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John E. Angell

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### ***Summary***

Police scholars approached the decade of the 1970s with optimistic expectations that the use of alternative organizational designs could improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of American policing. These expectations were not fulfilled. The 1970s ended with the traditional bureaucratic philosophy more firmly entrenched in the police managerial psyche than it was in the 1960s. The author argues that this is not because the traditional bureaucratic arrangements are superior, and proposes specific changes to police organization to improve community relations and the effectiveness of the police function.

**Police Organization and Community Relations**

by

John E. Angell

Justice Center  
University of Alaska, Anchorage

JC 8027

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POLICE ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

by

John E. Angell

Police scholars approached the decade of the 1970's with optimistic expectations that the use of alternative organizational designs could improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of American policing. These expectations were not fulfilled. Major police organizational change experiments were sidetracked by factors ranging from the inability of policy officials to break from the mind shackles of traditional bureaucratic philosophy, and rigid commitments to narrow self-interest, to our ineptness in defining and instituting the changes desired in experimental projects. The 1970's have ended with the traditional bureaucratic philosophy more firmly entrenched in the police managerial psyche than it was in the 1960's. Even progressive police executives seem satisfied with a narrow, project approach which provides the window dressing necessary to convey an impression of movement toward upgrading police organizations without in actuality changing the basic organizations.

Is this situation the result of the superiority of status quo bureaucracy over alternative organizational arrangements? Certainly not! Anyone who reviews management literature will continually find conclusions concerning the dysfunctions of bureaucratic organizational arrangements and the value

of alternative organizational arrangements for policing.

The intellectual critics of the management field fault the classical bureaucratic approach using logic and deductive reasoning. Bureaucratically arranged organizations, they say, are inconsistent with the democratic culture of American society. The definitions of bureaucrat theory were developed in totalitarian societies of the past. Bureaucratic organizations limit citizen access to and influence in decision making processes. They exist isolated from the communities and people they serve. They have an inherent tension toward greater and greater centralization of decision making, further limiting the possibilities for citizen influence over their policies and operations. Internally, they strive toward standardization of priorities and practices, constantly moving away from serving the unique and changing needs of a heterogeneous society and the individual requirements of their clients.

Further, say the scholars, the management philosophy of bureaucratic organizations is destructive to the retention of intelligent people and mature personalities in employees. It stimulates work specialization toward extremely narrow skills -- skills which do not require thought. Employees are encouraged to become uncritical robots and cogs that continually repeat routinized actions. At best, such employees are expected to blindly obey edicts of their superiors, as young immature children are expected to obey the instructions of their parents and other adults.

Finally, bureaucratically founded organizations are

condemned as be insensitive to social changes. They have evolved as gigantic, stone castles which can be changed only by additions, not structural revisions.

The research literature provides evidence of the value and utility of some alternative organizational arrangements. First, every systematic study of which I am aware supports the conclusion that decentralization of police organizations and increased community and employee participation in decision making increases community support for the police, improves community relations, enhances greater officer work satisfaction, and promotes police officer efforts.

Second, the findings of several studies support a conclusion that decentralization not centralization, reduces management and support overhead and facilitates more extensive devotion to the provision of police services to citizens. This increase in street level services results in reduced response time and higher citizen satisfaction. It also forces street officers to assume greater responsibility for their actions and behavior.

Finally, I know of no research that detected a decrease in police productivity as a result of decentralization of decision making or increased employee and citizen influence on decisions. Several studies reflect increases in productivity after such changes occurred.

Given such evidence, it is ironic that policy officials both within and outside the police agencies, are not vigorously pushing for change. To oversimplify, in my estimation they do not because of a fundamental truism of human society -- one is

not as likely to get into difficulty by sticking with tradition as one is by adopting or leading movements of change. The most secure approach to management is to give the appearance of change without actually changing things.

If we want to change police in directions that will enhance their social utility and improve community relations, several organizational modifications have significant potential. We must recognize at the outset the folly of attempting to on simplistic classical bureaucratic management philosophy. Police organizations cannot be viewed as autonomous machines that can be driven independent of the rest of society. Police operations are a part of society and a part of government. They are created by human beings to serve human beings -- they have no God-given responsibilities nor structures.

These conclusions have a number of implications. First, the police role should be based primarily on a broad mission of serving society and making communities better places to live, rather than a narrow goal apprehending people defined as criminal. Most people agree the police effort should be focused toward eliminating conditions and situations that result in people becoming criminally deviant. Second, organizational arrangements should not limit police to their traditional or exciting functions. The police should be organized in conjunction with other government responsibilities. The police organization must be integrated with and supportive of other segments of government. Governmental planning should include police. Government training should include police. And governmental quality control should

include police. Finally, police should be organized to facilitate maximum participation in policy and procedural development and be flexible enough to ensure that unique community and individual needs are served.

I would propose several specific changes related to police organization consistent with the preceding.

1. We should encourage establishment of a police role definition that focuses police on the provision of a broad range of public safety and human services. We should modify our perspective of police and view police organizations as a subsystem of the Human Service System rather than a subcomponent of the Criminal Justice subsystem.
2. Staff operations of police agencies, such as communications, training, planning, inspections, and crime laboratories should be centralized and arranged to serve a wide range of government agencies. Even most criminal investigation functions might be reorganized as independent of local policing agencies. The policies governing such functions are agreed upon by broad segments of the society and do not vary widely from community to community. Such changes would facilitate broader coordination and result in greater expertise and other efficiencies of scale.
3. Other police operations should be integrated with other human services and decentralized in communities or neighborhoods. Each neighborhood should contain teams of professionals for handling health, welfare, legal and social control problems that confront the people of the neighborhood. Policy and procedure development should, within broad limitations, be the duty of the citizen and members of the Human Service Teams.

These three suggestions contain implications far beyond what can be presented in this ten minute monologue. They cannot be realized without creating tension and conflict. Even if perfectly realized, they will not solve all police and community problems. Their realization would, however, establish a foundation for policing for improved efficiency and for ensuring the long-

range social utility of American policing. I believe, in contrast, that continuation of adherence to our classical police organizational arrangements will create ever increasing problems and inefficiencies to a point where police will eventually become completely dysfunctional and socially unproductive.