym that has become so popular that the ability to participate is now “earned” through grades
and good behavior. Mark notes that over the course of each year they reach out to a large number of
students.

That just creates a web effect where the kids go home and they tell their parents about the positive
experience. Whether that resonates with the parents or not is beside the point. But I’m sure it
hits home with some that ‘Oh, my kid hung out with a cop and he liked it. The cop wasn’t mean
to him.’

Alan describes the change in the way children interact with the officers.

All of the kids are happy to see us. We’re getting high fives constantly in the grade schools and
that type of thing because at that age they’re happy to see us. We hope by having that liaison
contact in the school district that this continues [in junior and senior high].

He continues, “It’s amazing how some of these young kids will come up and they will hug you
and they will not let go. It’s almost as if they are craving some attention … in a good way.” Since they
stepped up their efforts with youth juvenile arrests in Columbia Heights has declined by over 50%
(Nadeau, et. al., 2015, 23).

Jeffrey commented on the benefits that most of them see from the way the department has
reframed policing.

We’re seeing that we’re not having to go into so many violent situations and that benefits me. …
You can’t tell me that these programs aren’t helping our own safety as well. So if I need to read a
book to a second grader, who loves everything about me being and puts a smile on my face, well
then I’ll do that if that’s going to prevent me from getting into a shooting with that kid 10 years
from now.

Alan acknowledges that he is not sure he would have taken a position with Columbia Heights
when he was a rookie as he became a cop because of the adrenal producing part of the job – the foot
chases and locking up the bad guys. Reflecting on that now he notes,
Over the years officers can get pretty jaded as far as their outlook on people, especially people in the city that they work in, and because of that they soon forget that there’s good kids, that there’s good people out there. … Seeing some of those kids you soon realize that they’re no different than any other kid. They’re trying to do good; they’re hoping that things work out for them.

Some of these kids have some incredible challenges. We forget that … because we only see them in one way and that’s after they’ve done something criminal.

One of the benefits of community oriented policing that Alan sees is that the police get to interact with another part of the community, see the shared hopes and dreams, and provide some guidance and companionship to youth who need it.

One of the images identified by the officers for themselves is that of warrior. “One of the things I think we forget as warriors is that we also have to truly look out for those who are less fortunate than us. … I think getting out and helping those that are truly less fortunate in a different way, I think it helps you. … There are some good people here and those are the ones we need to make sure are okay.”

**Innovation**

The Chief notes, “One of the things that I really see as one of the neat outgrowths here is that we’ve challenged our staff. If you don’t see something that seems to fit a community need or your aptitude, your gifts, what interests you, then make a recommendation and chances are, as long as it’s consistent with our mission, we’re going to support it.” The officers seem to be responding positively to this. The Chief described an officer who came to him and said,

You know, Chief, we’ve got all these things and I’m happy to do any of them, but what are we doing to help our senior citizens? I mean they’re frequently the victims of fraud. They can be so vulnerable sometimes and preyed upon by their own family members. What can we do there?

This conversation led to the development of a six week Senior Citizens Academy that has run successfully twice.
One officer commented, “I’m thinking I can do more than I probably could in a larger department because of the lack of constraints, because of the freedom and the creativity they allow. … You can see the effect you have on a more personal level.”

**External partnerships**

At the heart of community oriented policing is the importance of authentic relationships between the police and community members. Trust is the foundation that will lead a citizen to call with a concern or a business to reach out to address a problem. It is the ability to address issues and solve problems to prevent prime that provide a system that has led to historical reductions in crime and high approval ratings from the community. Matt described how the question, “Who can I partner with to solve this problem?” is now a part of their mindset. Asking the question opens them up to new possibilities such as working with the county health department to inspect and shut down a motel that had long been a site of drug use, domestics, assaults, people with warrants and other crimes.

Specific strategies for external partnerships embraced by the department include developing public policies that address recurring issues, enforcing ordinances that improve the community, mentoring “our” kids, listening to the community and working together.

**Developing public policy**

When a need for a new policy surfaces, the department works with the city attorney and city council to develop them. Examples that were shared included a Replica Firearm ordinance to ban plastic guns that look like real guns. Another requires landlords to know the background of their tenants and to respond to concerns like noise or drug use. Holding the landlords accountable for their businesses has helped given the 33% of housing is rental.

