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Implementing Intelligence-Led Policing: An Application of Loose-Coupling Theory

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This research is intended to inform a knowledge gap in the literature and present the first national findings related to intelligence-led policing adoption among state and local agencies. Specific practices are identified to inform scholars and practitioners regarding intelligence-led policing behaviors.
Methods: Original survey research from a federally-funded project is gleaned to explore intelligence-led policing adoption through a loose-coupling theoretical perspective. Negative binomial and logistic regression models are employed to identify predictive relationships.
Results: Agencies nationwide appear to be closely following the National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan recommendations to enhance information sharing. Consistent with the Department of Homeland Security's Target Capabilities List is also observed. Agency size appears to have a significant effect on key organizational information sharing behaviors. The findings are tempered due to limitations in the research design.
Conclusions: Local agencies appear to be tightly-coupled with the recommendations put forth in the National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan in their efforts to adopt intelligence-led policing. Agency size appears to enhance adoption across most dependent metrics. This research progresses the limited evidence base and progress regarding this emerging policing philosophy.

Introduction

In the 1970s, the Kansas City Preventative Patrol Experiment exposed the limitations of the patrol as an effective method for the police to deal with crime. Since then, police agencies in the United States experimented with several different programs and philosophies intended to improve their effectiveness. In particular, team policing, community policing, problem oriented policing, and Compstat were intended to reduce the police reliance on patrol and responding to calls for service (Phillips, 2012). Each of these innovations expected law enforcement to approach crime reduction through analysis, using the public in a supportive and collaborative role. This new vista on crime fighting would require a substantive shift in thinking and behavior if the police were to be more effective in reducing and solving crime. Empirical evidence suggests, however, that the features of team policing, community policing, problem oriented policing, and Compstat were not properly implemented (see Dabney, 2010; Eck & Spelman, 1993; Maguire, 1997; Sherman, Milton, & Kelly, 1973).

It has been argued that programs are enacted but often encounter problems at the implementation stage (Pressman & Waldavsky, 1984). Implementation is frequently a complex process because there are often several layers to negotiate (Nakamura & Smallwood, 1980). For example, organizations may have several different levels and communications channels, complicating the implementation process. Williams (1982), in his research on legislation, argued that at least three levels are involved in the implementation process. The executive-level develops the law, the agency-level applies the law, and the street-level enforces, or implements the law. The gap between the layers often results in disagreement among the actors at the various levels, regarding the goal of their particular behavior in relation to the law or program. Feeley (1983) describe this as a "leakage of authority." For example, when legislatures enacted "mandatory arrest" laws to address domestic violence, the goal at the executive-level was to deter future offenses by making arrest easier for police officers. The goal of street-level officers, however, was not necessarily deterrence. Their focus was to immediately resolve the situation, unlike executives that were procuring a deterrence effect (Phillips, 2008).

This research fills a gap in understanding organizational implementation, by studying the use of intelligence-led policing (ILP); a recently developed approach intended to improve police effectiveness through information sharing and data analysis (Carter & Carter, 2009a). Implementing ILP requires police agencies to shift away from the traditional practices of routine patrol and responding to calls for service (Ratcliffe, 2008). This study is grounded within a loose coupling theoretical framework, which argues there is a gap between what an organization is expected to do and what is actually being done (Hallet, 2010). The implementation of ILP is examined by identifying aspects

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representative of police agency behavior that may contribute to the connection, or disconnection, between what police are expected to do and what is actually being done with respect to ILP. From a practical perspective, if there are common factors that hinder or enhance the implementation of ILP, police agencies may possibly improve their efforts to utilize this emerging approach. With respect to research, scholars seeking to advance the knowledge base of contemporary policing and intelligence will have an exploratory evidence base to inform their designs.

