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Executive Su

Developing a Partnership Between a University and a Police Department:

the University at Buffalo School of Management

and

the Buffalo Police Department Partnership Project

by

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Executive Summary

Developing a Partnership between a University and a Police Department:

the UBSOM-BPD Partnership Project

I. Overview

The purpose of the partnership between the University at Buffalo School of Management

(UBSOM) and the Buffalo Police Department (BPD), which was funded from 1996-1999

under the National Institute of Justice Locally-Initiated Research Partnership (LIRP)

program, was to help the BPD build effective strategies for community policing. The

Buffalo Police Department Commissioner at the time, R. Gil Kerlikowske, was brought

in from the outside to assist the BPD in its transition to this kind of policing in which the

police work closely with the community to produce public safety. When he arrived in

Buffalo, he met with Professor Raymond Hunt from the University at Buffalo School of

Management to discuss the possibility for assistance with planning for the kinds of

organizational and programmatic changes that would be required to accomplish the

transition. Thus began a partnership between the two organizations that has continued for

four years and has expanded to other law enforcement agencies and communities in Erie

County through a Regional Community Policing Center located at the University at

Buffalo.

II. Methodology

The partnership was committed to a few general guidelines for its purpose of developing

strategies for community policing:

- the research agenda (what the researchers would be doing) would be driven

    primarily by the practitioners in the form of a steering committee

- feedback systems should be developed in order to determine what works and

    what doesn't

- organizational change should be led from the middle

At the researchers' request, Commissioner Kerlikowske invited a group of the

department's managers to form a steering committee that would direct the project's

activities. The researchers had not pre-determined what the department should do, in

specific, to move toward the community policing model. Instead, they had purposely left

the strategies unspecified so that the steering committee could design them to fit the

particular needs and capacities of their own organization. The researchers defined their

own role as service providers to assist the steering committee to develop those strategies.

As one member of the steering committee said, "the committee was what we made of it,

and the University regularly reminded us that we steered the project."[1]

The strategic planning process

The researchers came into the police department with no timelines, no charts and no wish

to create an all encompassing strategic planning document. Rather, they hoped to help

the BPD develop planning processes necessary to make the transition to community

policing. The researchers proposed a plan-do-check-act (PDCA) planning process that

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meant that the department would try projects, see if they worked and then modify them as needed. It is a seemingly simple process but requires feedback systems that few police departments have in place. The steering committee itself, comprised of supervisors from each of the departments primary units (patrol, detective bureau and administration) was the most consistent source of feedback.

The steering committee also became a forum for discussing issues that were otherwise not discussed either because they seemed too difficult or because they were fundamental or long range issues that managers seldom have the time to address in the heat of other pressing problems. Having the University researchers on the committee helped keep the committee focused on looking at the department's longer range goals and more fundamental issues.

Action research model

As Tom McEwen points out in his article on the NIJ's LIRPs, "Factors That Add up to Success," the LIRPs are "distinctive in fostering the translation of research into action," and they "exemplify an inquiry strategy know as 'action research.'" Moreover, he adds, "a distinguishing feature of action research is partnership with practitioners."[2] Under the action research model, and particularly in the case of the UBSOM-BPD Partnership, researchers not only become familiar with the context, culture and constraints of the organization but also, in some respects, become part of the organization. These action research principles were fundamental to the success of the partnership project.

III. Keys to the success of the partnership

Identify mutual benefits

The success of the partnership between the University and the police department was primarily due to both institutions recognizing the potential benefits of collaboration. The police department was modernizing not only its organizational paradigm but also its informational systems as well as expanding its training programs, particularly for middle managers. At the same time, the University was revitalizing its public service mission, focusing on the integration of research and public service and looking to local contexts for conducting research.

