

# Police Decision-Making: A Futures Perspective



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## Foreword

This work represents the second offering in what is a continuing series of white papers authored by members and affiliates of the Futures Working Group. These papers are intended to spark ideas and incite creativity in responding to the future challenges and opportunities that the law enforcement and criminal justice community must confront. As with most white papers, this is not intended to be the final word or definitive perspective concerning the topics discussed. Rather, these papers are designed to foster further discussion and consideration of possible, probable, and preferable future directions for law enforcement. In this vein, the current paper offers a provocative argument for folding futures thinking into the critical issue of daily decision-making in police agencies. We hope you find this and the future white papers of the Futures Working Group to be useful.

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**The opinions and statements expressed throughout this white paper are those of the individual authors and should not be considered an endorsement or a reflection of the official position of either the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Society of Police Futures International, or any other institution for any policy, program, or service.**

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The authors are also indebted to a number of individuals that participated in a small Futures Working Group focus group that convened in May of 2008 that provided the seeds of thought for the ideas expressed here. This group included contributions from not only the editors noted here but also Michael Buerger from Bowling Green State University, John Jackson from the Houston Police Department, Carl Jensen from the University of Mississippi, Gerald Konkler from the Tulsa Police Department, Alberto Melis from the Douglas Arizona Police Department, Tom Petee from Auburn University. Lastly special thanks go to the students of the FBI National Academy Session 237 course entitled “Futuristics, and Law Enforcement”. These students provided important feedback and discussion on an earlier draft of this work.

## **Executive Summary**

Police chiefs are expected to know everything. Yet there are forces that must be contended with in almost all efforts to provide policing and public safety in the 21<sup>st</sup> century communities that we serve. These include, but are not limited to: the realities of working in a politically charged environment; public funding is declining while unfunded mandates seem to be escalating; new and non-traditional missions have emerged; communities expect the crime declines of the past decades to be maintained; departmental work forces are in transition; policing is often seen as a “necessary evil”;; and lastly, but perhaps most importantly, the daily expectations placed upon the police are often so demanding that officer’s personal lives often become neglected at a high cost to both health and interpersonal relationships. The leadership required to respond to and manage these forces in today’s police departments requires a futures perspective if any chief or law enforcement leader is going to have any chance of gaining and maintaining long term successes.

A key tenet of futures perspectives for policing is to identify possible futures, examine the most probable futures, and then provide leadership that moves toward the most preferred futures for providing and maintaining police services in a community. This white paper examines these dynamics and offers some insights in areas such as the importance of planning, the value of accreditation, the logistics of budgeting, and the need to manage existing relationships both internal and external to the police department. In doing so, a futures perspective that we believe is valuable to effective police decision-making is outlined. Such

processes as environmental scanning, examination of ongoing and emerging trends, construction of scenarios, and identification of preferences are discussed. Through the use of these approaches issues such as recruitment and hiring, budgeting, technology acquisition and implementation, and future demographic, legal, political, and crime issues are briefly examined.

Using this discussion as a backdrop, it is argued that futures perspectives combined with leadership can provide as a sort of “geo-positioning device” to navigate the future decision-making that is and will be required of all police departments. Lastly, recommendations of how to implement futures thinking in your department are offered. These include: 1) Not delegating futures thinking to a single individual but rather adopting futures as a cultural aspect of the police department; 2) Similarly, the chief cannot be the only individual advocating this perspective. The agency rank and file, as well as management, must become agents of the future; and 3) Strategic thinking must prevail over the tendency to emphasize and utilize tactical responses to today’s problems. The future of policing will depend upon the ability of law enforcement to adopt and adapt to the future changes and challenges that await law enforcement today.

We attempt in the paper that follows to show how futures thinking can affect your future – personally, professionally, and socially – in fact, across every aspect of our life. What if we had known the social changes brought about by the Viet Nam war ahead of time? What about the Computer Age? Not to mention by cell phones? And perhaps most notably the dramatic changes that stemmed from the attacks on 9/11/2001? Many argue that these were life-altering watershed

events, and, in their aftermath, we changed our entire approach to life -- personal, professional, social and so on as a result of these events.

Through the discussion offered here this work hopes to show how anticipating the future in a logical, coordinated and intelligent manner can prepare you for the coming challenges – to deal with the waxing, waning and, in fact, changing labor pool and skill sets needed. We hope this is instructive in assisting you to learn to react to coming events and not to passing crises. We want you to anticipate the coming changes on the legal horizon, to the creation of unfunded mandates and changes in funding sources. We want you to begin examining whatever issue is at hand by looking at trends and how they will affect you, your job, your people and your agency.

## Prologue

Talking about the future is often the stuff of science-fiction. Many have grown up with extremes of science fiction; from the comic fancies of the transportation systems in *The Jetsons*, to the darkness and social complexities of *Blade Runner* and *Minority Report*. Strangely, throughout the world, we accept these as science fiction, and consider the realities of Segways and the pervasiveness of the internet in our daily lives.

Yet the science fiction of yesterday is today's reality. And this applies not only to the ubiquitous cell phones foreseen in *Dick Tracy*, but advances in medicine, media, transportation, and yes – policing. Could we have foreseen *You Tube* and *Facebook*? Could we have anticipated that these would have an effect on policing, and in fact be used by police?

We attempt in the paper that follows to show how *futures thinking* can affect your future – personally, professionally, and socially – in fact, across every aspect of our life. What if we had known the social changes brought about by the Viet Nam war ahead of time? What about the Computer Age? Not to mention by cell phones? And perhaps most notably the dramatic changes that stemmed from the attacks on 9/11/2001? Many argue that these were life-altering watershed events, and, in their aftermath, we changed our entire approach to life -- personal, professional, social and so on as a result of these events

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One fact is clear. Whether we desire it or not, whether we are ready or not, whether we can use it or not – the future is coming.



