

Community Policing: Principles and Elements

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Community policing has its roots in such earlier developments as police-community relations, team policing, crime prevention, and the rediscovery of foot patrol. In the 1990s it has expanded to become the dominant strategy of policing – so much that the 100,000 new police officers funded by the 1994 Crime Bill must be engaged in community policing.

Community policing (COP) is often misunderstood. Four essential principles should be recognized:

- *COP is not a panacea.* It is not the answer to all the problems facing any one department. However, COP is *an* answer to some of the problems facing modern policing and it may be *an* answer to some of the problems facing any one department.
- *COP is not totally new.* Some police departments or individual police officers report that they are already doing it, or even that they have *always* practiced COP. This may be true. Even so, there are some specific aspects of community policing that are relatively new; also, very few agencies can claim that they have fully adopted the entire gamut of COP department-wide.
- *COP is not “hug a thug.”* It is not anti-law enforcement or anti-crime fighting. It does not seek to turn police work into social work. In fact, COP is more serious about reducing crime and disorder than the superficial brand of incident-oriented “911 policing” that most departments have been doing for the past few decades.
- *COP is not a cookbook.* There is no ironclad precise definition of community policing nor a set of specific activities that must always be included. A set of universally applicable principles and elements can be identified, but exactly how they are implemented should and must vary from place to place, because jurisdictions and police agencies have differing needs and circumstances.

In order to describe the full breadth of community policing, it is helpful to identify four major dimensions of COP and the most common elements occurring within each. The four dimensions are:

- The Philosophical Dimension
- The Strategic Dimension
- The Tactical Dimension
- The Organizational Dimension

The Philosophical Dimension

Many of its most thoughtful and forceful advocates emphasize the community policing is a new philosophy of policing, perhaps constituting even a paradigm shift away from professional-model policing and not just a particular program or specialized activity. The philosophical dimension includes the central ideas and beliefs underlying community policing. Three of the most important of these are citizen input, broad function, and personal service.

(1) Citizen Input – Community policing incorporates a firm commitment to the value and necessity of *citizen input* to police policies and priorities. In a free and democratic society, citizens are supposed to have a say in how they are governed. Police departments, like other agencies of government, are supposed to be responsive and accountable. Also, from a more selfish standpoint, law enforcement agencies are most likely to obtain the citizen support and cooperation they need when they display interest in input from citizens.

A few of the techniques utilized to enhance citizen input are:

- *Agency Advisory Boards* – groups of citizens who meet regularly with the chief/sheriff and other top commanders to provide input and advice on overall agency policies, priorities, and issues.
- *Unit Advisory Boards* – groups of citizens who meet regularly with unit commanders and related personnel to provide input and advice on unit policies, priorities, and issues (e.g. precinct advisory boards, victim/witness advisory councils, family abuse advisory boards, etc.).
- *Beat Advisory Boards* – groups of citizens who meet regularly with their beat officer or beat team to provide input and advice about priorities and issues.
- *Special Advisory Boards* – groups of citizens with special interests who meet regularly with the chief/sheriff, top commanders, or related personnel to provide input and advice on policies, priorities, and issues related to their special interests (e.g. ministry alliance, business council, mental health council, etc.).
- *Community Surveys* – surveys conducted in various ways (telephone, mail, in-person, in the newspaper, etc.) to obtain citizen views on policies, priorities, and issues.
- *Electronic Mail/Home Page* – use of the Internet, on-line services, computer bulletin boards, etc., to obtain citizen views on policies, priorities and issues.
- *Radio/Television Call-In Shows* – use of radio and TV call-in shows to obtain citizen views on policies, priorities and issues.
- *Town Meetings* – public meetings to which citizens are invited in order to provide input and advice on policies, priorities, and issues.

(2) Broad Function – COP recognizes policing as a *broad function*, not a narrow law enforcement or crime fighting role. The job of police officers is seen as

working with residents to enhance neighborhood safety. This includes resolving conflicts, helping victims, preventing accidents, solving problems, and fighting fear as well as reducing crime through apprehension and enforcement. Policing is inherently a multi-faceted government function – arbitrarily narrowing it to just call-handling and law enforcement reduces its effectiveness in accomplishing the multiple objectives that the public expects police to achieve.

