

One fall night about six years ago when I was a young cop, my partner and I were parked in a lot, as usual, but this time I was at the wheel. A call came over the car radio that a yellow Mustang had just missed running down an officer on foot. Just then a yellow Mustang sped by. I took chase, but my partner reached over and turned off the ignition. I drove to the station and disobeyed his order to stay in the car. The desk sergeant listened to both of us and just ordered us back to work. Nobody spoke to me. The next evening when I reported to work, I was punished with a walking post up and down the long hill of Hoosick Street. Nobody ever told me why I was being punished. I was kept on that post during a bitter winter and through the spring.

Officer "Don Turner," 1969

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## Two Transformations in Police Upgrading

Punishment has historically been employed as a major method of controlling police officers. Uncontrolled police power is so threatening to a democracy that great effort has been invested to control the actions of officers on the street. The administrative tools of control have been supervision, regulation, and punishment. What is unusual about the 1969 incident related above, in which an energetic young officer was punished for defying his slothful partner, is that the young officer's action was then agreed to be right by police locker room views, right by police rules and regulations, right by law, and right by the broad values of American society. Yet this stark example shows an endangered officer on foot and an officer giving chase being treated as though they do not matter. These events were the product of an ill-designed and ill-managed police department with a long history of providing shoddy service to citizens.

Repressive ways became part of the repertoire of the young officer who was so severely punished for trying to catch the reckless Mustang driver. We will give the young officer the pseudonym Don Turner. Two years after all capricious departmental punishment had ended, Officer Turner was still acting hostile to citizens.

I've got many complaints against me from women. I am nasty with them so that they don't get the upper hand. When there are just the two of us, I let the woman rant unless I am not up to stomaching it. If there is a crowd, I can't let her rant because that will stir up the others. I may act nasty when I don't feel like it. I've shouted, "Shut up, bitch." I've grabbed them by the arm and pushed them in the squad car.

When police officers matter, the people they serve matter. This book is about the transformation of police service from callous and shoddy to helpful and competent. We will look at the problems of transforming a department that demeans and punishes officers into one that treats them as professionals in the service of the public.

Since policing is a practical business, the issues are illustrated with events from the operations of a single department over a fifteen-year span. Only five individuals from Troy—two city managers, one commissioner, and two police chiefs—are named; the confidentiality of citizens and other officers is maintained through the use of pseudonyms. This study examines closely the application to police organizations of the human relations school of management. If this approach works, officers spend less time following the locker room advice "Cover your ass" and more time treating citizens in ways that show that people matter.

## **Police Work**

A police department is a city's multipurpose agency for dealing with social disorders. No grand design lies behind the wide variety of problems that are police business today. The longer an organization has been in existence, the more different functions it is likely to perform, because to

avoid shrinkage it picks up new functions whenever the demand for old ones slumps. Changes in technology, resources, and needs over the decades have permitted police departments to drop some problems, such as lodging for wayfarers, and have required the commitment of enormous resources to others, such as traffic safety. The tendency to diversify is accentuated when an organization is open twenty-four hours a day and its services are free. A contemporary view of the diversity of police work and why officers love it emerges from photographs and reflections of officers across the country collected in the book called *Tribute* (Lawrence et al., 1989).

The 16,000 departments in the world of American policing show tremendous variation. Departments differ in their mix of officers who treat people with concern and officers who are indifferent or cynical. When people call the police, they usually receive calming reassurance and direct assistance, but sometimes officers act callously. Some police officers work closely with the people of the neighborhood to reduce burglaries, but other officers know almost no one. Some officers calm unruly crowds, but others stir anger among peaceable people. Luck does not determine whether or not a city has many officers who are concerned about the people they serve and grow skillful in solving complex problems. Management does.

A useful step in sorting out the remarkable variations among police departments is to return to the groundbreaking work of James Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior* (1968). When Wilson linked variation in police practices with the organizational structure of the department and with the character of the local political system, he identified three styles of policing: the "watchman style" of a sluggish department; the "legalistic style" of a department that emphasizes impartial enforcement of the law; and the "service style" of a department that provides a wide variety of services requested by citizens. Troy, New York, where the watchman style prevailed prior to 1973, provided the examples for this book. In developing the concept of the watchman style, James Q. Wilson had looked at three other New York cities that also lie in the Hudson River Valley: Albany, Amsterdam, and Newburgh. In a watchman-style department, citizens who are not powerful are treated rudely—Don Turner's domineering attitude toward women is an example—but such a department routinely gives preferential treatment to politically powerful people, ranging from ignoring their drunken driving to posting officers at their whim. To members of a watchman-style department, whether people matter depends upon who the people are.

### **The Transformation toward Professional Police Administration**

The major twentieth-century advances in the quality of police service have been directed by professional police administrators, individuals

who transformed watchman-style departments into legalistic-style departments. O. W. Wilson, the foremost administrator of midcentury, set forth in his classic text *Police Administration* (1950) the current version of the reforms begun at the turn of the century by the Progressive movement. Police administrators fought political machines, which had so dominated policing that an officer's rank in the department depended upon his rank in the local party organization. Although the scope of patronage was drastically narrowed in the early decades of this century, pressures on selection, promotion, and assignment are still common in many cities. Quite obviously, officers cannot be expected to enforce the law impartially against powerful people to whom they are indebted. Police administrators sought to shield officers from outside influence and to create strong departmental controls to curb abuses against the powerless. They hammered at incompetent police agencies in order to forge positive answers to these questions:

Do police officers obey the law?