The police soon recognized the utility of having the University team to document the projects and changes occurring in the department. As one administrator said, there was someone "to document where we'd been, where we were going. A lot gets done, but if it isn't documented we don't realize it. This project gave us tangible evidence of the changes."[3] Perhaps even more importantly, the BPD saw the advantage of having persons who were not caught up in the daily minutiae of operations who could see and capitalize on opportunities for developing community policing in the department. As one committee member said, there was "someone who received information about problems, needs or good ideas from all over the department, from patrol, from MIS, from the training academy, and transferred it to the right people."[4]

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Other benefits of the partnership for the police department include

- connection to university resources (technical assistance, training, interns, other departments such as geography)

- a neutral observer who lends credibility and provides an external perspective and a macro view of the organization

- assistance with evaluations and other projects

Benefits of the partnership for the University include

- an opportunity for the integration of its research, teaching and public service missions

- substantial projects and field experience for interns

- additional research opportunities

- data more readily available

- a better understanding of the context of the research, leading to better research[5]

Set agendas and goals together

Feedback systems and leading from the middle: In one of the early meetings of what was to become the steering committee for the partnership project, the partners agreed on two primary principles that would govern the strategic planning process. First, the department needed to establish systems for obtaining feedback from the field in order to determine on an ongoing basis what is and is not working. With feedback systems in place, strategies would be informed and shaped by operations. The steering committee

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would operate as the central vehicle for information exchange and discussion between patrol, the detective bureau, and the administration and was charged with developing other feedback mechanisms. Secondly, change in the department needed to be "led from the middle." Middle managers, in this case captains and lieutenants, would be key to making the department more effective and progressive.[6] As one committee member said, "if supervisors aren't online with community policing, the patrol officers and new recruits won't buy in to it."[7] Operating on these two strategic principles has allowed community policing to take a shape suitable for Buffalo and reflective of its particular strengths and needs.

Project-oriented strategy: Another agreed upon principle of the partnership's strategic planning process was not to create an elaborate document but to build a structure for continuous planning in a dynamic environment. After two years, the steering committee had only a one-page vision statement that outlined three goals for the department. But it could boast of a host of projects and changes that managed to happen largely through the efforts of those "in the middle."[8] Using the principle of finding out what works and what doesn't, pilot projects have become a standard method of operation to test out new ideas using the plan, do, check, and act method: plan a project (with the involvement of middle managers), pilot it on a small scale (preferably in a district or unit that helped to develop the project), check to see if there are any problems (via your feedback systems), and make any adjustments (act on what you find out).[9] Many of these projects then became department-wide initiatives.

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The UB team also focussed from the outset on projects important to the police and chose projects that had the support of all parts of the department, including the Union. As the UB team advised the committee in one of the early meetings, "in the political arenas that are police departments, multiple views make broad agreements on <u>principle</u> unlikely but ad hoc compromises can be reached on issues and projects . . . . Hence the importance of . . . a decentralized, project-oriented strategy."[10] While only a small number of people in the department would align themselves with community policing, many advocated and supported projects that had all the qualities sought for in the new paradigm.

Navigating the organization and understanding its culture

Because the idea of the project was to develop a community policing model suitable to the BPD context, the University team needed to develop a sense of the BPD context: its "culture," how it works, who's who, what's where, and why things are the way they are. These are all the implicit things with which one needs to be familiar in order to have a solid basis for sensing not only what an organization needs but what it can accept and assimilate and at what rate. Much of this sense of place, as of a foreign country, comes not from systematic inquiry, but from the informal, unplanned experience of being there over a period of time. This knowledge of an organization's culture and contexts is essential to conducting action research.

<u>Language:</u> In discussions regarding strategic planning, the University and police didn't always speak the same language. University personnel needed to understand the audience and translate when necessary. For instance, words like "vision" and "mission" did not

reverberate with the police—they sounded too idealistic and vague. So when the project manager held interviews to discuss the vision and mission with patrol supervisors she asked them what they thought their job was (mission) and what they would like to see happen in the department in the future (vision). Since the word "community policing" had developed such a strong negative connotation in the department, discussions centered instead around "quality of life" issues and the "neighborhood initiatives," terms that seemed neutral and acceptable.