## **FUTURES THINKING: A GPS FOR POLICE LEADERSHIP**

If you're a police chief or sheriff, chances are you don't have time to read this or most of the other things that cross your desk. But here is what is in it for you -- a small investment of time thinking into the future will make you more successful today. This paper will illustrate how you can see greater leadership and success at all levels by supporting futures thinking in your department.

Veteran police leaders are increasingly sensing that the police business is transitioning from the Community-Oriented Policing/Problem-Oriented Policing (COP/POP) era, but to what end? It's more than simply a shift toward Homeland Security or the militarization of many aspects of policing....and it's not a total abandonment of COP/POP. What is the nature of this change? There is an urgent need for police leaders to peer into the future for guidance about our next era of policing.

Many of the challenges that face police leaders today were forecast well in advance of their actual emergence as pressing issues. Chiefs and sheriffs are more likely to succeed at their jobs if they are aware of the future challenges before they are consumed by the proverbial alligator nipping at their heels. Fostering futures thinking prepares police leaders for both existing and new challenges that may arise. Futures thinking can provide a sort of leadership "GPS" device for guiding organizations forward into uncharted territory.

Police professionals drawn into leadership roles are driven by their passion and their ability to make a positive difference:

- Most police leaders are optimistic in nature, and hold some promise for the results of their organizational efforts as well as their community efforts. Often, they are chosen for their positive energy.
- The career path that leads a person to the pinnacle of his/her profession is rewarding, and leaves a sense of personal achievement that goes hand-in-hand with any accomplishments achieved within the organization.
- The work done by police leaders is noble, important, and relevant...in other words, policing matters.
- Progress in reducing crime, increasing quality of life, and creating positive work environments is highly motivating for a chief.
- The new officers being hired today are intelligent and effective at what they do -- it can be fun to mentor and share the wisdom of experienced leadership.

- Going beyond traditional policing to more holistic leadership where community problems and social issues are directly confronted provides relevance for police leaders.

At the same time, the challenges of today's police leaders are complex, and can take quite a negative tone, as evidenced below:

- Police Chiefs work in a politically charged environment. They are often faced with dealing with elected officials who often hold unrealistic expectations and who's vision may be limited to and largely driven by the timeframe of the next election. Chiefs often serve "at the pleasure" of these elected officials, and consequently the average tenure of a police chief is relatively short. Chiefs are expected to carry out political agendas while maintaining ethical and effective police services, but the paradox is that they must remain apolitical to the public, while in fact aptly and diplomatically dealing with highly charged conflicting issues. Moreover, political agendas or "correctness" sometime run contrary to what police leaders know the data really say – for example, the widely held perception that undocumented immigration leads to rampant crime.
- Public funding for police services is largely declining. However, this budget shrinkage coincides with increases for demands for service. It is one of the great ironies of policing that while communities in growth naturally demand more police service, communities in decline also have an increased need for the police because of the upturn in crime that often accompanies economic deterioration and demographic change.
- New and non-traditional missions have emerged for the police – for example, Homeland Security concerns and immigration enforcement. The political pressures previously mentioned often lead to prioritizing of these new mandates, very often also leading to the detriment of traditional policing.
- Communities that in the 1990's experienced several years of continual and steady crime reductions from community oriented/problem solving policing, now expect a sustained effort of proactive policing without cost increases.
- Department workforces are in transition -- many baby boomer employees are retiring, and the qualified labor pool for entry level police jobs is down in an already highly competitive market.
- While private sector employment has seen a decline of labor unions and an increase in the collaborative relationship between management and labor, police unions in some communities are increasingly aggressive and

- All human organizations tend to have a bias towards the status quo, evidenced by great resistance to change. Police leadership must bridge the political “winds of change” and the employee mindset of “I’ve waited out the last 5 chiefs and I’ll wait you out, too”
- Bypassing or ignoring efforts to curtail unfunded mandates, state and federal legislatures continue to pass new laws that often require local police response. Federal funding for local policing has all but dried up, with the possible exception of efforts related to Homeland Security, and states have lost most of the “pass through” funding as well, or at the very least have lost the control they once held over those funds.
- In many communities, the level of trust and respect between the media and police leadership is damaged, resulting in relentless negative media coverage. This has created a crisis where the level of trust accorded to police officers by the public, the judiciary, and other key segments of society is waning.
- Policing is a high risk occupation that requires split-second decision-making even at the lowest levels within the organization. Mistakes or lapses in judgment are bound to occur in this environment, but they are subject to an unusually high level of scrutiny. Police leaders are always held accountable for what happens in the department and bear the brunt of criticism when things go wrong.
- Likewise, police chiefs are human as well, and will invariably make some mistakes. Living inside the fishbowl that represents modern policing results in an extraordinary level of scrutiny by the public, employees, and community officials.
- New chiefs often inherit agencies in need of reform. The average tenure of chiefs is so short that they rarely have the opportunity to “finish the job” before yet another new chief is brought in.
- Chiefs are expected to know about everything - daily operations, technologies, fiscal matters, personnel matters, crime reduction strategies and social engineering. At the same time they have to be totally accessible and be the ultimate diplomat. The knowledge connected with the desired expertise results in non-stop information flow, more than any human can keep up with.
- Policing is sometimes viewed as a “necessary evil” by city officials. This perception is fed by the reality that police departments tend to be the source of the biggest lawsuits, citizen complaints, and often the biggest budget line item.

