

COMMUNITY

P O L I C I N G

Implementing POP: The San Diego Experience

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In police organizations, credibility is the basis for building a trusting relationship between the leader and the officers. Credibility is developed from words supported by actions. Police officers have long memories when assessing the merit of a leader's words. We were reminded of the impact of words spoken but not forgotten when two officers of the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) recently went through their old academy files and found a quote that I had made to their graduating class: "Random patrol is little better than sleeping on duty."

In light of a decision in the fall of 1989 to implement a problem-oriented approach to policing in all uniformed divisions, the officers who uncovered this statement found congruency in those words. The message given to patrol officers from a command that is supporting and guiding problem-oriented policing (POP) is that officers are expected to use uncommitted time to look for and solve existing beat problems. They are encouraged—indeed, expected—to make decisions about how to analyze problems, develop appropriate responses and interact responsibly with the community in a partnership aimed at solving community problems.

Police executives tout the patrol officer as the "backbone" of the organization, but experience teaches officers that their performance is often measured using numbers—of arrests, contacts, citations—as indicators of efficiency. They are encouraged to seek investigative or specialized assignments as a sign of a progressive career. Any officer who errs or fails elsewhere in the organization goes "back to patrol."

POP acknowledges the patrol officer as a valued member of the organization,

the expert on his beat. It is the decentralization of decision making to the beat officer, supported by supervisors who are unthreatened by an officer who uses creativity and innovation to solve beat problems, that reinforces the patrol officer as the hero of the police agency. In San Diego, patrol officers are becoming knowledgeable about the communities they serve, and they are developing previously untapped resources to solve problems that have plagued the community for over 20 years.

SDPD officers are not asked to become social engineers, solving problems that belong to other agencies or individuals. Rather, they use a simple problem-solving model to facilitate the exchange of information between public and private agencies and community groups, and to follow up on action by those who become part of the problem-solving process. In this way, the officers are drawn into a close relationship with communities and government agencies, working together on problematic conditions.

The fostering of effective partnerships to solve problems is crucial as administrators, managers and first-line supervisors deal with the scarcity of new resources and the lack of coordination and awareness of existing resources. POP is very much in its infancy in the SDPD, but our history and commitment to community policing and our experiences with developing and implementing problem-oriented policing lead us to believe that the allocation of time and resources to support problem solving will evoke positive results. Results are visible in officers who enjoy their work and find satisfaction in solving recurring problems, and in community members who

are pleased with the effectiveness of police services in San Diego.

Implementing POP means an administrative commitment to the long-term process of building a flexible and dynamic support structure, capable of changing to meet the needs of the organization. Implementation is difficult because it requires scrutiny of virtually every part of the operation, from management style to organizational structure. Additionally, the SDPD has one of the lowest officer per capita ratios of any major metropolitan city, resulting in heavy workloads for the officers. In spite of these challenges, our officers have found time not only to handle beat responsibilities, but to polish their problem-solving skills.

A Commitment to Community Policing

In 1973, the Police Foundation sponsored the Community Profile Development Project (CPDP) in San Diego. This experiment in police innovation was directed by Lt. Norm Stamper, now assistant chief of the SDPD, at the Northern Division. The goal of the experiment was to improve police patrol practices by requiring each participating officer to systematically profile his beat to develop knowledge about problems and resources, and to develop patrol strategies to solve beat problems.

The project team developed the CPDP with the rationale that the patrol officer with beat knowledge and accountability is in the best position to make decisions concerning beat problems. The officer's knowledge and ability to solve beat problems were the basis for promoting involvement between the community and the officer.

Following this successful field exper-

iment, the SDPD conducted a week-long training program for all officers in the organization. The purpose of the training was to provide a transitional experience to help officers develop a mindset that would enable them to work effectively within a community policing framework. From its inception, community policing in San Diego has never been a public relations program aimed at making the community feel good about police officers. The CPDP experiment—and community policing as it subsequently evolved—attempted to promote an analytical, thoughtful process of police-community interaction directed toward problem solving.

