
Implementing Crime Prevention: Lessons Learned from Problem- oriented Policing Projects

by

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Abstract: *Problem-oriented policing initiatives are one important form of crime prevention, and they offer opportunities for learning about implementation success and failure. Problem-oriented policing initiatives can succeed or fail for a variety of reasons, among them: inaccurate identification of the problem, inaccurate analysis of the problem, inadequate implementation, or application of an incorrect theory. This paper draws upon both the research literature and reports on problem-oriented policing initiatives to identify those factors that best explain why action plans do or do not get implemented. It identifies and provides examples of five clusters of factors that help explain implementation success or failure: (1) characteristics, skills, and actions of project managers; (2) resources (3) support and cooperation external to the police agency; (4) evidence; and (5) complexity of implementation.*

INTRODUCTION

The literature on community and problem-oriented policing is replete with analyses and explanations for many aspects of failed efforts to adopt

these approaches. Much of the literature is focused at the organizational level: that is, exploring why the approach did not take hold as a systemic, organizational framework for the operations and administration of the police agency or as a guiding philosophy for governmental and nongovernmental responses to crime and disorder (Skogan, Hartnett et al., 2000; Alarid, 1999; Sparrow, 1988; Laycock and Farrell, 2003; Greene, 1998; Rosenbaum, 1994; Grinder, 2000). Less well studied is failure at the problem level: that is, exploring why a crime or disorder reduction initiative undertaken to address one particular problem did not achieve its objectives.

Using the basic framework of a problem-solving model, there are four basic reasons why any particular problem reduction initiative might fail (or, conversely, succeed):

1. The problem was inaccurately *identified*: the underlying problem was something other than what it first appeared, the problem was not as acute as initially believed, or the police agency or the community was not as concerned about the problem as first thought.
2. The problem was insufficiently or inadequately *analyzed*: either the real contributing or causative factors were not discovered, or insufficient or inadequate evidence was mounted to persuade others to take interest in the problem.
3. The responses developed from the problem analysis were improperly or insufficiently *implemented*, or not implemented at all.
4. The problem was properly identified and analyzed, and responses were implemented, but the responses did not have the desired effect on the problem.

This paper concerns itself principally with the third of these four reasons: successful or failed implementation of responses.

At first blush, *implementation* seems the simplest and most straightforward of the four basic problem-solving steps. Invoking the simple admonition adopted by the Nike Corporation as its slogan, one might think that implementation requires merely that one "just do it." In reality, implementation is often infinitely more complex than it first appears, demanding much greater attention and care than is commonly imagined (Larson, 1980).

The implementation phase of problem-oriented policing initiatives may well be the most crucial yet least well-understood phase. Indeed, the early literature on problem-oriented policing paid scant attention to this

phase, owing largely to the absence of a sufficiently robust body of case studies from which an improved understanding of implementation might be gleaned. Goldstein's (1990) seminal work on the concept devoted entire chapters to identifying problems (chapter 6), analyzing problems (chapter 7), and developing and choosing from among alternative responses (chapter 8), but only alluded to some of the challenges associated with implementing responses, and then only in the context of choosing from among a range of response options (1990:143⁴-5). Even later studies of problem-oriented policing initiatives - which carefully studied such questions as how problems were identified, how they were analyzed, what sorts of responses were developed, and what results were achieved - paid less attention to the factors that explained whether, why, and how well the responses developed were implemented (Capowich and Roehl, 1994; Scott, 2000).

Partly out of a desire to make the problem-solving process appear less daunting, many proponents and practitioners of problem-oriented policing promoted the use of simplified problem-solving processes, the most common being the SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment) model (Eck and Spelman, 1987). One unfortunate consequence of this simplified model is that it conflates into one stage - the Response stage - several rather distinct processes.

Goldstein's original conceptualization of a problem-solving model for problem-oriented policing saw this "Response" stage as comprising at least three distinct processes: (1) conducting a broad, uninhibited search for response alternatives; (2) choosing from among those alternatives; and (3) implementing the chosen alternatives (Goldstein, 1990).⁵ Each of these processes requires careful attention to minimize the risk of failure. With regard to the first of these processes - conducting a broad search for responses - conventional thinking creates the risk that police will be blind to innovative responses that have greater potential to be effective than conventional police responses. Decision makers can prematurely settle upon a response strategy and become fixated on one strategy to the exclusion of potentially more viable alternatives. With regard to the second of these processes - choosing from among alternatives - failing to fully account for the advantages and disadvantages of each potential response (e.g., likelihood of effectiveness, community reaction, financial costs, available resources, legality, practicality) can lead police to try to implement responses that are doomed to fail or backfire. So too with regard to the third of these processes - implementing chosen responses - is careful attention required to minimize the risk of failure.

Although implementation failures are every bit as instructive as successes, they are, of course, harder for researchers to uncover for the simple reason that they are less likely to be documented by police agencies.