If we keep coming to your house because you’re having loud parties or because somebody is outside causing trouble who is associated with your rental… you don’t want to displace people but it also makes it really hard on the good neighbors. So, actually by displacing people that are
bad tenants has a positive effect on the whole building. If the whole building has a positive effect, that has a positive effect on the whole city.

**Targeting ordinances that impact neighborhoods**

In addition to developing ordinances to address repetitive issues, steeped in the knowledge of the broken windows theory of policing, the police also make sure the city is kept in good shape. Terry described, for example, enforcing trash can policies that cans can only be at the curb 24 hours before and after trash pickup. Residents wondered why the police and fire department (enforcement arm for property maintenance in Columbia Heights) focused on such a mundane matter.

It looks messy. They are knocked over, their stuff spilling out of them. Just not a good environment for a public street to see this kind of stuff, not to mention the used TV, the used couch. Through the property maintenance code … we’ve done collaborating with other city departments. … There’s efforts for those hot zones to look better that helps people feel better about where they live.

**Mentoring “our kids”**

Engagement with Big Brothers/Big Sisters is one of the primary means of positively building relationships with the youth of the community. After hearing the police talk about their engagement with the youth, other city leaders and citizens have begun to join in. Through their Coffee with a Cop program, community members asked “Hey, what can we do?” and the Chief responded, “We would love to have you as a mentor for our kids!” Several are now Big Brothers/Sisters, building circles of caring for “our kids” in the community.

**Listening to and dialoging with the community**

As the number of Hispanics in the community rose, the police became aware of a rift in their relationship with that part of the community because so many were getting arrested when they were stopped because they didn’t have driver’s licenses. Jeffrey noted, “It’s a lot different [here] than it is down in South America or Mexico so it takes a long time to overcome their ears and build a new relationship. … They are traditionally scared of the police.” After some community meetings and
listening sessions the police agreed to honor a basic identification card issued by the consulate and not to arrest and jail those without driver’s licenses. The new residents understood the need for such a card (as well as a driver’s license if they were driving) and there was a sense of having solved the problem together.

Working with the new Americans was noted by several officers. Paul thinks the multicultural outreach has been most effective and relevant as many of the new residents in Columbia Heights are afraid of the police. He told the story of a person having a wallet stolen but they were too afraid to report it. He learned that in the person’s birth country it would not have been reported and reflected, “Who knows how many crimes are not reported…”

**Working together**

Alan spoke of issues with a business in the community. There were repeated issues regarding parking, loud people at night, parking on residential streets. The issues started becoming worse. As the police worked the issue they kept the mayor, city manager, city council and other business owners in the loop. Because of this shared knowledge of the escalation, when a drive by shooting occurred, the city council acted to pull the business license at their next meeting. It was the diligence of working with the business owner and building owner and making it clear that they were responsible to provide a safe environment and to be a good neighbor as well as a safe neighbor.

Due to the diversity of Columbia Heights the police encounter negative expectations and perceptions. Some minority communities have a long history of adversarial relationships with the police, whether in this country or in their native land. Jeffrey reflected on this reality that an officer is never interacting with another with a clean slate.

Just because you say, ‘Hey! We’re the good guys now’ doesn’t fix all the things that have happened in the past. Communication goes both ways. Just because they don’t trust you doesn’t mean you can’t trust them. You need to both work to find common ground … rather than focus on differences.
Discussion

In addressing the question, “How has a primarily Caucasian police department achieved both a historical reduction in crime as well as extremely high levels of community support in a very diverse, urban community?” this study identified leadership initiatives, internal cultural change and external partnerships as key to their success. The observations of a new Chief of Police regarding reactive policing, low morale, lack of strategies to reduce crime, and the stress of being short staffed and short on supplies led him to move the department to an organizing philosophy of community oriented policing.

For Columbia Heights it was not just a token nod to the importance of community oriented policing but rather an integrated attempt to change through reframing the internal culture and developing critical external partnerships. The internal changes occurred through the integration of community oriented policing through hot spot policing, a strategic plan that is reviewed monthly, quarterly and now engages all officers in its development, a budget that reflects the priorities of community engagement, use of language that builds bridges between people, the networking of a COP coordinator to help officers and other employees find appropriate opportunities and stakeholders, hiring strategies that prioritized problem solving and people skills, accountability strategies, transparency with both the departments and the community, training that included building a knowledge base and shared set of understandings and continuous assessment/improvement. The external strategies involved developing public policies that address recurring issues, enforcing ordinances that improve the community, building partnerships to engage more community leaders to mentor “our” kids, actively listening to the concerns of community groups and working together to find solutions that recognized the needs of all involved. The internal research of the department concluded, “The Columbia Heights example shows the transition from an agency that claimed to be a COP agency yet dedicated few resources towards that end, to an agency that had an entire organizational transformation aligned with COP principles” (Nadeau, et. al, 2015, 28).