Some examples of the broad function of policing include:

- *Traffic Safety* – good police departments pursue traffic safety through education and engineering as well as selective enforcement.
- *Drug Abuse* – many agencies seek to reduce drug abuse through public education, DARE, regulation of prescriptions, and control of chemicals as well as through a variety of enforcement efforts.
- *Fear Reduction* – many agencies attempt to reduce fear of crime (especially when it is out of proportion to actual risk) through public education, high-interaction patrol, problem solving, and enforcement focused on nuisance crimes (e.g., panhandling and loitering).
- *Domestic Violence* – most police departments now offer domestic violence victims an array of services (referral, transportation, protection, probable cause arrest, etc.) rather than merely explaining how to obtain an arrest warrant.
- *Zoning* – some agencies take the opportunity to participate in zoning decisions and related matters (e.g., issuance of building permits) in order to offer input related to traffic safety, crime prevention, etc.

(3) Personal Service – Community policing emphasizes *personal service* to the public, not bureaucratic behavior. This is designed to overcome one of the most common complaints that the public has about government employees, including police officers – that they do not seem to care, and that they treat citizens as numbers, not real people. Of course, not every police-citizen encounter can be amicable and friendly. But whenever possible, officers should deal with citizens in a friendly, open, and personal manner designed to turn them into satisfied customers. This can be best done by eliminating as many artificial bureaucratic barriers as possible, so that citizens can deal directly with “their” officer.

A few of the methods that have been adopted in order to implement personalized service are:

- *Officer Business Cards* – officers are provided personalized business cards to distribute to victims, complainants, and other citizens with whom they have contact.
- *Officer Pagers and Voice Mail* – officers have their own pagers and voice mail so that victims, complainants, and other citizens can contact them directly.
- *Recontact Procedures* – all or a subset of victims, complainants, and others are recontacted by the officer who handled their situation, the

officer's supervisor, or some other staff member (e.g., a volunteer) to see if further assistance is needed.

- *Slogans and Symbols* – many departments adopt slogans, mission statements, value statements, and other devices designed to reinforce the importance of providing personalized service to the public.

The Strategic Dimension

The strategic dimension of community policing includes the key operational concepts that translate philosophy into action. These strategic concepts are the links between the broad ideas and beliefs that underlie community policing and the specific programs and practices by which it is implemented. They assure that agency policies, priorities, and resource allocation are consistent with the COP philosophy. Three important strategic elements are re-oriented operations, prevention emphasis, and geographic focus.

(1) Re-Oriented Operations – Community policing recommends re-oriented operations, with less reliance on the patrol car and more emphasis on face-to-face interactions. One objective is to replace ineffective or isolating operational practices (e.g., motorized patrol and rapid response to low priority calls) with more effective and more interactive practices. A related objective is to find ways of performing necessary traditional functions (e.g., handling emergency calls and conducting follow-up investigations) more efficiently, in order to save time and resources that can then be devoted to more community-oriented activities.

Some illustrations of re-oriented operations include:

- *Foot Patrol* – where appropriate, many agencies have instituted foot patrol to supplement or even replace motorized patrol.
- *Other Modes of Patrol* – many agencies have adopted other modes of patrol, such as bicycle patrol, scooter patrol, dirt bike patrol, and horse patrol.
- *Walk and Ride* – many agencies require officers engaged in motorized patrol to park their cars periodically and engage in foot patrol in shopping centers, malls, business districts, parks, and residential areas.
- *Directed Patrol* – many agencies give motorized patrol officers specific assignments (sometimes called “D-runs”) to carry out during time periods when they are not busy handling calls.
- *Differential Patrol* – many agencies have adopted differential responses (e.g., delayed response, telephone reporting, walk-in reporting) tailored to the needs of different types of calls, instead of dispatching a marked unit to the scene of every call for service.
- *Case Screening* – many agencies have adopted different investigative responses (e.g., no follow-up, follow-up by patrol, follow-up by detectives) tailored to meet the needs of different types of criminal and non-criminal cases, instead of assigning every case to a detective.