A variety of factors explaining why problem-oriented initiatives appear to succeed or fail appear in the research literature and in police reports on problem-oriented policing projects. The factors are of five general types:

1. characteristics, skills, and actions of project managers,
2. resources,
3. support and cooperation external to the police agency,
4. evidence, and
5. complexity of implementation.

Further explanation and examples of these factors follow.

1. Characteristics, Skills, and Actions of Project Managers

The degree to which POP initiatives succeed or fail depends greatly on the characteristics, skills, and actions of key individuals, most especially those individuals who have assumed the responsibility for managing the initiatives. Several personal characteristics and skills stand out in the literature as especially significant, among them: leadership, personal engagement by the police chief executive, continuity of assignment, ownership of the initiative, effective communication to others of the project objectives and directives, and technical and managerial competence.

Leadership At or Near the Level of the Principal Project Agents

It is perhaps a truism that strong leadership is necessary to successful implementation of problem-oriented policing initiatives, or that weak leadership is a key factor in failed implementation: however, the strength or weakness of leadership is at least partially defined by the success or failure of the task one is leading. It nonetheless bears saying that in so many POP initiatives project leadership stands out among the factors cited for successful implementation of responses (Skogan et al., 2000).

POP initiatives are undertaken at various levels of aggregation and at various levels within a police bureaucratic hierarchy (Scott, 2000; Goldstein

1990). Some initiatives are undertaken at the beat level, some at the jurisdictional level, some at cross-jurisdictional levels, and some at various intermediate levels. Thus we find project leadership and management being exercised by individuals at varying ranks and position within and outside the police organization, from line-level officers or civilian staff, to mid-level supervisors and managers, to senior executives.

Few police agencies seem to have well-established systems for ensuring that the action plans developed in POP initiatives are carried out. Consequently, to the extent that they are carried out, it seems often to be due to the diligence, persistence, and perseverance of one or a few individuals. These individuals schedule and lead meetings, perform the tasks they have agreed to and hold others accountable for doing the same, and generally do whatever is necessary to keep the project a priority concern. It is often the case that these individuals exercise a degree of leadership not commonly expected of their rank and position. They press ahead unless made to stop.

Personal Support and Involvement of High-Ranking Police Executives

Particularly when the POP initiative requires a significant commitment of resources, a change in policy or legislation, or the exercise of significant political influence, the police chief executive's personal engagement in and commitment to implementing a response plan can be critical.

This was exemplified when the police chief in Fremont, California spearheaded his agency's initiative to change its response to burglar alarms. In the face of strong opposition by the alarm industry, the police chief pressed the case for a policy change by carefully presenting his agency's internal analysis of its response to burglar alarms to audiences of alarm owners, elected officials, and the public at large (Aguirre, 2005).

Similarly, the police chief in Racine, Wisconsin used his influence and contacts within the political and business community to advance a POP initiative to reduce drug- and gang-related crime by sparking community redevelopment. The police chief worked with other influential community leaders to set up a nonprofit foundation through which private donations could be received and spent on community redevelopment and crime control efforts. The foundation purchased blighted houses, renovated them, permitted police to use them as community police stations for awhile (in order to help stabilize the neighborhood), and then sold them as owner-occupied homes. A combination of community development and targeted

law enforcement were deemed to have significantly reduced reported crime and fear (Racine Police Department, 1999). This initiative was recognized as a finalist in the Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing in large measure due to the distinctively-involved role of the police chief.

The police chief executive can similarly stifle the implementation of a response plan. In one instance, a detective working to improve investigations of child sexual abuse requested that his police chief solicit the local district attorney's support to purchase an expensive piece of equipment for medical examinations of child victims. Although the police chief dutifully placed a call and left a message for the district attorney, when the chief was notified during a meeting that the district attorney was returning his call, the chief replied that the district attorney should be told that the matter wasn't important. The detective then became discouraged and the initiative effectively ended. Ironically, the meeting in which the police chief did not want to be interrupted concerned implementing a community policing plan in the agency.²

Even where a police chief executive does not intentionally squelch a POP initiative, his or her lack of engagement at critical junctures in the project can mean that the project achieves less than it might otherwise. Police chief executives typically operate in a tumultuous political and professional environment in which organizational priorities change relatively rapidly and somewhat unpredictably. Accordingly, some POP initiatives that begin as high priorities for the chief executive can drop down the priority list as the project progresses and as new issues supersede the problem at hand. An initiative by the Savannah, Georgia Police Department (now the Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department) to address burglary of single-family houses yielded interesting and useful insights in the problem analysis and a comprehensive set of practical recommendations for action. However, even though the project confirmed that the problem was persistent and the community's overall response to it inadequate, other priorities - counterterrorism (in the wake of the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. and an anthrax scare), violent crime (owing to a spike in its incidence), and merger of the city and county police departments - came to dominate the chief executive's attention after the project began. Few of the response recommendations developed in the burglary project were implemented and, for the most part, the project was abandoned. The time and attention of key burglary project staff were consumed attending to these competing priorities of the chief executive (Scott, 2004).