- The daily expectations of a police chief may lead to such demanding schedules that their personal lives are neglected, at a high cost for interpersonal relationships and health.

When contrasting the positive reasons why leaders were drawn to their role, and the negative challenges they face, an interesting dichotomy arises:

- Negative challenges of being a police leader reflect an immediate or short-term focus.
- Positive aspects of being a police leader reflect a more forward looking focus.

The negative challenges, while not insignificant, are nevertheless often of short duration. These challenges are not constant, nor do they typically last beyond the administrative term of the current police chief. The stress, the scrutiny and the negativity all stop after one leaves the job. Moreover, the level of stress is not constant even while still holding the position of police chief -- it ebbs and flows, with the occasional high peak.

On the other hand, the positive aspects of police leadership can last forever. Police executives have the opportunity to affect the future, not only of their jurisdiction and their agency, but also for the profession of law enforcement as a whole. In fact, the major movements in law enforcement -- from the origins of the police, to reforms implemented, to community policing and the modernization of policing -- can be traced to a few visionaries who saw beyond the present and touched the future. Innovators such as O.W. Wilson, Robert Trojanowicz, Herman Goldstein, and Clarence Kelly were all leaders or academicians of vision who fostered futures thinking and contributed to the advancement of the police profession.

A key tenet of futurists is to identify possible futures, examine the most probable futures, and then provide leadership that moves toward the most preferred futures. Police leaders who foster futures thinking and articulate a vision toward the most preferred futures are also the most likely to overcome the inherent resistance that comes from change.

What follows is a case statement, of sorts, on why and how to foster futures thinking in policing organizations.

## **HOW POLICE LEADERS CURRENTLY COPE**

### **Planning**

Some chiefs do not recognize the value of thinking about the future because they are too busy fighting off the alligators of today that are biting at their heels. Some go so far as to say that there is nothing gained by planning for the future – that Strategic Plans are useless because things change too quickly. You cannot plan for 5 years because you do not know how things are going to be. Others at least give some thought to change and attempt to make today's decisions based on trends or what they believe might occur. To the extent that planning exists in many agencies, it is project based, such as radio migration, or involves capital improvements such as building construction or repair. Planning is rarely comprehensive and normally aligned with existing silos in the organization. A rare few make plans for their agencies for the next 3 years or more and apply the principles of futures thinking and research.

Larger agencies that are seeking accreditation or which are already accredited by agencies like the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., (CALEA) are required to have multiyear plans that address goals and operational objectives, anticipated workload, personnel levels, population trends, and future capital and equipment needs. The plan must be reviewed and revised as needed. Standards like those established by CALEA also require that all accredited agencies maintain and update goals and objectives for the agency (and major components) and make them available to agency personnel.

How far in the future, and how detailed the multiyear plan must be, are not specified in the standards. Obviously not all agencies are accredited – in fact, fewer than 1,000 agencies are accredited by CALEA -- so the vast majority of police agencies are not required to meet even these minimal standards on planning for the future.

A mandatory CALEA standard requires that larger agencies conduct workload assessments at least every three years and distribute personnel in accordance with these assessments. This is to ensure the equalization of individual workloads not only in the patrol function but in all other functions of the agency.

The advantage to even the minimal requirements of futures planning and thinking required by CALEA standards is that it forces the agency to at least consider the future in terms of more than merely fiscal aspects.

Capital improvements are major infrastructure investments with substantial impact on the future shape of the organizations. As a consequence, decisions about capital improvements should not be taken lightly and an organization's planning horizon should extend far enough into the future to encompass the longest term capital improvement project.

## **Annual Budget**

Many chiefs and their agencies are facing declining or at best flat budgets. While the budget process is probably one of the most opportune times for the agency to plan for the future, it too frequently relates only to the NEXT budget cycle. Budgets are perceived to be too unstable to sustain longer plans. Yet, planning institutionalizes change and provides a consistent message to budgetary authorities. As a result, less budgetary variation should be expected with longer planning. With due regard to capital improvement plans, there is more to futures thinking than knowing how many police cars an agency will need in the next few years or whether body armor needs to be replaced in 3 or 4 years.

Another budget issue relates to the agency funding positions to actually do the futures research/thinking. While advantageous, it is possible to accomplish in most agencies not by creating new positions but by changing the mindset of those currently charged with the planning and research function. Rather than continue doing this function in the same tired manner (the way we have always done it!), current personnel assigned to the task can be reinvigorated by introducing them to the concept of futures thinking/research. Short of current personnel having an epiphany, the transfer of new personnel is always a possibility.

## **Existing Relationships**

Chiefs and police supervisory staff usually report to an elected official who may be only concerned with the current election cycle.....at best he/she may be looking at the next election and what will ensure re-election. Chiefs are therefore involved with politics, whether they want to or not. This relationship may help explain the short tenure of chiefs of police and the inability/unwillingness of chiefs to be fully committed to futures thinking. While a chief may well wish to leave a legacy of a great police agency he/she must sometimes be concerned with keeping his job rather than ensuring that the flywheel of greatness is kept turning after he/she departs.

Unions can impact the ability of an agency to think of the future beyond the next collective bargaining agreement. Unions obviously do think of the future but their mission differs significantly from that of the employer.

## **COP/POP**

While addressing underlying problems via COP/POP is not inconsistent with futures thinking, it may foster an attitude of looking more at the near term future rather than mid or longer term. In attempting to address immediate problems in the community, agencies might tend to neglect or not consider the unintended consequences of their problem solving. Futures thinking is more than simply an agency practicing COP/POP.