(2) Prevention Emphasis – Community policing tries to implement a *prevention emphasis*, based on the common sense idea that although citizens appreciate and value rapid response, reactive investigations, and apprehension of wrongdoers, they would always prefer that their victimizations be prevented in the first place. Most modern police departments devote some resources to crime prevention, in the form of a specialist officer or unit. COP attempts to go farther by emphasizing that prevention is a big part of *every* officer's job.

A few of the approaches to focusing on prevention that departments have adopted are:

- *Situational Crime Prevention* – the most promising general approach to crime prevention is to tailor specific preventive measures to each situation's specific characteristics.
- *CPTED* – one set of measures used by many departments is CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design), which focuses on the physical characteristics of locations that make them conducive to crime.
- *Community Crime Prevention* – many departments now work closely with individual residents and with groups of residents (e.g., block watch) in a cooperative manner to prevent crime.
- *Youth-Oriented Prevention* – many departments have implemented programs or collaborated with others to provide programs designed to prevent youth crime (e.g., recreation, tutoring, and mentoring programs).
- *Business Crime Prevention* – many departments work closely with businesses to recommend personnel practices, retail procedures, and other security measures designed to prevent crime.

(3) Geographic Focus – Community policing adopts a geographic focus to establish stronger bonds between officers and neighborhoods in order to increase mutual recognition, identification, responsibility, and accountability. Although most police departments have long assigned patrol officers to beats, the officers' accountability has usually be temporal (for their shift) rather than geographic. More specialized personnel within law enforcement agencies have been accountable for performing their functions but not for any geographic areas. By its very name, however, *community* policing implies an emphasis on places more so than on times or functions.

Some of the methods by which COP attempts to emphasize geography are as follows:

- *Permanent Beat Assignment* – patrol officers are assigned to geographic beats for extended periods of time, instead of being rotated frequently.
- *Lead Officers* – since several different officers will be assigned to a beat across 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, often one officer is designated as the lead officer responsible for problem identification and coordination of the efforts of all the officers.

- *Beat Teams* – the basic building block for patrol can be the beat team (all the officers who work in a particular beat) rather than the temporal squad or shift.
- *Cop-of-the-Block* – the beat can be sub-divided into smaller areas of individual accountability, so that every patrol officer has general responsibility for a beat and special responsibility for smaller areas.
- *Area Commanders* – middle-level managers (typically lieutenants) can be given responsibility for geographic areas consisting of several beats, instead of being shift or squad commanders.
- *Mini-Stations* – each beat or combination of beats can have its own facility (mini-station, sub-station, or storefront) to give it additional geographic focus for officers and area residents.
- *Area Specialists* – some detectives and other specialists can be assigned to geographic areas instead of to narrow sub-specialties (e.g., a detective handles all, or at least most, of the crime occurring in a particular neighborhood, instead of handling car thefts from all over the jurisdiction).

The Tactical Dimension

The tactical dimension of community policing ultimately translates ideas, philosophies, and strategies into concrete programs, tactics, and behaviors. Even those who insist that “community policing is a philosophy, not a program” must concede that unless community policing eventually leads to some action, some new or different behavior, it is all rhetoric and no reality. Indeed, many commentators have taken the view that community policing is little more than a new police marketing strategy that has left the core elements of the police role untouched. Three of the most important tactical elements of community policing are positive interaction, partnerships, and problem solving.

(1) Positive Interaction – Policing inevitably involves some negative contacts between officers and citizens – arrests, tickets, stops for suspicion, orders to desist, inability to make things much better for victims, etc. Community policing recognizes this fact and recommends that officers offset it as much as they can by engaging in positive interactions whenever possible. Positive interactions have several benefits, of course: they generally build familiarity, trust and confidence on both sides; they remind officers that most citizens respect and support them; they make the officer more knowledgeable about people and conditions in the beat; they provide specific information for criminal investigations and problem solving; and they break up the monotony of motorized patrol.

Some methods for engaging in positive interaction include:

- *Routine Call Handling* – officers can take the time to engage in more positive interaction in the course of handling calls, instead of rushing to clear calls in order to return to motorized patrol.