At least part of the implementation failures in the St. Louis Consent-to-Search initiative (an initiative designed to remove guns from the hands of young people known to be involved in youth gangs) was attributed to a fundamental philosophical change at the level of the police chief executive. Wrote the project researchers:

After the first chief left, the St. Louis Police Department had no organizational commitment to either problem solving or community policing. The prevailing departmental philosophy . . . was that consent searches were ineffective and too soft on offenders. Departmental leadership placed a high priority on taking offenders rather than guns off the streets. (Decker and Rosenfeld, 2004:15)

Continuity of Project Leadership and Management

Many POP initiatives take months, even years, to bring to fruition. When key project leaders and managers stop working on the project (due to transfers, promotions, retirements, new project assignments, and the like), it is often difficult to maintain interest in and commitment to the project (Bullock, Farrell et al., 2002). This is typically the case when POP initiatives are perceived within the agency to be matters of personal, rather than organizational, interest and priority. Absent a formalized system in which project management is officially transferred to a successor, the departure of the project's key leaders often spells the end of the initiative.

In order to take on the task of trying to reduce domestic-violence homicides in Newport News, Virginia, a police detective requested and was granted a transfer to a special task force set up for that purpose. The effort required extensive problem analysis and the careful development, implementation, and monitoring of a new domestic violence protocol and program. The police detective assumed the central coordinating role among a host of other agencies that were brought together to address the problem (Newport News Police Department, 1998).

The continuity of a police captain's assignment as project manager for an initiative to address drug dealing in private apartment complexes in Newark, New Jersey - through a change in the top leadership of the police agency - was deemed essential to the project's success (Zanin, Shane et al., 2004).

Ownership of the Initiative

Most people are more committed to their own ideas than to others'. In the context of implementing POP initiatives this means that it is desirable

that the people needed to implement responses feel some sense of ownership of the action plan (Bullock, Farrell et al., 2002, citing Read and Tilley, 2000). A sense of ownership can be cultivated in key individuals by providing them with opportunities to meaningfully influence the direction of the project such that they feel they are not merely implementing somebody else's plan, but implementing their own plan. Conversely, a lack of input by key individuals at meaningful stages of the project can lead to their lack of commitment to implementation (Long et al., 2002).

Much of the problem-oriented policing literature stresses the importance of maintaining a strong link between the analysis and response development phases, and the response implementation phase. Ideally, the same individuals remain actively involved in the project throughout, from initial problem identification to analysis to response development to response implementation to assessment. Ownership of an action plan can either be assumed or assigned (or neither) in a police organization. Ideally, the individual or individuals who spearheaded the problem analysis would likewise have the capacity and desire to put their resultant plan into action. The emergence of professional grant writers working for police agencies increases the risk that the plan of action, which often must be specified in the funding application, will be developed without the input or commitment of those who will be tasked with putting the plan into action. Where it is not possible for the lead problem analysts to implement the plan, the next best possibility is for the action plan to be officially assigned to one or more individuals who will be held accountable for carrying it out. When responsibility for implementing an action plan is neither assumed nor assigned, the plan typically lies dormant.

The lead researchers of the earliest POP initiative examining the problem of drinking drivers concluded that the failure to fully implement the recommendations for action arising out of the inquiry was largely attributable to the fact that no one individual within the police agency had or was given responsibility for doing so (Goldstein and Susmilch, 1982:108-09). By contrast, the recommendations for action that emerged out of the same researchers' analysis of a second problem - repeat sex offenders - were promptly and effectively implemented owing largely to the fact that a police lieutenant was tasked with doing so (Goldstein and Susmilch, 1982:109). Similarly, the researchers who worked and reported on the Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire attributed some of the project's success to the clear accountability mechanisms established through an interagency task force (Kennedy, Braga and Piehl, 2001).

A sense of ownership of a response plan is unlikely to be engendered merely by assigning it to someone nor by extrinsic motivations such as financial reward. For example, where police officers or others agree to carry out certain assignments principally because there is overtime compensation to be earned from doing so, it is often the case that the commitment to carrying out the plan as originally designed is weakened. Wrote one project manager:

Police supervisors, who were brought in from other districts to work overtime, were not implementing the program in a consistent manner.... It became apparent that the lack of ownership for the problem by other district supervisors was jeopardizing the attempt to deal with the problem. As a result, the original designed response was being implemented inconsistently, causing confusion and frustration. (Halton Regional Police, 2002)

Creating a specialized assignment to address a problem appears to increase the likelihood that action plans will be implemented. Specialized assignments might be in the form of special task forces, specialized units, secondments, and other similar arrangements. The specialization of the assignment might be either to the particular problem or to some sort of problem-solving unit within which the individuals assigned can choose problems to address and concentrate their work on them. From among the POP initiatives regarded as most successful one more commonly finds them occurring within the context of specialized rather than generalized assignments.