## **Not very well....**

As noted above, many or most agencies are busy fighting the immediate problems of today and are not well situated to consider the future. Not infrequently the most change toward futures thinking comes about after a crisis.....it is then that administrators and politicians do an 'autopsy' of failures and, invariably determine that the problems arose because of a lack of foresight-- --a failure to appropriately plan for the future.....Or when a new politician or police CEO takes office and makes longer term plans during the honeymoon period. It's obviously very wasteful and inefficient to manage by crisis and reaction. It is generally almost always less effective and more costly than prevention of the crisis/problem or being proactive.

## **FUTURES PERSPECTIVES**

### **Thinking about Thinking**

Whether we recognize it or not, each of us thinks about the world in their own particular way. In policing, our thinking is often consumed with getting through the day and extinguishing the fires that immediately threaten us. Unfortunately, in many cases that only guarantees that we will be faced with future fires.

Those who manage to escape the box of thinking only in the present and make a concerted effort to seriously consider the future, discover a strange thing - - the way they think about the world, indeed, the way they think period, changes. At first, thinking about the future takes some effort. For most of us, it's not natural to consider the ramifications of a decision five years hence, or the manner

in which a particular innovation or emerging technology might affect the larger culture. However, once that path is taken, futures thinking becomes irresistible; one begins to instinctively view the world through the lens of future possibilities, uncertainties and alternatives. It is exhilarating, and occasionally, unsettling. And yet, for the successful police manager in today's world, this type of thinking is essential. Consider the following forecast, as articulated by a well-known futurist:

At the middle of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century, it took about 20 years for the sum total of human knowledge to double. Today [1999], it's roughly every five years. [At this increasing rate] in 2020 it will be every 73 days! (Schwartz quoted in Bennett, 1999)

In other words, the rate of change is itself changing, accelerating at an exponential rate. Where the chief of the past had the luxury of playing "catch up," this is no longer the case. In order to remain merely current in today's information age society, police executives need to be thinking two, three or even four steps ahead. This is not a skill that can be turned off and on—in fact, it is one that inexorably changes the individual, even if that person does not recognize it is occurring. Futures exploration entails both an evolving philosophy that directs the research questions, and a range of techniques which serve as the tools for inquiry (World Future Society, 2008). The "ingrained thinking" described above operates as the philosophical foundation. The sections that follow provide an overview of some of the techniques that can be easily and effectively integrated into any police agency.

### **Environmental Scanning**

Much futures thinking involves forecasting over a period of years. However, many police agencies have more immediate needs: they require an understanding of "just over the horizon" trends that may significantly impact the organization and the community. To fill this need, futurists devised the "environmental scanning" methodology as an "early warning" system or a "kind of radar" to scan the world systematically and signal the new, the unexpected, the major and the minor" (Aguilar, 1967: ix). In short, it is a means of examining trends that are expected to occur in the very near term.

Not too long ago, it was difficult to conduct environmental scans because the resources necessary to conduct them were not always readily available. However, with the advent of near-instantaneous search engines (e.g., Google)



and dynamic information sources (e.g., wikis), that is no longer the case. Indeed, any agency can conduct an environmental scan relatively quickly and easily.

Put simply, one “scans” by consulting numerous sources of information about a particular topic to see how it is evolving. Based on easily recognizable trends, one forecasts how the object under study will likely change in a defined period of time (three, six, nine months, etc.). For example, if you were interested in knowing whether a particular type of crime was becoming more or less of a threat, you could conduct a rudimentary form of content analysis by tracking over time how often that crime is mentioned in the public media. If the number of “hits” increases, one can hypothesize that the crime may be trending higher. This, then, might signal the need for further analysis to support or reject this contention.

In an actual real life case example, one police agency decided that the most significant drug problem in its jurisdiction was powder cocaine and directed the bulk of its enforcement resources in that direction. The wife of a lieutenant on the force worked as an emergency room nurse. One evening, she remarked to her husband that many young adults and teens were being admitted to the emergency room with symptoms of extreme dehydration. She further stated that several patients had told her that a new drug with the street name of “ecstasy” was being freely used at all-night dance parties called “raves.” Curious, the lieutenant asked some of his young acquaintances about the drug; they confirmed that what his wife said was true—ecstasy was becoming the drug of choice for a growing contingent of high school and college students. The lieutenant then did some research; he discovered that, once introduced into a community, the use of ecstasy skyrocketed. Young people enjoyed its effects and believed the drug to be harmless. The lieutenant reported his findings to his superiors and stated that he believed ecstasy had the potential of replacing cocaine as the drug of choice in the near future. The agency refused to accept his findings and continued to direct its enforcement efforts at cocaine. Several months and many emergency room admissions later, angry community members forced the agency to re-direct its drug enforcement efforts to ecstasy. Sadly, by this point, the drug had become entrenched. The lieutenant remarked that, had his agency addressed the problem at its outset, it might have been able to have a significant effect on its sale and distribution.

Whether he realized it or not, the lieutenant conducted an environmental scan: he consulted multiple sources of information on a “just over the horizon” topic and made logical, short-term forecasts of possible futures.

Environmental scanning provides numerous potential benefits for police managers. In the first place, scans have utility in a number of areas, including projecting future crime trends, demographic shifts and budget shortfalls. Additionally, because they look at near-term trends, environmental scans are often more accurate and have a more immediate impact than longer term forecasts. Finally, they are relatively inexpensive and simple to construct.