From the mid-1970s, community policing has been the philosophy that guides the attitudes of our officers when interacting with the community. The missing ingredient has been analysis. Problem solving is a tool that supports community policing by encouraging analyzing problems as its fundamental strategy. POP in San Diego was developed from the ideas and experiences of patrol officers currently in the field, and supervisors and managers who participated in our community policing training.

What is in place is a visible and effective problem-solving structure that promotes the use of a simple model, SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment), to guide patrol officers in solving recurring beat problems.

Introducing POP to the SDPD

In April 1988, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) selected five cities as sites for a field experiment in POP. Funding was provided by the Bureau of Justice Assistance for technical support and equipment. The cities involved in the Problem-Oriented Approach to Drug Enforcement were Tampa, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Tulsa and San Diego. The link between the cities and PERF was a field technical assistance coordinator (FTAC), a local person hired by PERF to work with the agency in planning, developing and implementing a POP program. The FTAC, as an outsider, was not responsible to follow the department chain of command and could communicate project goals or barriers at any level either within or outside the agency.

Each city was asked to develop a problem-oriented strategy to tackle neighborhood drug problems. In San Diego, a management team comprised of personnel from all levels of the organization was formed to address issues relating to the project. Team members knew very little about POP or what was expected from the project at the beginning, and the team meetings were used to share information and ideas about how to implement POP.

Team members and leaders changed often due to transfers and promotions.

but the changes actually had a positive effect, since more department personnel were exposed to the project, generating more support and interest for POP efforts.

An advisory board consisting of a cross-section of community institutions and professionals was developed. The purpose of the advisory board was to bring people with agency authority into the project to provide resources and community support for POP. The board met regularly for the first three months of the project and then dissolved to become part of the newly formed Problem Analysis Advisory Committee (PAAC).

Two management team members

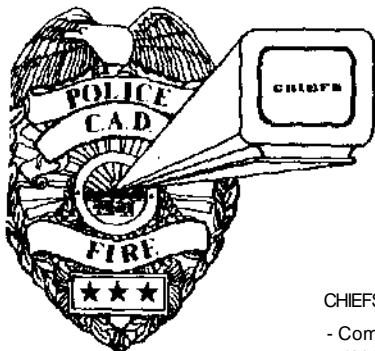
made a site visit to Newport News, where the National Institute of Justice had sponsored the first field test in POP in 1985. Borrowing from that city's experiences, the team members suggested that San Diego create a PAAC similar to one at Newport News, but including agency representatives from outside the department. The PAAC was designed to serve as a monthly forum to educate officers about public, private and community agencies that could assist them in solving problems. The PAAC also sponsors brainstorming sessions with patrol officers in various stages of problem solving. Chaired by a field operations commander.

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the PAAC's format is very informal. Feedback from officers who attend the monthly meetings is that the information is both interesting and valuable.

In July 1988, PERF's Washington project team conducted an eight-hour training session in POP for the management team, nine officers from the Southeast Division (site of the field experiment) and four officers and two sergeants from a proactive unit, the Walking Enforcement Campaign Against Narcotics (WECAN). Two WECAN officers who attended this training worked the first successful POP project, which resulted in a new working relationship between the San Diego Housing Commission and the SDPD. For the first time in the history of the Housing Commission, a Section 8 tenant involved in illegal narcotic activity was disqualified for Section 8 benefits on the basis of a police officer's report.

In October 1988, the FTAC requested permission from the Southeast Division captain to move her office from headquarters, where she had been less accessible to WECAN officers, to Southeast, where she could work more closely with the nine patrol officers assigned to a POP target area. Officers outside the target area began to ask for training after observing the activity and resources offered to the target officers. The eight-hour training course was shortened to a two-and-one-half-hour "nuts and bolts" training session using group instruction and case studies to introduce POP concepts and encourage the officers to apply them. Feedback from participants and observers of both training courses supported the belief that the short course provided the necessary tools for officers to learn about and use POP. Overtime and time out-of-service were also minimized with the shorter course. POP began to receive attention at the command when two second watch patrol officers, who had not completed training, asked for assistance in applying POP to an 80-unit apartment complex infested with narcotic activity.

The officers' efforts resulted in five search warrants being served simultaneously at the complex, eviction of problem tenants, new resident management and a management company that cooperated fully with the police to clean up the complex. The officers received commanding officer's citations and were recognized not only in the department newspaper but in several outside publications for their work. More officers requested POP training, with the eventual result that all patrol officers and investigators at the command completed training.