Typically, specialized assignments provide not only the time and other resources necessary to the task, but also greater accountability because responsibility for addressing particular problems is more firmly established. Additionally, specialized assignments offer other intangible benefits to the individuals assuming those assignments: prestige, freedom from ordinary duties, greater autonomy over working conditions, and so forth. To the extent the individuals value these benefits, they have incentives to ensure that action plans are implemented; that the project appears to be moving forward and producing results. Of course, specialized assignments have a built-in dilemma: if those so assigned are too successful and the problem is eliminated or dramatically abated, there may no longer be a justification for perpetuating the specialized assignment. It is a tendency of bureaucracies (and by extension, the subdivisions thereof) that the individuals holding desirable positions in them will do whatever is necessary to perpetuate the existence of the bureaucratic entity. Consequently, individuals holding

specialized assignments often seek an optimal rather than maximum degree of success: just successful enough to convince decision makers that the specialized assignment is *effective*, and just unsuccessful enough to convince decision makers that continuation of the specialized assignment is *necessary*.

Where a specialized assignment is intended as a sort of pilot initiative to develop a response strategy that is then to be rolled out more widely to general assignment officers, a new set of challenges arise. The factors that make specialized work effective - commitment to the plan, esprit de corps, flexible time and other resources, and so forth - are often difficult to replicate outside the specialized context.

Externally-funded research projects are similarly a mixed blessing in terms of translating the research into action. The external funding provides resources and expertise that might otherwise be unavailable to the project. It can also serve as an incentive to project participants who want to make a favorable impression to external funders (and not to be embarrassed in published reports). But the external aspects of the initiative can undermine the police agency's sense of ownership of the project. A subtle attitude can develop among police agency participants that the point of the whole exercise is to satisfy the researchers' and funding agency's needs rather than to solve the problem at hand. This appeared to be the case in the initiatives addressing drunk driving in Madison, Wisconsin (Goldstein and Susmilch, 1982) and burglary of single-family houses in Savannah, Georgia (Scott, 2004). Where this attitude develops, there is a tendency to view the project as complete once the problem analysis is complete.

Even where ownership of an initiative is once firmly established, it can degrade over time because of other factors discussed elsewhere in this paper such as staff turnover, complacency, loss of resources, loss of control over the initiative, and so forth.

Effective Communication of Policy Objectives and Directives to those Responsible for Implementation

Where it is beyond the capacity of the project leaders to themselves implement responses, it becomes crucial that they be able to persuasively and effectively communicate to others tasked with implementation what needs to be done and why (Long, Wells et al., 2002, citing Van Horn and Van Meter, 1977; Bullock and Tilley, 2003; Clarke and Eck, 2003). Wrote Larson (1980:5): "As a general rule of thumb, the greater the number of actors and agencies involved in a program, the less likely it is to succeed."

Problem-solving is, for the most part, not sufficiently well institutionalized in most police agency's operations for it to be self-evident that the tasks needed to implement a POP initiative response plan must be dutifully performed. Notwithstanding that police agencies are perceived to be highly disciplined quasi-military organizations in which orders are faithfully obeyed, police officers, like most workers, comply with directives better when they understand and agree with the objectives and see value in their contributions toward them. Accordingly, getting others to carry out essential tasks often requires a careful effort to get them to "buy in" to the initiative. This is more readily accomplished if those tasked with implementing the responses have at least some input into the design of those responses.

As difficult as it often is for police officers to obtain "buy-in" within their own agency, it is often even more difficult to convince people outside the police department to carry out specific tasks faithfully and properly. The success of an anti-bullying initiative led by a police officer in South Euclid, Ohio was heavily dependent on the capacity of the officer and his project colleagues to persuade school administrators and teachers, students, and parents to address bullying differently than they had in the past. The officer's analysis of the problem led him to conclude that teachers, administrators, parents, and students had a far greater capacity to control bullying than did the police, but only if they learned to adopt a new understanding about and attitudes toward bullying, and then translated that new awareness into new behavioral responses to the problem. The officer and his project colleagues deliberately involved school administrators and teachers, parents, and students in the process of interpreting their analysis findings and proposing new responses. Extensive training and education of all key groups was instrumental in conveying what could and should be done to control bullying. Program evaluation surveys confirmed that the training and education components of the initiative were a critical factor in the successful implementation of new responses (South Euclid Police Department, 2001).

The St. Louis initiative to confiscate guns from young persons through consent searches suffered from difficulties in convincing regular patrol officers and supervisors of the value of this approach, which was developed by a specialized unit. Many officers who were not part of the unit that designed the initiative never came to believe in the value of the particular response. Little training was provided outside of the specialized unit (Decker and Rosenfeld, 2004).

Professional Capabilities of Key Individuals

Even where strong leadership is present, successful implementation requires that the individuals responsible for carrying out essential implementation tasks must have the requisite technical knowledge, skills, and abilities (Larson, 1980; Bullock and Tilley, 2003; Ekblom, 2002; Clarke and Eck, 2003). These requisite proficiencies extend both to project management and supervision, as well as to service delivery or the acquisition, installation, and operation of things.