One simple method of integrating environmental scanning into an agency is to conduct monthly or quarterly meetings at which every department head is responsible for presenting a short (1 page) near-term forecast of emerging trends in his/her area. For example, the head of the detective bureau would report on projected crime trends, the person in charge of communications could discuss new communications systems and technologies, and the patrol commander could provide information on projected changes in neighborhoods and demographics. Those given the task of assembling the forecasts would be encouraged to use multiple sources of data. To that end, someone researching demographic shifts would be expected to reach out to the Census Bureau, the local school system, and the Chamber of Commerce. In this way, the forecast becomes more robust, and the agency expands its network of potential “friends” and partners.

### **Examining Trends**

While the futurist’s tool box contains a variety of different equipment, one of the most critical tools is the observation of trends. Futurists employ current trends to establish a framework on which to map out alternative futures. However, unlike economists, who are largely dependent upon trends to forecast future outcomes, the futurist makes use of trends only as starting points in exploring the possible paths that the future might take. In some ways, trends are observable signs of currents that operate in complex ways, which make straight-forward projections problematic.

In general, people tend to think in a linear fashion, and consequently it is natural that we try to project any trend outward into the future. There is a temptation to look at tomorrow and assume that it will be the same as today. However this is a fallacy in thinking because it is only rarely the case that this assumption holds. There is a recognition by futurists that a trend is not necessarily something that will continue indefinitely – that there are counter forces in the environment working against the continuation of that trend. Moreover, trends are almost never constant in their movement – they can accelerate, slow down or abruptly stop.

Futurists take trends and use them as the basis of exploring possible futures. These trends are used as guidelines to build scenarios of alternative futures. For example, if the trend continued on in the short term, what would the outcome be? If it strengthened, how would that outcome change? What if it weakened? What if it stopped completely? In fact, it is these latter scenarios that are the most interesting to futurists.

### **Constructing Scenarios**

On August 29, 2004, Hurricane Katrina struck the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts. As the category 5 storm raged across the Mississippi River delta, its storm surge overwhelmed the dike system that protected New Orleans from the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. By Labor Day, it became clear that New Orleans would be uninhabitable and 300,000 evacuees headed to Texas, most triaging in Houston. In meeting the law enforcement needs, various state and local agencies collaborated to secure the safety of the evacuees. The Houston Police Department played a coordinating role, reconciling the deployment of thousands of officers along with support needs in a narrow time frame. The short lead time and the complexity of the task would have been overwhelming under normal business, but Houston had the advantage of a template. A few years earlier, the Houston Police Department had explored the consequences of an avian flu epidemic. As part of the exercise, the Houston Police Department developed a set of contingency plans should an outbreak occur. In the face of the evacuation of New Orleans, these earlier devised plans were adapted rapidly to meet the security needs of this new unfolding humanitarian crisis.

The Katrina example demonstrates the power of using scenarios in policing. Scenarios are exercises that produce learning. They develop an understanding of existing capacities, help identify shortfalls, and enable the development of strategies. Scenarios enable one to gain experience without having to go through an event in reality. Consequently, the insights gained are available to decision-makers facing real-world eventualities and can be adapted rapidly to meet emerging demands.

Scenarios ask “What if?” type of questions: “What if this technology emerges?”, “What if that social behavior becomes mainstream?”, “What if this forecast comes to pass?”. Scenarios are constructed upon a foundation of trends. Futurists consider the implications of observed trends. Simple scenarios explore a single trend. More sophisticated scenarios explore the interaction of multiple trends. The scenario tool has its roots in the post- World War II work of Herman Kahn at the RAND Corporation. Over the years, various methods for developing

scenarios have emerged, but all share the exploration of trends as a fundamental feature. Some probe for depth and some probe for breadth.

### **Identifying Preferences**

Futures thinking is interesting on its own, but its real power is helping leaders crystallize preferences into a vision for the future of their organizations. Environmental scanning, trend analysis and scenario exploration provide a broad and deep reservoir from which to draw informed preferences and to identify opportunities and threats to the organization. Having mapped the landscape, leaders can then determine where they want to go and plot a path forward.

Leaders trade in change; the capacity to move organizations in a desired direction is the hallmark of effective leadership. Yet, corporate CEOs and other leaders often express frustration at their inability to create change in their organizations. The problem is ultimately history -- the past is institutionalized in the organization's culture and structure and it becomes difficult to escape. Friction and inertia abound. For some players in the organization, change -- even change that clearly benefits the organization, amounts to the potential for loss of personal status or perks. Effecting change requires the leader to penetrate the barriers that exist. Because visions involve value choices -- statements and prioritizations -- they provide a means to move beyond the barriers to change. By expressing and reinforcing an attractive and powerful vision that appeals broadly to the organization, the leader gives his or her followers an image of a better organization and lets them know that the journey is worth the effort that will be required.

### **APPLYING FUTURES THINKING TO TODAY'S DECISIONS**

The question remains as to how futures thinking could help the police chief of today address the common problems that are faced on a day-to-day basis in contemporary police departments. This portion of the paper shows how a futurist perspective could benefit police administrators in making decisions on a variety of different issues confronting police departments, including several that have implications for the future of the profession.

### **Recruiting and Hiring**

The officers we hire today are tomorrow's supervisors and leaders. To properly recruit and adequately train, we need to understand the dynamics of the current pool of candidates, as well as the impact of other trends upon the work

environment. New technological capacities are expanding the nature of police work. Demographic trends are creating new social expectations, conflicts, and norms.

What we should expect of current officers is not what we expected twenty or even ten years ago; nor is it what we will have to expect ten years from now. The public expectations of the police are shifting, partly driven by technology and partly by changing demographics among other factors. Thus the capacities and potentials of those we select, train and educate will need to respond to a dynamic operational environment. Physical, conflict-based crime will not disappear, but the Information Age is changing the nature of financial crimes and creating new pathways for other predatory acts.