Loose Coupling Theory

In the 1970s, Meyer and Rowan (1977) developed institutional theory (also known as neo-institutionalism) to examine the behavior of organizations. These scholars reported that organizations prescribe to symbolic myths and ceremonies in order to achieve field legitimacy. With field legitimacy, organizations receive resources, thereby procuring a level of stability in the occupational field (Crank & Langworthy, 1992). The cognitive methods to field acceptance are anchored in isomorphism or homogeneous practices. As DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 149) claimed isomorphism is a method "that forces one" organization into "the same set of environment conditions" as others within field. The three forms of isomorphism are coercive, mimetic and normative. Coercive isomorphism is institutional practices that are imposed by regulatory bodies (e.g. government). Mimetic are successful practices that are copied "from one another," while normative isomorphism are directives from professionals that align organizational practices (Deflem, 2008, p. 150). Loose coupling occurs when prescribed organizational practices are not followed because of internal organizational contingencies (Edelman, 1992; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Loose coupling theory suggests that organizations are split into two levels, allowing them to behave rationally at one level while responding to uncertainty at another (Thompson, 1967). These groups are the superordinate or dominant coalition, and the subordinate or work process group (Ingersoll, 1993; Weick, 1969, 1976, 1982). The former contain leaders or supervisors within an organization that are charged with maintaining institutional legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The superordinate level preserves legitimacy by developing institutional policies and practices that signal to the external environment they are aligned with field performance. That is, the superordinate level performs in a way satisfying the expectations of the external environment. The external environment includes political counterparts, groups who can apply pressure on an agency, and the media. The subordinate or work process group is comprised of institutional actors (e.g. street-level workers) that are expected to follow the dominant coalition's prescription for the agency. These workers, however, exist in an environment where their behavior may require modifications from what is expected. Thus, institutional actors retain a level of independence in how they perform their duties. In short, the dominant coalition prescribes or enacts institutional practices, while the work process group is expected to subscribe to or implement those desired practices. The fact that the superordinate and subordinate levels are linked is found in the word "coupled," while the fact these elements have a degree of independence from each other is found by the word "loosely" (Orton & Weick, 1990).

Loose coupling is a suitable theory to predict or explain the gap between the administrative and street-level layers of an organization (Feeley, 1983; Williams, 1982). Loose coupling suggests that both groups do not always work in tandem (Ingersoll, 1993; Weick, 1969, 1976, 1982). The disconnection or "slippage" between the desired outcomes by the dominant coalition and the actual practice by the work process group is grounded in the reality of the organization or profession (Lipsky, 1980). As Stojkovic, Kalinich, and Klofas (2003) might posit, the discretion of street-level workers cannot be fully accounted for. Specifically, engaging diverse populations requires flexibility in street-level authority in order to adhere to public needs (Stojkovic et al., 2003).

Loose Coupling and Policing

Loose coupling theory has been a developing area of policing scholarship. Central to policing and loose coupling research are observations on organization size; specifically, disconnect between the desires of the dominant coalition and practices of the work process group. Policing scholarship suggests this slippage between both groups directly corresponds to agency size. Mastrofski, Ritti, and Hoffmaster (1987) reported that administrators for large organizations do not closely monitor officers, as that they tend to be more concerned with appeasing the external environment. This, then, provides officers in large agencies a greater degree of discretion when compared to their counterparts in smaller agencies. Mastrofski et al. (1987) supported their claim by reporting that officers in smaller agencies were likely to arrest all drunk-driving offenders, while officers in larger agencies would arrest 50% to 60% of violators.

Other scholars contend there are additional considerations beyond agency size that explain the loose coupling between the dominant coalition and work process group in police organizations. Brown (1981) found that officers in smaller agencies in California exercised more discretion than officers in larger agencies, such as the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). Brown (1981) suggested that small agencies, given their high-visibility, would need to exercise discretion to minimize public concerns. Phillips (2008) research on domestic violence and mandatory arrests reported that agency size was not correlated to police practices. Rather, the likelihood of arrests in domestic violence incidents is best explained by the situational variables in a domestic violence incident (i.e., victim injury, the existence of an order of protection, and the cooperation of the offender) (Phillips, 2008).

Intelligence-Led Policing (ILP)

For the past decade, American law enforcement has faced implementation and operational challenges of adopting an emerging policing philosophy known as ILP (Carter & Carter, 2009a; Crank, Kadleck, & Koski, 2010; Darroch & Mazerolle, 2013). This ambiguity and implementation fidelity mirrors the law enforcement experience with community policing throughout the past 30 years. This new philosophy has been widely accepted with little exploration. Anecdotal evidence suggests four important factors for this occurring. First, after September 11, 2001, there was a strong desire on behalf of state and local agencies to "do something" in order to prevent a similar attack from occurring again. Second, there was a strong, unified message from police leaders and the U.S. Department of Justice's Global Intelligence Working Group that it was necessary to implement ILP to protect communities consistent with national standards. Third, in the years since September 11, 2001, agencies saw what they believed to be success in combating crime beyond terrorism by utilizing the intelligence-led approach (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2010). Lastly, the application of ILP is believed to be an effective approach to target and reduce violent crime in urban areas (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2010).

Similar to the evolution of community policing, ILP seeks to reform existing police practices to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing processes. While community policing largely relied on a reshaping of existing resources, ILP requires some additional resources in the form of an analytic capability. This capability can be created within an agency by hiring an intelligence analyst or by relying upon the analytic capability of fusion centers that are designed to support and facilitate information sharing for law enforcement (Carter & Carter, 2009b). Despite this integrated analytic function, ILP mirrors the transformation towards community policing wherein agencies were not expected to overhaul their organization. ILP is built upon best practices established by community policing while emphasizing