The St. Louis gun control initiative cited above also suffered because an outside clergy group that was supposed to make follow-up visits to the homes where guns were confiscated failed to make these visits when referred by police (Decker and Rosenfeld, 2004).

2. Resources

Whether POP initiative action plans get properly implemented also depends heavily on the sufficiency and availability of the resources necessary for implementation (Grabosky, 1996). Such resources typically include, at a minimum, finances, authority, and staffing. It is seldom sufficient that the resources exist; they must also be sufficiently accessible to project decision makers and flexible in their adaptation to particular needs.

Sufficiency of Legal and Organizational Authority

It is often the case that the responses developed in POP initiatives are sufficiently innovative that they present a significant challenge to the status quo. Accordingly, POP initiative managers must acquire and use new forms and grants of authority in order to properly implement new responses. This authority might come in the form of a change in the law - a new regulation, ordinance, by-law, statute, or judicial interpretation - or in the form of a change in administrative or organizational policy or practice.

In problem-oriented policing, key decision making should occur at an organizational level closest to where the problem is experienced, consistent with the need for meaningful oversight and review. This has typically meant that authority has generally been pushed down in the traditional police hierarchy, whereby police officials are encouraged to use this newly granted authority to push forward the POP initiatives in which they are personally engaged. Naturally, such a shift in orientation can give rise to new tensions, both within the police organization and in its relations with

external organizations. Police officials pressing for the implementation of new responses might well be challenged by others who perceive that the officials pressing for action lack the requisite authority to do so.

How these tensions get resolved varies from agency to agency and project to project. Much turns on the skill with which the project manager exercises his or her authority, whether the exercise of that authority is backed up by a formal grant of authority, and the extent to which higher-ranking police officials defend their subordinates when they exercise that authority and are challenged by others for doing so.

Some line-level police officers, whether by virtue of their personalities or their training and experience in leadership roles outside of policing, are tremendously effective at making authoritative requests of others to do certain things. For example, a police officer working on a problem involving noise complaints emanating from a railroad switching yard, when met with resistance from lower-level railroad employees, promptly placed a telephone call to the chief executive officer of the railroad corporation in another state, requesting his cooperation and appealing to the corporate executive's desire to avoid bad publicity to the corporation for disturbing local citizens. The corporate executive was receptive to the officer's recommendations and ordered that steps be taken to reduce the noise. The police officer, taking steps that even some police chief executives might be reluctant to take, relied upon assurances from his department that this was the sort of initiative he was expected to take, as well as on his experience as an officer of higher rank in his military service.³

Availability and Flexibility of Sufficient Resources

Some responses to problems do not require the commitment of new resources; perhaps all that is required is a shift of existing resources or revision of a policy. But most projects involve at least some responses that do require additional resources: staffing, money, equipment, and so forth. This often presents significant challenges to police agencies, particularly during times when resources are tight. The regular operating and capital budgets of most police agencies are set well before most problem-oriented initiatives are crystallized and few police budgets have pools of funds set aside for unanticipated needs. Accordingly, many POP initiatives, to the extent they require the commitment of significant new resources, are heavily dependent on other funding sources: grants, special police funds such as drug asset forfeiture funds, or corporate or community donations.

Even where external resources are available, the strictures of those resources - delays between application for and receipt of resources, timelines for expending the resources, reporting requirements, use restrictions, and so forth - can make them less useful for the purpose of addressing an evolving public safety problem than they might first appear.

To the extent that a POP initiative in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina succeeded in addressing the problem of thefts of appliances from construction sites, it did so in large measure because two police officers were assigned to work on the project on a full-time basis for about two years (Clarke and Goldstein, 2003). Given the labor-intensive nature of their analysis of and responses to the problem, and given the competing priorities for police attention, it is highly unlikely that this initiative would have yielded the results it did without this substantial staffing commitment.

An initiative undertaken in the Fenlands area of England to reduce repeat burglaries was intended to follow an earlier burglary reduction model in which all houses once burglarized would receive a heightened level of protection from police and others. However, in the final analysis, far fewer houses received this heightened protection, a fact attributed by project evaluators to the inadequacy of resources necessary for the scope of the task (Jones, 2003:82).

3. Support and Cooperation External to the Police Agency

There are some responses that police can implement solely on their own authority, but more commonly, police need support and cooperation from outside their agency to implement new responses to public safety problems. Obviously, it is easier for police to get things done in the absence of strong opposition to the plan of action, but even in the absence of strong opposition, getting things done still calls for cultivating external support and cooperation.⁴

Grass-Roots Community Support

Response plans that enjoy grass-roots community support tend to be more likely to be implemented than those without it because such community support can be converted into political influence which can mobilize resources and action. Police have influence themselves, to be sure, but their influence alone is not always sufficient to persuade reluctant government

officials. St. Louis police expedited the demolition of derelict buildings that were serving as crime magnets by getting citizens to write letters to the government agency responsible for demolishing buildings. In the same project, police mobilized a large group of citizens to testify at a liquor licensing hearing, persuading the licensing authority to revoke the license of a troublesome tavern (Risk, 1992).