Time works against us. Every new hire that is not, or cannot become, information-savvy is an employee who will return little of the investment we make in him or her. While it is relatively easy to train and provide information, changing mindsets toward the information age is beyond the capacity of many police agencies. We cannot continue to select from among only those who present themselves for employment. Municipal governments must provide police departments the resources to determine what skills and attributes are and will be needed, and to actively recruit for them.

Recruiting and hiring are like fishing: these efforts are most productive if one goes where the fish are. The most desirable candidates are not reading want ads in newspapers, nor are they watching network television, nor will they mail in applications. They are on the 'Net, participating in social networks, texting their buddies, using Google. They are virtual learners and they are accustomed to virtual relationships. We must learn to capitalize upon that in recruiting, and anticipate the downstream effects once they are hired.

The tech-savvy generations will find the steep and rigid hierarchies of traditional police departments both quaint and unpleasant. The thirty-year retirement plan that anchored the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) is a foreign concept to millennials, whose peers anticipate multiple career changes during their working life. Police agencies are already seeing the effects of nomadic careers moving out from center-city agencies to the suburbs and exurbs; as the economy grows more technology-dependent, out-migration to other careers will be easier as well.

The psychological contract between organization and employee has changed in the private sector, and the antiquated public sector model is no longer viable: we just haven't realized it yet. We must either move toward flat, flexible, empowered and networked departments that will challenge top-flight candidates, or we will increasingly attract only applicants who want job security but bring few desirable attributes to the job.

Responsive professional service in rapidly-changing social conditions

cannot be done with traditional staffing models. We will need to accommodate short-term, part-time and contract employment, hiring for a fixed period and for particular tasks or projects. Outsourcing of administrative and support functions may become more flexible, although government-wide constraints will limit the payoff of these efficiencies.

Delay and dithering, so characteristic of many policing agencies, augurs ill for the hiring of information warriors. No viable information age entity takes months to make decisions. No information age applicant will wait around for such industrial age delays in decision-making.

Evolutionary changes in organizational structure and function will uncover obvious inefficiencies, complicating efforts to augment services. We will need to find ways to eliminate some previously safe harbors, e.g., the rubber gun squad and various retirement desks. Even more, change must be continuous and driven by futures-oriented vision, not driven by halting, under-the-gun crises as it has been in the past.

## **Budgeting**

Most of our jurisdictions are and will be feeling budgetary pressures. Most agencies will endure budget shortfalls, even if new efficiencies and improved process flows help us survive the crisis. To get off the treadmill of short-term reactions, we must develop and leverage strategic and tactical partnerships with citizens and community business interests.

Realistic budget requests require understanding the same trends that the politicians look at: industry trends affect tax bases, market fluctuations affect employment and tax bases, state and regional development plans affect transportation and other services.

Rapid developments in technology will require more nimble financing, both for capital acquisitions and for continuous training. The twenty-year municipal bonds that purchased fire trucks cannot enable an agile information age department. As crime becomes more and more technologically based, budgetary needs will continue to expand in order to develop employees who can provide professional services to citizens.

## **Technology Planning**

Two countervailing information age forces currently encroach upon police operations: a central emphasis on security and the external push for transparency of government operations. These forces are fundamentally incompatible. The central focus, some of it founded in law, is and will be creating

two problems.

1. Frustration of users because the world increasingly depends on availability of information in a timely manner (“fast” matters far more than “secure and perfect”); and

2. Irrelevance, since users are developing and will continue to develop communication channels outside the formal hierarchy. The desire to get work done will overcome the desire for control, isolating public entities where private sector competition exists.

The wide range of new technologies being developed will demand new levels of investigative skills: computer forensics and DNA typing are but the tip of the iceberg. The physical changes of photonics, nanotechnology, and the byproducts of genomic research will soon require additional skills for detection and interpretation of evidence. Existing technologies such as robotics will continue to mature, providing new opportunities and techniques of crime.

The current difficulties of interoperability of communications are likely to increase: public sector bandwidth has shrunk as a result of political decisions. We may soon face a day when all commerce is electronic, based upon biometric identification; that will present new opportunities for fraud and new challenges for investigation. It will also create tectonic shifts in the criminal markets that now depend upon the relative anonymity of cash.

## **Crime Futures**

Technology-based crime is what we tend to think of as “future crime,” but a broader focus is needed. Far more important is the blurring of organizational, jurisdictional, social, and biological boundaries: large-scale changes that result from technological advances. We need to be able to anticipate the opportunities they present for new crimes, and new variations on old crimes, in order to minimize their impact.

Our legal concept of jurisdiction is anchored in the physical world, and hampers our response to crimes of cyberspace. The police will soon have to decide whether, and if so how, to deal with the fragmentation of crimes based on internet transactions. We have traditionally been pressed to respond to all the crimes that occur within the physical dimensions of our jurisdiction; the Internet allows predators around the globe to victimize our citizens. The amount of cybercrime that can be vested upon our citizens is potentially limitless. Crafting an effective response will demand hard choices, creative thinking, effective networking, and ultimately assertive political advocacy for robust prevention and enforcement mechanisms.

We face new challenges in establishing domains of responsibility in the face of expanding technologies: easy access to information makes the tools of

hacking, bomb-making, identity theft, and other criminal pursuits readily available to populations who previously might never have encountered them. What is the role of the police in monitoring and policing on-line behavior? How does that role intersect with the responsibilities of parents, schools, internet service providers, and others?