Probably the biggest challenge at the heart of the culture change in Columbia Heights was the reconstruction of what it means to be a police officer especially to those who found meaning in the traditional policing concepts of getting the “bad guys” off the street and enforcing the law. The Chief
embodied the potential of creating a new culture by negotiating the meaning of what was important in the Columbia Heights Police Department. The officers are always ready to respond to crime and work to put the “bad guys” away but with the decrease of crime and emphasis on prevention how officers spend their time had to be renegotiated. The Chief’s redeployment of two officers from street patrol to addressing a hot spot during the first summer of his tenure provided interactions that reformed the practice by providing small victories that others noticed. As success built through targeting areas for a “laser focus,” the process evolved to weekly analysis of crime to stay on top of the developing issues and deploy officers accordingly. Rather than being “call cars” the officers interacted with one another and the community to solve and prevent problems in ways that brought new sense of meaning to their work.

Even the most reticent could not ignore the success of the model although as predicted by Greene (2000) these members of the police subculture still focus particularly on issues of danger and authority. They are wary of giving away their “secrets” and not having the upper hand in the case of a crisis. As noted in the departmental survey there are approximately three, or 10%, of the sworn officers who continue to resist the conversion to community oriented policing as the organizing philosophy. For them, the symbolism of what it means to be a police officer is at risk. For others, they have put great stake in the community oriented policing philosophy and the meaning they find in it.

Jeffrey noted,

My fear is ‘what happens when [the crime statistics] start to go back up?’ Does that mean we’ve lost something here? No. I think that if we start to see them go up that means we need to change our approach again… We have to go in and address our model and say, ‘Hey, how have the needs of our city changed and what are we going to do about it?’

He reflects that whereas before when things got worse the department “didn’t know what to do other than to just react.” Now there is a plan in place as well as strategic partners. “The system works. It’s been proven.”

**Reflections on Ferguson**
The majority of these interviews were conducted in August 2014, just a couple of weeks after a police officer in Ferguson, MO shot and killed an unarmed Black man. The officers being interviewed were thinking about the events in Ferguson and how their community might react.

I would like to think that if we had a situation like where one of our officers was forced to shoot a person and the community had this outrage, I would like to believe that we have enough of a core through these partnerships and these youth outreach programs and community programs that … we’ve got that trust with the majority of the community. … The biggest thing that’s going to make your COP programs successful is building trust. … We work with those community leaders. We work with the businesses. We work with the youth. We work with the minorities. I think that it would be different here.

There is a realism underlying this reflection as he notes that “bad things are going to happen in this job. It is an inherent risk of the job.” Tom uses the metaphor of faith as a foundation.

Your have your faith so that when bad times strike you can fall back on your faith. It’s no different with the COP thing. The community oriented policing program is our faith that we fall back on as police and say, ‘Okay, we had a bad thing happen so now we need to pull all these people together and resources and work through it.’

One of those resources and allies must be the media. They are needed to promote the positive activities but also to not just report but understand negative events. “You need them to understand what happened and why. Otherwise they’re just going to make up their own beliefs and their own answers.”

The Chief and a couple of officers noted that one of their real goals is to see more and more minority police officers. The department has started a teen academy in the high school as well as assigned a school liaison officer, hoping to attract students to consider the profession. Jeffrey uses any opportunity to tell the youth, “Hey, if you had a bad experience with police officers, then become one. Fix it.” He also tries to show them that this is “actually a really good job.” He recognizes there are historical and cultural barriers to relationships with the police from the perspective of community members “but being a COP department is the only way to address those.”
Another officer reflected hope that all of their community oriented policing efforts would help them if they ever face a situation like Ferguson.

We always worry about that whole political capital or that emotional bank account that we invest into the city because every now and then we’re going to make a big mistake. It’s just the nature of the game that we play. We hope that people remember that mistakes get made, we try to learn from those mistakes, we try to deal with those mistakes in the best way that we think, but mistakes are going to happen because we have to pick police officers from the human race.

Bibliography


Add:

Bogdan and Biklen

Merriam

CHPD study
## APPENDIX: Crime Statistics of Columbia Heights, MN

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