- *Meetings* – officers can take every opportunity to attend neighborhood meetings, block watch meetings, civic club meetings, etc.; these can yield productive non-enforcement interactions with a wide spectrum of the community.
- *School-Based Policing* – officers who take the trouble to go into the schools get many opportunities to interact positively with youth, not to mention teachers and other school staff.
- *Interactive Patrol* – too many officers patrol primarily by watching what goes on in public spaces; officers should stop and talk with more people so that their patrolling relies more on interacting than on watching.

(2) Partnerships – Community policing stresses the importance of active *partnerships* between police, other agencies, and citizens, in which all parties really work together to identify and solve problems. Citizens can take a greater role in public safety than has been typical over the past few decades, and other public and private agencies can leverage their own resources and authority toward the solution of public safety problems. Obviously, there are some legal and safety limitations on how extensive a role citizens can play in “co-producing” public safety. Just as obviously, it is a mistake for the police to try to assume the entire burden for controlling crime and disorder.

- *Citizen Patrols* – in many jurisdictions citizens actively patrol their neighborhoods, usually in cooperation with the police and often in radio or cellular phone communication with police dispatch.
- *Citizen Police Academies* – many departments now operate citizen police academies, typically held in the evenings, that inform interested citizens about the police department and often prepare them for roles as volunteers or citizen patrols.
- *Volunteers* – many departments utilize volunteers, auxiliaries, and reserves in a variety of sworn and non-sworn roles.
- *Schools* – many police departments today work much more closely with schools than in the past, not just with DARE programs but also with school resource officers, truancy programs, etc.
- *Code Enforcement* – many of the problem locations that police deal with are susceptible to code enforcement for various building and safety violations.
- *Nuisance Abatement* – some locations have such a multitude and history of criminal and civil law violations that procedures can be followed to close them down, demolish them, and/or forfeit their ownership to the government.
- *Landlords & Tenants* – many police departments work closely with apartment managers, public housing managers, tenant associations, and similar groups in order to improve leasing practices and prevent problems in rental properties.

(3) Problem Solving – Community policing urges the adoption of a *problem solving* orientation toward policing, as opposed to the incident-oriented approach that has tended to prevail in conjunction with the professional model. Naturally, emergency calls must still be handled right away, and officers will still spend much of their time handling individual incidents. Whenever possible, however, officers should search for the underlying conditions that give rise to single and multiple incidents. When such conditions are identified, officers should try to affect them as a means of controlling and preventing future incidents. Basically, officers should strive to have more substantive and meaningful impact than occurs from 15-minute treatments of individual calls for service.

Some of the more promising approaches to problem solving include:

- *The SARA Process* – many departments use the SARA model (scanning, analysis, response, assessment) as a guide to the problem solving process for all kinds of crime and noncrime problems.
- *Guardians* – when searching for solutions to problems, it is often helpful to identify so-called guardians, who are people who have an incentive or the opportunity to help rectify the problem (e.g., landlords, school principals, etc.).
- *Beat Meetings* – some departments utilize meetings between neighborhood residents and their beat officers to identify problems, analyze them, and brainstorm possible solutions.
- *Hot Spots* – many departments analyze their calls for service to identify locations that have disproportionate numbers of calls and then do problem solving to try to lower the call volume in those places.
- *Multi-Agency Teams* – some jurisdictions use problem solving teams comprised not just of police, but also of representatives of other agencies (public works, sanitation, parks and recreation, code enforcement, etc.) so that an array of information and resources can be brought to bear once problems are identified.

The Organizational Dimension

It is important to recognize an Organizational Dimension that surrounds community policing and greatly affects its implementation. In order to support and facilitate community policing, police departments often consider a variety of changes in organization, administration, management, and supervision. The elements of the organizational dimension are not really part of community policing *per se*, but they are frequently crucial to its successful implementation. Three important organizational elements of COP are structure, management, and information.

(1) Structure – Community policing looks at various ways of restructuring police agencies in order to facilitate and support implementation of the philosophical, strategic, and tactical elements described above. Any

organization's structure should correspond with its mission and the nature of the work performed by its members. Some aspects of traditional police organization structure seem more suited to routine bureaucratic work than to the discretion and creativity required for COP.