We must anticipate the effects of social networking, and the generational shift toward the false intimacy of exposure through FaceBook, MySpace, and others. Personal information that once was considered confidential, provided on a limited basis, has been transformed into massive databases controlled by corporations. Data theft and sales lead to identity fraud in multiple venues (theft, cover for illegal immigrant employment, false identities concealing other crimes, etc.). A major emerging issue is the potential for DNA and genome analysis to affect individuals' eligibility for medical coverage. While possibly more of a social issue that is not directly linked to crime, a society potentially divided by access to medical care has implications for communities, and thus for police.

The legal ramifications of peer-to-peer technologies on intellectual property rights are still being ironed out and the issue of what can be stolen in cyberspace is slowly being redefined despite a major effort by corporate entities to retain the *status quo*.

## **Demographic Futures**

The future will be defined by the movement of people. Areas with high mobility tend to be young and acquiring wealth; areas with high stability tend to be old and increasingly impoverished. Rust Belt cities are losing population, Sun Belt areas have expanded significantly. As globalization moves manufacturing and some service jobs to overseas locales, the nation is less likely to experience internal migrations like those of the Dust Bowl, the northern migration during World War II, or the Houston oil boom of the 1980s.

As "identity politics" appears to fragment the social fabric, police have evolved into a community builder, a generator of social connections. The police may emerge as the single local agency dedicated to networking as its primary means of operating.

Determining what shifts are likely to affect a particular area involves a networked effort to identify information sources. Public school districts tend to be very sensitive to demographic trends of school-age cohorts, though their institutional constraints can be as difficult as police traditions.



## **Political Futures**

Political challenges emanate from below and above. America's emerging diversity creates new pressures from the grassroots. Top-down pressures come from local governing bodies that feel financially and socially stressed: trapped in failed policies, bereft of good alternatives in a climate of unfunded mandates, and suffering declining tax bases. This is a tough environment for traditional policing and it demands a police department focused on community building, networking, information sharing, and leadership.

What police will need to learn is how to tap into the new ways people participate in the political process. Some of that will be issues-driven, some technology-driven. The current generation has gone from interest in televised Presidential debates to candidates appearing on late-night talk and comedy programs, to viral spread of YouTube clips of gaffes and *faux pas* that would have had only local impact in campaigns past.

Outside of the electoral processes, citizens' relationships with their local governments are changing as well. Old-style ward-based communications still exist, but citizen influence is expanding to non-governmental organizations, viral lobbying and campaigning (both positive and negative), and direct legal actions.

The full potential interplay of newly discovered socio-technological capacities has only begun to be revealed. The "flash mob" was a two-week phenomenon, random convergences of people to perform silly things (hop on one foot while patting their head, for instance), impelled by the impulse of a technological rather than a social network. Its current incarnation is the emergency notification systems put in place on college campuses to warn community members of dangerous conditions. Further extensions of the concept might be Amber Alerts distributed via GPS systems or satellite radio networks; neighborhood monitoring of closed-circuit TV; on-line crime reporting; and network dissemination of crime information in real time.

Each of these entails a budget consideration, as the police officer's ability to both receive and disseminate real-time information about an unfolding crime requires that the department and the officer have access to sufficient technology to afford this communication. It also requires the department to have made sufficient contacts in the community to generate interest and participation in providing this information to police.

## **Legal Futures**

Emerging law will continue to follow rather than lead, remaining one or more steps behind emerging realities. Nonetheless, case and statutory law has

already expanded to the point where traditional training of officers in law is not working well. We need to move intentionally toward a curriculum that focuses on constitutional principles rather than details. This will involve a bare-bones approach to legal precedents, with substantial time spent on how to find and interpret new statutes and emerging case law. Our next generation of police officers will need an ability to adapt current practice new legal frameworks.

The entire warp and woof of western law is deeply anchored in traditions, even more so than the police culture. The slow movement of cases through the appellate process refines the fundamental issues, and acts to check and balance the irrationality of sudden impulse. While we are striving to be nimble and responsive, the law acts to save us from irrational winds of change, but the needs and balances may require revisiting and revising as well.

As the preceding discussions hint, the rapid expansion of technology also affects the ancient shape of law. Internet crime is criminal, but reaches to communications (regulatory) law, privacy concerns, and others. As cyberspace begins to redefine citizenship, it may also tilt the balance toward a redefinition of law: the Constitutional Conventions of the 1700s may need 21<sup>st</sup> century descendants to renegotiate and redefine the relationships between citizens, their government, and the growing trans-jurisdictional corporate entities.

### **Transportation Futures**

Money for new highway systems will not likely be forthcoming and improvement of mass transit is similarly constrained. Even maintenance will be a challenge. Existing traffic divisions will be economically unsustainable.

Municipal governments are outsourcing major portions of traffic enforcement to private agencies that maintain speed and red-light camera systems. Despite early setbacks, congestion pricing will emerge as a means of controlling center-city traffic, altering the type and demand for enforcement. Agencies can plan to phase out traffic divisions by civilianizing crash reporting and reducing high speed chases. Then comes the fight for reallocation of those now superfluous resources.

### **Other Considerations**

What does “community” mean with the rise of virtual worlds? Citizens have lived in multiple, non-geographic communities since the end of the Second World War, but cyberspace allows them to transcend physical space even further. Rather than by geography or even family, ideology, identity politics, or other permutations may soon determine how youths identify themselves.