Grass-roots community support can also be essential to forestall opposition to police action. Indianapolis police were able to sustain an intensive effort to stop vehicles, search for guns, and investigate suspicious drivers and occupants in a predominantly minority community owing in large part to preparatory work done by the police to gain community understanding of and support for the initiative (McGarrell, Chermak et al., 2002).

Supportive Media Coverage

Where media coverage of a police effort to address a problem presents the police perspective in a favorable light, this can provide a substantial boost to the implementation of responses. It can do so in several ways: by engendering public understanding of and support for the course of action recommended by police (and thereby giving elected officials incentives to ensure that the problem is addressed), by shaming and holding to account certain parties deemed to be responsible for contributing to the problem or parties deemed not to be cooperating in the effort to remediate the problem, by keeping the problem in the consciousness of key officials (including police officials) until it is properly addressed, by providing a reasonably objective assessment of the case being made by police for new responses to the problem, and by encouraging police officials through the intrinsic satisfaction of positive publicity and recognition.

Media coverage, however, is not universally supportive of a police plan to address a particular problem, and can in fact thwart it. A plan by Manchester, UK police to conduct an enforcement crackdown on certain gang members was put on hold because lawyers representing some gang members on trial at the time prevailed in their argument that the media coverage of a police crackdown on gangs would unfairly prejudice the jury in the instant trial (Bullock and Tilley, 2003:122). When Lauderhill, Florida police filed a nuisance abatement action against the owner of a commercial property as a means of controlling an open-air drug market operating on the property, local newspaper coverage was hostile to the police action, adopting the editorial view that only drug dealers and buyers

should be held responsible for the drug market, not the property owner, and further questioning the police motives. Although the adverse media coverage did not ultimately hinder the legal action, it did weaken public support for it (Lauderhill Police Department, 1996).

Existence of Organizations with the Capacity and Mandate to Implement Responses

Where there already exist organizations outside the police agency with the clear mandate and capacity to implement responses, the probability that the responses will actually be implemented appears to be higher. Conversely, where the response would require creating a new organization or unit to implement the response, or where it is unclear which organization or unit has the mandate and capacity to implement the response, successful implementation is less likely (Long, Wells et al., 2002; Bullock, Farrell et al., 2002).

The Newark (New Jersey) Police Department's analysis of problems associated with drug dealing in privately-owned apartment complexes led them to conclude that reengineering a major arterial roadway was likely to be the most effective response to a particular problem. Traffic reengineering on such a scale as this is clearly beyond the authority and capacity of the police agency alone. That it nonetheless was contemplated and approved owed largely to the fact that the city's Traffic Engineering Department became deeply engaged with the Newark police on this project. Traffic engineers had the authority and the technical competence to undertake such a large project. The Traffic Engineering Department had already secured the authority and funding from the state for this reengineering project. Traffic engineers were therefore positioned to work closely with the police because doing so only required relatively minor modifications to their existing plans rather than a major reprioritization of traffic projects. The actions deemed necessary to control the drug problem in the short term while awaiting completion of the long-term roadway redesign and construction were within the capacity of the police (drug enforcement), city fire, code, and health inspectors (code enforcement against problem properties), and traffic engineers (temporary roadway redesign) to effect at a reasonable cost (Zanin, Shane et al., 2004).

This same factor can apply to units within the police agency. The Oakland, California Police Department implemented a sophisticated set of responses to address a problem pertaining to a budget motel. It negotiated with the motel's on-site manager to improve management practices,

assisted with some clean-up of the motel property, negotiated changes in management practices with corporate executives, conducted undercover surveillance and enforcement operations at the motel, and ultimately filed a nuisance abatement lawsuit against the motel's parent corporation. All of these actions called for careful attention to detail, legal and procedural expertise, and persistent monitoring of the problem. That the responses were executed so well was largely attributed to the fact that the police agency had in existence a special unit - known as the Beat Health Unit - that over the course of many years had developed procedures, systems, and expertise to address just these sorts of problems. Particularly given the high financial stakes in this problem and the formidable corporate resources aligned against the police, it is highly unlikely these responses could have been implemented, let alone have proven so successful, without the mandate and capacity that the Beat Health Unit could bring to bear on the problem (Oakland Police Department, 2003).