The types of restructuring associated with community policing include:

- *Decentralization* – authority and responsibility can sometimes be delegated more widely so that commanders, supervisors, and officers can act more independently and be more responsive.
- *Flattening* – the number of layers of hierarchy in the police organization can sometimes be reduced in order to improve communications and reduce waste, rigidity and bureaucracy.
- *De-specialization* – the number of specialized units and personnel can sometimes be reduced with more resources devoted to the direct delivery of police services (including COP) to the general public.
- *Teams* – efficiency and effectiveness can sometimes be improved by getting employees working together as teams to perform work, solve problems, or look for ways of improving quality.
- *Civilianization* – positions currently held by sworn personnel can sometimes be reclassified or redesigned for non-sworn personnel, allowing both cost savings and better utilization of sworn personnel.

(2) Management – Community policing is often associated with styles of leadership, management, and supervision that give more emphasis to organizational culture and values and less emphasis to written rules and formal discipline. The general argument is that when employees are guided by a set of officially sanctioned values they will usually make good decisions and take appropriate actions. Although many formal rules will still probably be necessary, managers will need to resort to them much less often in order to maintain control over subordinates.

Management practices consistent with this emphasis on organizational culture and values include:

- *Mission* – agencies should develop concise statements of their mission and values and use them consistently in making decisions, guiding employees, and training new recruits.
- *Strategic Planning* – agencies should engage in continuous strategic planning aimed at ensuring that resources and energy are focused on mission accomplishment and adherence to core values; otherwise organizations tend to get off track, confused about their mission and about what really matters.
- *Coaching* – supervisors should coach and guide their subordinates more, instead of restricting their roles to review of paperwork and enforcement of rules and regulations.

- *Mentoring* – young employees need mentoring from managers, supervisors, and/or peers – not just to learn how to do their job right but also to learn what constitutes the right job; in other words, to learn about ethics and values and what it means to be a good police officer.
- *Empowerment* – under COP, employees are encouraged to be risk-takers who demonstrate imagination and creativity in their work – this kind of empowerment can only succeed, however, when employees are thoroughly familiar with the organization’s core values and firmly committed to them.
- *Selective Discipline* – in their disciplinary processes, agencies should make distinctions between intentional and unintentional errors made by employees and between employee actions that violate core values versus those that merely violate technical rules.

(3) Information – Doing community policing and managing it effectively require certain types of information that have not traditionally been available in all police departments. In the never-ending quality vs. quantity debate, for example, community policing tends to emphasize quality. This emphasis on quality shows up in many areas; avoidance of traditional bean-counting (arrests, tickets) to measure success, more concern for how well calls are handled than merely for how quickly they are handled, etc. Also, the geographic focus of community policing increases the need for detailed information based on neighborhoods as the unit of analysis. The emphasis on problem solving highlights the need for information systems that aid in identifying and analyzing a variety of community-level problems. And so on.

Several aspects of police administration under COP that have implications for information are:

- *Performance Appraisal* – individual officers can be evaluated on the quality of their community policing and problem solving activities, and perhaps on results achieved, instead of on traditional performance indicators (tickets, arrests, calls handled, etc.).
- *Program Evaluation* – police programs and strategies can be evaluated more on the basis of their effectiveness (outcomes, results, quality) than just on their efficiency (effort, outputs, quantity).
- *Departmental Assessment* – the police agency’s overall performance can be measured and assessed on the basis of a wide variety of indicators (including customer satisfaction, fear levels, problem solving, etc.) instead of a narrow band of traditional indicators (reported crime, response time, etc.).
- *Information Systems* – an agency’s information systems need to collect and produce information on the whole range of the police function, not just on enforcement and call-handling activities, in order to support more quality-oriented appraisal, evaluation and assessment efforts.

- *Crime Analysis* – individual officers need more timely and complete crime analysis information pertaining to their specific geographic areas of responsibility to facilitate problem identification, analysis, fear reduction, etc.
- *Geographic Information Systems (GIS)* – sophisticated and user-friendly computerized mapping software available today makes it possible for officers and citizens to obtain customized maps that geographically identify “hot spots” and help them more easily picture the geographic locations and distribution of crime related problems.

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