As a grassroots program, POP flourished as Southeast officers identified beat problems and initiated POP projects themselves. In May 1989, their effectiveness in creatively solving beat problems was recognized by the National League of Cities, which awarded the San Diego

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Police Department a 1989 Innovations Award for being one of the nation's top three drug enforcement programs.

In July 1989, it was decided to implement POP in all uniformed divisions and an implementation plan was developed. The FTAC was hired by the department as a private contractor to coordinate the implementation process. The decision to civilianize the coordination position was made to ensure continuity of the program and to support the coordinator's role of identifying and removing barriers to implementation without discomfort over chain-of-command issues.

Implementation Strategies

Taking a program that was successfully coordinated and managed by a few people at one division and implementing it department-wide is a major challenge for any organization. The SDPD has seven divisions, each a unique entity serving a variety of community needs and demographics. Ensuring the viability of POP means recognizing and enhancing the diversity in our own agency as well as in the community. A viable program must also acknowledge that existing organizational practices may not encourage problem solving by officers. Officers who are not rewarded or recognized for investing time and energy in using creativity and innovation to

solve problems will doubt the department's commitment to POP. Implementing change in any organization must be done thoughtfully and carefully as there are rarely shortcuts in the process of working through resistance and fears.

In January 1990, 22 administrators, managers, first-line supervisors, officers and civilians from SDPD were invited to attend an all-day workshop to brainstorm strategies for an implementation advisory group (IAG). The purpose of the workshop was to address steps that must be taken by the department to ensure that POP is *flexible*, changing to fit the needs of the department and the community; *viable*, continually used by officers to address beat problems; and *interesting*, increasing job satisfaction for officers.

A slower pace was adopted for the workshop, specifically to allow time for thoughtful, analytical discussions. From this group of creative and progressive thinkers came a myriad of ideas to guide the work of implementation. Now, the challenge begins as the newly formed IAG, a committee of 13, evaluates the results of the workshop and begins to translate ideas into actions—actions that support the department's commitment to problem solving.

Summary

POP is not a short-term anesthetic to

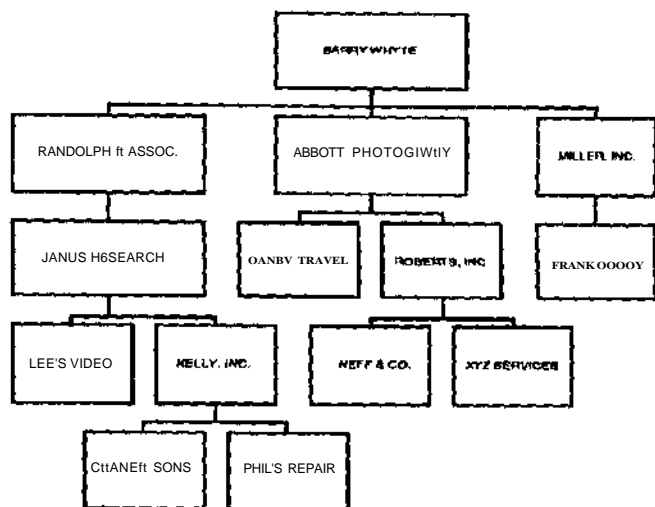
appease dissatisfied citizens or camouflage serious police and community problems. It requires an ongoing process of education, training and resource development, which our command staff supports as a viable method of policing in our community.

The educational process includes community members and city officials who must understand that POP is a strategy that leads officers toward finding long-term solutions to community problems. If the people we serve expect us to make arrests for every problem, we must explain the theory of problem solving and ask them to work with us as partners to address the conditions that generate problems. Our community has shown support for POP, as demonstrated by requests from individuals and groups to make neighborhood problems POP-projects. City officials, able to see the results of problems being solved in their districts, have also shown interest in and support for the program.

Five years from now, members of the SDPD will not be asking—"Whatever happened to POP?" The interest and enthusiasm shown by our officers will be bolstered by an agency that encourages and rewards initiative and creativity in solving community problems. *

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