Law, social expectations, and other areas may also be dislocated by additional events on a scale of 9/11: pandemics, widespread natural disasters (a major quake along the New Madrid fault; The Big One along California's San Andreas fault; rapid loss of Antarctic or Greenland ice and the corresponding rise in sea level; a massive Yellowstone eruption), mass casualty events from industrial accidents; economic boom times or another Great Depression; and future acts of terrorism all represent wild cards that will further alter the social and political landscapes.

## **PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER: USING THE LEADERSHIP GPS TO NAVIGATE INTO THE FUTURE**

Today's police leaders are likely to find it easier to navigate the challenges identified in the opening of this paper by fostering futures thinking in their departments. Leading towards preferred futures is the most likely way to success. Leaders may find futures orientation to be foreign to their current perspective; stepping away from the crisis du jour and contemplating what successors may face is not routine for most chiefs. But, the value and benefit of futures thinking is not exclusively future outcomes. Today's leadership will meet today's challenges with a broader perspective and improved decision making tools with a futures perspective. Applying futures thinking towards today's challenges enhances a police leader's ability to respond.

A futurist perspective provides chiefs with a menu of options to respond to different political situations. Politicians often walk a fine line in their relationships with police chiefs. They want to maximize the situations where they can take credit and minimize those where they can be blamed. The ideal circumstance is when the elected official comes to view the police chief as a good resource for information – particularly where events on the horizon are well thought out. Futurist thinking also provides the possibility for creating legacy. How often has it been the case that a new chief inherits a command situation where the predecessor did not have the foresight to plan beyond his/her tenure? By taking a futurist direction, police chiefs can build an agenda for the department that transcends the current political climate.

Today's crime strategy meetings that analyze real-time data, often based on the COMPSTAT model, may give way to more predictive crime strategy models. Futures research on socioeconomic influences on crime may allow chiefs to not only improve today's tactical decisions on crime suppression, but also improve proactive crime prevention through forecasting. Taking into consideration the forecasts of future crime potential will allow police leaders to

address more of their current challenges. Forecasts of future crime patterns foster analysis of the future needs of the workforce; this allows today's leaders to tailor their hiring practices to recruit and select police employees who are most likely to be both adaptable and successful with future challenges. By understanding the likely future environment, today's leaders can support technological developments and research that is most likely to provide both immediate and future support for the police mission, whatever that may become.

Forecasting future economic conditions also helps current leadership. Consider the tough fiscal environments facing police today, with declines in both federal funding to local government and the national economy. How many police departments anticipated the sharp decline in federal funding during the height of the COPS program to hire more officers nationwide? Futures thinking helps today's leaders not only anticipate the fiscal roller coaster of public sector funding, but also provides greater tools to make the case for budgetary needs. Elected officials who can be educated on the link between today's funding of personnel and technology and forecasted crime potential are more likely to provide resources than those who are only provided current data. Forecasts specific to a community's growth or decline give police leaders an edge in projecting resource needs and leading the charge for community improvements that could mitigate the need for increased police services.

Managing the human resources requires insight into what makes employees tick. Futures thinking allows leaders to better understand what matters most to their incoming employees, how best to identify the skill sets needed for the future, and focus on the right "match". This strategy has implications for addressing the challenges of labor-management relations, and provides insight into forging more collaborative relationships that can yield faster and more profound organizational change. Leading change is enhanced when the future vision can be widely shared and understood, and today's new employees are more likely than our current employees embrace a future perspective.

The police chief's role, as described in the opening challenges, carries expectations of diverse knowledge and expertise. Futures thinking allows leaders to diversify their knowledge base and to encourage expertise in emerging issues throughout their organizations. The leader in a futures oriented organization is an advocate for growth and progress, and is seen as an invaluable resource for community and political leaders as well as their employees.

Perhaps the transition occurring in policing is a convergence, where models and theories such as COP/POP intersect with tactics arising from

Homeland Security and challenges yet to be identified or named. A futures thinking perspective for policing is most likely to yield the adaptability, vision, and creativity to not only assist in current leadership's daily decision making, but to create a legacy of success for a future generation of leaders.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING FUTURES THINKING IN YOUR DEPARTMENT**

We recognize that it may initially prove to be difficult to implement futures thinking in many departments. For some of these departments, futures thinking may seem to represent a radical shift in the culture of the department, and could be met with some resistance. However, as we have demonstrated above, the benefits of this perspective can have profound implications for the department. The following are some recommendations on how to go about instituting a futures perspective and futures thinking within a police department:

1. Futures thinking should not be an individual effort, but rather should become a naturally occurring element within the police organization's culture and leadership structure. Futures can be a mechanism for engaging that bright young supervisor or officer who might otherwise begin to drift and consider leaving the agency.
2. In a related fashion, it should also be recognized that the police chief does not have to be the primary lead in advocating a futures agenda. A wise police chief will delegate the day-to-day work on futures planning to others within the department.
3. Contemporary policing is in a constant state of flux. Consequently, change is a reality in most police departments. To institute a futures perspective and futures thinking at the departmental level, a police chief should identify individuals within the department who are "agents" of change. These individuals recognize that their department will ultimately have to adjust in order to continue to meet its mission, and embrace the inevitable change that will occur in the department. Ideally, a team of these change agents could be entrusted with pushing a futures agenda within the department. They should come from different domains within the department and would need to represent a diversity of perspectives in order to be able to promote a more dynamic interaction of ideas. Although this team would report directly to the police chief, it should be empowered with the capacity to implement policies that promote futures thinking.

4. Ultimately, implementing a futures perspective begins with prioritization. Strategic thinking must take priority over the tactical. While police leaders will need to protect against fatal short term problems, they also have to be willing to sacrifice taking a short-term hit from a small problem in order to devote the time and resources necessary to begin addressing issues with longer term implications.

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