Fortuitous *Timing*

Some POP initiatives benefit from fortuitous timing. A critical incident (such as a heinous crime) or budget pressures might generate public interest in and attention to a problem that might not otherwise occur merely through a more painstaking presentation of evidence and arguments (Goldstein and Susmilch, 1982). Police ought to exploit such opportunities responsibly, taking care to complete a careful analysis of the problem so that they are able to justify their new responses to the problem if called upon to do so in a more deliberate and reasoned fashion. The recommendations made to improve the overall response to repeat sex offenders emerging from a study of that problem in Madison, Wisconsin took on urgent importance when a repeat sex offender murdered a young girl just as the study's recommendations were coming out (Goldstein and Susmilch, 1982). The California Highway Patrol's efforts to reduce injuries and fatalities in farm-vehicle crashes met with less resistance in the wake of a horrific crash that killed 13 farm workers. Legislation applying mandatory seat belt laws to farm vehicles, enhancing farm-vehicle inspections, and providing funding for educating farm employers and workers was enacted speedily (California Highway Patrol, 2002).

The Newark Police Department's plan for controlling drug dealing in private apartment complexes through major roadway redesign benefited from the fortuitous timing of the project: the city had already received

state funding and approval for reengineering of that particular roadway, albeit not for the purpose of controlling drug markets. The project was able to take advantage of the plans already on the drawing board intended merely to address traffic congestion concerns and modify them slightly to also address drug market problems (Zanin, Shane et al., 2004).

Congruence of Perspectives and Objectives

Problem-oriented policing generally urges police to engage other organizations in the effort to address problems. While such engagement often yields a synergetic effect, it can also have an inhibiting effect. Where the perspectives, objectives, performance indicators, or cultures of the various collaborating organizations are too divergent and are not effectively reconciled, implementation plans can suffer (Bullock, Farrell et al., 2002; Bullock and Tilley, 2003; Grabosky, 1996; Clarke and Eck, 2003; Laycock and Tilley, 1995). For example, if police personnel are motivated to undertake activities with which they are familiar and for which they believe they will be rewarded - such as law enforcement - and the particular project calls for them to undertake different sorts of activities - such as providing social services - police might be less than enthusiastic or diligent in providing the social services.

Ordinarily, responses are more likely to be implemented if the individuals and organizations tasked with implementation recognize and legitimate the activity as one that they feel competent to carry out and which fits their conception of what they or their organization ought to be doing. For example, police are more likely to conduct criminal law enforcement activities because such activities fit squarely within the scope of police competence and self-image. They are likely to be more reluctant to engage in other sorts of tasks such as providing social services. So too with other agencies. The Boston Gun Project, which was coordinated by an inter-agency task force, appears to have apportioned the various tasks that were part of its overall response plan in accordance with the respective competencies and self-images of the participating agencies. The police engaged in enforcement crackdowns, the clergy and gang outreach workers offered assistance to gang members, probation officers supervised their clients, prosecutors prosecuted crimes, and so forth. Responses were faithfully implemented perhaps in part because no agency or individual was asked to stretch its conventional sense of its own function. To be sure, the various participants, with their conventionally divergent perspectives on the problem, endorsed one another's work in a unified fashion, but the work itself

was performed by the individuals and organizations most comfortable with the respective tasks. Moreover, the various elements of the response plan were developed mindful of the practicality of what participating agencies could do to address the problem. So, for example, economic development was not made part of the response plan in large measure because none of the participating organizations had the capacity to do that work (Kennedy, Braga and Piehl, 2001).

Divergent perspectives and objectives can often be reconciled, of course, but doing so typically requires a conscious and concerted effort and is best done at the outset of the project before hard feelings and recalcitrance develop. Sometimes it is just a matter of having key individuals spend time with one another to learn and appreciate one another's professional perspectives. Other times it requires some third party - sometimes an individual with supervisory authority over all involved organizations - to intervene and help establish some common perspectives and objectives. Such appeared to be the case when the Joliet, Illinois Police Department first tried to work collaboratively with its city Neighborhood Services division to enforce rental property management laws against neglectful property owners. The city manager eventually stepped in to reconcile differences, which led to the two agencies developing and implementing a new process for enforcing rental property management laws, a process which proved to help both agencies achieve results they both desired (Joliet Police Department, 2000).

A related pitfall is what has been termed "mission drift" (Bullock and Tilley, 2003) whereby the initial project objectives morph into either more ambitious or different objectives altogether. This can occur as a result of an insufficient understanding of the causes of the problem or lack of clarity and agreement about which aspects of a larger problem to concentrate upon. Large, ill-defined problems such as "juvenile delinquency," "violent crime," "gangs," "repeat offenders," or "drugs" are especially susceptible to this phenomenon. Spelman (1990) noted that projects and programs to target high-rate repeat offenders often turn into efforts to target especially dangerous offenders who may or may not also offend at high rates. The original implementation plan becomes diluted or diffuse as the various actors responsible for implementation go off in divergent directions. While multiple objectives might be worthwhile, confusing them can render the response ineffective for either.