To what extent do police officers act impartially and courteously?

To what extent do performance statistics show high productivity?

The transformation from foot patrol to radio car patrol and the emphasis on efficiency and impartiality cut informal, friendly contacts between officers and the individuals they serve. In the extreme, some officers saw their work narrowed to crime fighting and saw themselves dealing primarily with criminals and troublemakers, defined as people who did not matter.

The tumultuous 1960s shattered complacency in the police field. The racial character of many cities had shifted greatly without any corresponding change in the racial composition or sensitivity of the police department. Black militance, central to this change of political climate, encouraged others to demonstrate for their particular causes. Students demonstrated against the war in Vietnam and faced the police as their domestic enemy. When President Lyndon Johnson's promises of a Great Society led to higher expectations among the urban poor and government programs supported their mobilization, additional segments of society took to the streets. Meanwhile, the proportion of the population in the crime-prone ages was growing rapidly. Young people were also turning to drugs in moods of curiosity, defiance, and disillusionment, and some engaged in burglary and theft to support their addiction.

Public concern with law and order grew so intense that between 1965 and 1971 five presidential commissions had inquired into the problems of the police. The first, the U.S. President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (1967a), can now be seen as outstanding in contracting for social science research and making far-reaching recommendations. Moreover, the experiences of the 1970s further agitated the police field: the pell-mell federal funding of new programs



through the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), the influx of educational programs and educated officers, police union picketing and job actions, and the application of social science research to police problems. Consequently, the unevenness among police departments has increased: some have pulled far ahead, while others have remained mired in old ways.

### **The Transformation toward Professional Police Officers**

The fresh approach to police work that emerged in the late 1960s now has practitioners scattered across the continent. The first seeds were sown long ago by August Vollmer, who in 1908, as head of the Berkeley, California, police department, sought to recruit college students as police officers. This approach takes for granted the professional competence of police executives and strives to develop the professional skill and independent judgment of officers on the street. The magnitude of this second transformation is as great as that of the first, which turned watchman departments into legalistic ones. The service-style department identified by James Q. Wilson in the mid-1960s was the precursor of departments now engaged in encouraging officers to create and implement tailor-made solutions to community problems.

The departmental impact of this transformation can be visualized by thinking of the standard organizational pyramid turned on its side. The leaders who once commanded now obtain allegiance to shared goals and now manage systems that facilitate cooperative efforts. Those officers who once were expected to obey but resourcefully devised evasions now develop judgment, responsibility, and self-discipline. The changes include a fundamental decentralization of authority and responsibility to the officers on the beat and a fundamental opening of departmental policies and operations to public inquiry and demands. Departmental leadership directs the focus of the members toward the people they serve and facilitates their work by efficient management of the support services: cars in good working condition, clear radio transmission, useful records, and appropriate coordination. The key questions underlying the new approach include the same three that are central to the first transformation, plus three new ones:

To what extent do officers use discretion to help citizens solve their problems?

To what extent is the department managed to support officers' use of discretion?

To what extent does the department inform the public?

The success of the two leading contemporary undertakings, community policing and problem-oriented policing, require the police department to increase the motivation and develop the judgment of officers on

the street. If officers are lazy or narrow-minded, both these approaches fail. In this book the police leaders who promote officers' wide latitude in decisionmaking are called "police managers" rather than "police administrators" to emphasize that they manage resources in support of the individuals who decide the content of the direct services.

The hospital model is introduced to describe the new organization design, which promotes and supports sound judgment by the men and women who serve as police officers. This model draws analogies between police officers and physicians to highlight both the discretionary decisions that officers make and their broad service role. The old tradition of thinking about police departments as quasi-military organizations emphasized the authority to use deadly force and gave the illusion that police officers routinely work under the direction of superiors. In reality, however, police officers employ both persuasion and coercion; moreover, close supervision is impossible because police service is delivered by geographically dispersed officers working alone or in pairs. This study scrutinizes the changes that take place when the hospital model is the concept guiding changes in a traditional department.

The effort to develop the professionalism of individual officers and to support them with an open style of organization has been slow in coming to the police field, decades after the beginning of the human relations school of administration and decades after practitioners in other fields had become professionals. Still, the delay has had its advantages. Just as Japan in the late nineteenth century did not have to pass through the early stages of the industrial revolution but could immediately adapt current technologies, so police management is now in position to draw upon well-developed theories and practices from public administration and business management.

## **The Pace of the Two Transformations**

The acceptance of administrative and scientific improvements from the first transformation has occurred far more quickly than incorporation of practices central to the second. Table 1-1 shows the uneven pace of advances in American policing by identifying both the date of initial adoption of an improvement and the decade of its widespread adoption. Dividing the advances into two separate lists, those in police administration and those in the development of professional police officers, makes vivid the differences. Police chiefs who hold the outlook of a professional administrator make improvements on the first half of the list; police chiefs who have the outlook of a police manager make improvements on both halves. Within each list the improvements are arranged in the order of first adoption by an American department, and only practices that have endured are included. Widespread adoption is considered to have oc-