Informal networks: Every organization has an informal network that carries and relays the bulk of the communication within an organization and that sanctions or disapproves programs and ideas. A police department is a social entity—many people have worked at the job all their lives and, due to the unusual schedules and nature of the work, they have socialized primarily with co-workers. Policing is also an information business and depends heavily on information exchange. Technological changes in the department will eventually improve formal information flow, but much information still gets exchanged through an informal network. Furthermore, certain persons have strong ties within the organization, and these persons have influence over information flow and perception.[11] Such persons are informal leaders, and in a several cases at the BPD they are also formal leaders. Such persons are key to disseminating information and gaining cooperation. The top management may not have strong ties to the informal network, but they can identify and consult those who do when planning projects. Early on in the partnership, the UB personnel developed a sense of the informal network at the BPD and connected with key leaders, both formal and informal.

Involve middle managers in projects

One of the primary benefits of the partnership, according to one of the steering committee

members, was the focus on management from the middle, "getting lieutenants,

particularly patrol lieutenants, involved in decision making and in projects" because, he

said, "ideas and projects are more readily accepted if the come from the middle rather

than from the top." [12]

One of the most successful projects for the BPD was the Neighborhood Initiatives, begun

before the start of the partnership and designed by the First Deputy Commissioner and

the Captain of Community Policing. Part of the design of the initiatives, and one of the

primary reasons for their success, was that administrators gave patrol commanders three

objectives (strict enforcement, high visibility, and communication with the community)

and then allowed them to design the initiative's programs that addressed problems

particular to their districts. While the initiatives were only intended to last for a year,

several programs and operations begun under them have continued and expanded. [13]

In another case, when a disconnect between lieutenants and community police officers

was identified, middle managers (captains and lieutenants) met with community police

officers and the UB team to discuss how to resolve the problem. Middle managers were

also the primary initiators of a summons book that allowed officers to ticket persons

violating certain city ordinances (such as loud noise) aimed at improving the quality of

life in the neighborhoods. Middle managers were also involved with several other

projects including a project to identify and address problems in responding to what are

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called "priority 4" calls in the 911 system (low level misdemeanor and disorder calls), an evaluation of the new mobile computer terminals (MCTs), a recruitment plan for the department, and the building of databases in individual districts.

Identify primary contact(s) within the organization

It is best to identify a primary point of contact for the project, someone who is familiar with how the organization works, who has respect and credibility within the organization, and who can expedite projects. It should be someone with some control over resources but not the department head, since a commissioner or chief is often unavailable for assistance with the projects on a day to day basis.

In this partnership, each of the primary contacts had a strong interest in the potential of the partnership with the University, gave freely of their time to the partnership project, kept in frequent contact with the UB team by phone and email, and took ownership of individual projects, initiating and then co-designing them with the UB team. It was significant to the success of the partnership that the persons who became the primary contacts had both energy and vision--they each had a strong sense of where they thought the department should be headed as well as ideas of how to get there. People, finally, make or break a project and it was the primary contact persons who kept the partnership going in between the monthly meetings with the steering committee and enabled the department to make the fullest use of the resources the University had to offer.

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IV. Results and accomplishments of the partnership

About midway through the partnership, the UB team drew up a list of problems that had

been identified in the initial interviews with department supervisors and the actions that

had been taken to address these problems.[14] While it sometimes seemed that many things

would never change in the department, when all the smaller scale projects were looked at

together they presented a picture of a department that had come a long way in a few

years.

The committee's sense of the changes were corroborated when in 1997 an IACP report

indicated that significant change had occurred since their initial review of the BPD in

1991. The IACP observers noted that "the men and women of the department, in

partnership with the current leadership, are forging a department that is far more

contemporary, professional, and effective than the one we studied six years ago....

Vitality is being restored. The BPD has an energy that was not discernible during our

previous study"; they also observed that of all the changes that had occurred "engaging

the public through neighborhood initiatives and other types of partnerships may have the

greatest impact."[15]

Creating a vision statement

Creating a vision statement is not only an end in itself but also a process to get the

department talking about its collective problems and goals. The steering committee saw

the development of the vision statement as a process that would allow the people in the

department to think about the question of what they want the department to become and

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