



From Compstat to Gov 2.0 Big Data in New York City Management Epilogue

In January 2014, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg stepped down after 12 years in office and Bill de Blasio was inaugurated as successor. As public advocate, a position he held before his election to mayor, De Blasio had urged more transparency in city agencies, notably the police department. While Bloomberg's improvements in providing citizens with useful data about government had made it easy to find neighborhood crime rates online, de Blasio as public advocate had argued that the police department frequently ignored or was late responding to public information requests.¹

De Blasio differed markedly in style from his predecessor. While Bloomberg had emphasized managerial savvy, the new mayor struck a more populist and progressive tone. Nonetheless, De Blasio retained the bulk of the Bloomberg administration's City Hall staff.² However, Bloomberg's Chief Analytics Officer Michael Flowers was not among them. In January, New York University's Center for Urban Science and Progress announced that Flowers had been appointed the program's first Urban Science Fellow, to serve as a mentor to graduate students in city management and data analysis techniques.³ Five months into his tenure, de Blasio had not appointed a new chief analytics officer.

But the new de Blasio administration did include at least one "big data" innovator: William J. Bratton. De Blasio recruited Bratton to return to his old job as New York City police

¹ "De Blasio Issues Failing Grades to 2 Agencies in Transparency Report Card, Finds Most Departments in Breach of Law," Office of the New York City Public Advocate, April 22, 2013. See: <http://archive.advocate.nyc.gov/foil/report>

² David W. Chen and Nikita Stewart, "New Mayor and a New Agenda, but Little Change Within the Ranks," *New York Times*, April 20, 2014. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/nyregion/new-mayor-and-a-new-agenda-but-little-change-within-the-ranks.html>

³ "NYU's Center for Urban Science & Progress Welcomes Michael Flowers As Its First Urban Science Fellow," (press release), New York University Center for Urban Science & Progress, January 27, 2014. See: <http://cusp.nyu.edu/press-release/nyus-center-urban-science-progress-welcomes-michael-flowers-first-urban-science-fellow-2/>

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commissioner. Bratton had spent 2002-2009 at the helm of the Los Angeles Police Department, and then returned to New York, where among other projects he started his own consulting business and built a social media site for police officers.⁴ Swearing Bratton into office, de Blasio emphasized the role of community collaboration in public safety, saying Bratton recognized that “the streets will be safer, and crime will be reduced even further, when police and community work together.”⁵

Bratton assumed command of a different police department than the NYPD he had led in 1994. New York City crime rates were at historic lows; his new challenge was to navigate a much more complex informational landscape and learn how to harness new sources of data, such as social media, for maximum effect in public safety. At the same time, says Bratton:

In this era of big data, where everybody has at their fingertips more ability to access information... than we had in 1994 with a floor full of mainframe computers, there is a continuing demand for access to information—transparency... To be successful we really do need to try to find ways to share information to the greatest degree possible.⁶

One marquee accomplishment facilitated by social media occurred in March 2014, when the NYPD indicted 10 suspected members of a Bronx gang under the auspices of Operation Crew Cut, an initiative begun under Bratton’s predecessor, Commissioner Raymond Kelly. Operation Crew Cut targeted violent rival gangs using information from social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram all of which, according to the NYPD, “gang members used to attract new recruits, fuel rivalries and brag about victories.”⁷

But more than using suspects’ own social media accounts to track their movements, Bratton wanted to expand collaboration with all New Yorkers via social media and other tools. He explains: “Fifty thousand personnel in the NYPD sounds like a lot, but in a city of 8 1/2 million people, we’re a lot better off with 8 1/2 million people knowing what’s going on and sharing information than just 50,000.”

As for data use in other city departments, de Blasio had in his campaign embraced a number of initiatives to make information easier to find and share. For example, in keeping with his stated concern about the city’s income disparities, de Blasio had proposed a centralized system to combine the city’s disparate job training and placement resources. Commentators also pointed out the potential for innovative uses of data in some of de Blasio’s other priority areas, such as education, where student records could yield insights on where to direct resources, and disaster

⁴ J. David Goodman, “Bratton to Lead New York Police for a Second Time,” *New York Times*, December 5, 2013. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/06/nyregion/william-bratton-new-york-city-police-commissioner.html?pagewanted=1& r=0>

⁵ Ed Pilkington, “Bill Bratton Vows to Tackle Stop-And-Frisk in Swearing-in as NYPD Chief,” *Guardian*, January 2, 2014. See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/02/bill-bratton-nypd-commissioner-stop-and-frisk>

⁶ Producer Adam Stepan’s interview with William J. Bratton on March 21, 2014, at One Police Plaza, New York City. All further quotes from Bratton, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

⁷ “Ten Members of Bronx Gang ‘280’ Indicted for Murder Conspiracy in Violent Turf War,” (press release), Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor of the City of New York, March 3, 2014. See: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/snp/downloads/pdf/280.pdf>

preparedness and resilience, in which rapid information sharing could save lives.⁸ Despite New York City's change in leadership, early in de Blasio's tenure it seemed that many of the management techniques of his predecessor would survive.

⁸ Travis Korte, "NYC Mayor Needs Analytics in His Corner," *Information Week*, March 13, 2014. See: <http://www.informationweek.com/big-data/software-platforms/nyc-mayor-needs-analytics-in-his-corner/d-d-id/1127660>