Although much of this discussion assumes that all those engaged in a problem-oriented initiative share common outcome objectives, this is

not always the case. Sometimes it becomes apparent after the start of the project that there are conflicts among the various interests of those involved in the project; that what police hope to achieve in the initiative does not square with what others hope to achieve. Such was the case when Lauderdalehill, Florida police sought to work with the merchants and owner of a commercial property comprising several shops to eradicate an open-air drug market. Although all parties initially claimed to want to eradicate drug dealing, when police concluded that certain business practices - failing to maintain the property, selling drug paraphernalia, operating pay telephones, and so forth - were significant contributing factors to the problem, several merchants actively resisted police efforts to implement prevention measures. The merchants believed that police should control the drug market exclusively through criminal arrests and that the merchants should be free to pursue their business interests without regard to any effects on drug trafficking (Lauderhill Police Department, 1996).

4. Evidence

Adequacy of Hard Data Support and Effective Communication of the Evidence to Key Decision Makers

Hard evidence that a particular response is justifiable and is or is not known to be effective, and effective communication of that evidence to decision makers, is a powerful factor influencing whether or not that response is ultimately implemented. This is often a significant challenge. Much of what police and others do to control public safety problems has not been rigorously and thoroughly evaluated. The body of evidence from accumulated practice and evaluation research is rather slim indeed. Moreover, it is often the case that police are advocating that new, relatively untested responses be tried in the hope and belief that trying these new responses will, if nothing else, be preferable to continuing with conventional responses that have not proven as effective as hoped. In these circumstances, police must cross two thresholds: one to establish that the old methods ought to be abandoned and a second to establish that the new methods should be tried. For some decision makers, this is more uncertainty than they care to embrace.

When the Salt Lake City, Utah Police Department set out to change its agency's response to burglary alarms, it met with tremendous resistance from the alarm industry because the proposed change would have far-reaching financial ramifications for many alarm companies. The police

proposed that police officers would only be dispatched to investigate burglary alarms if the police received some verification that the alarm was not false, that suspicious activity was indeed afoot. Because the alarm companies would no longer be able to count on the police making the initial investigation of the alarm, it would be incumbent upon them to investigate prior to summoning the police. It quickly became apparent to the alarm industry that if the Salt Lake City Police Department were to prevail in its effort to shift responsibility for initial response to burglary alarms in that city, the idea might catch hold in other cities across the country and might trigger a paradigmatic shift in the burglary alarm business model. Consequently, the alarm industry mounted a vigorous opposition to the police proposal. Because the Salt Lake City police chose to secure the authority for this new response via a change in city law, this meant that the police and the alarm industry would be engaged in a public debate over the merits of the proposal. To overcome substantial political pressure generated by the alarm industry, the police would have to marshal substantial hard evidence in support of their proposal. The police prevailed in a close vote of the local city council and several council members who voted for the police proposal cited the persuasive evidence presented by the police as justification for their vote (Salt Lake City Police Department, 2001).

Compelling evidence was equally, if not more, critical when a city ordinance regulating the operations of convenience stores, which was proposed by the Gainesville, Florida Police Department and enacted by its city council, was challenged in the courts by the convenience store industry. Whereas elected officials can be influenced by political pressure as well as hard evidence, the courts tend to be persuaded only by hard evidence and compelling interpretations of the law. Wrote Goldstein (1990:81) in his account of the Gainesville experience:

The minimum staffing requirement was challenged in the courts but upheld as an appropriate exercise of local government authority to increase public safety, in large measure because of the persuasive data the police had carefully collected and analyzed.

The response plan developed by a task force established to reduce vehicle crashes and injuries along a highway corridor in California included a number of responses that would require significant resources to implement, including funding overtime for enforcement, redesigning and rebuilding roadways, installing emergency communications equipment along roadways, and producing public education materials. The rigorous and

detailed analysis of the problem conducted by the task force was almost certainly essential to justify such public expenditures (California Highway Patrol, 2001).

5. Complexity of Implementation

Ease of Implementation

The relative ease with which a response *can* be implemented is obviously a significant factor in explaining whether and to what degree it *is* implemented: simple responses are more likely to get implemented, complex ones less likely (Clarke and Eck, 2003). Hope and Murphy (1983) cite one project in which a seemingly straightforward response - to use toughened glass for school windows to reduce vandalism - was never implemented because it created fire safety hazards and the alternatives simply required more effort than officials were willing to make. Responses that require a one-time effort tend to be simpler than those that require ongoing effort. The degree of complexity is in turn influenced by such factors as the number of individuals or entities that must approve or act upon a response proposal and the form of authority required.

Absence of Delays

Delays in implementation, for whatever reason, can stall the momentum of the project and create doubt about the viability of the plan (Larson, 1980; Bullock, Farrell et al., 2002). To the extent that project managers can keep the project moving forward, the likelihood that the action plan developed will actually be implemented appears to increase.

There is another aspect of delay that can profoundly influence whether a particular response strategy is implemented: where key decision makers feel pressured to demonstrate crime reduction results quickly, those response measures that are likely to take a long time to implement are unlikely to be adopted, however promising they might be. This is one of the unintended consequences of police management accountability schemes that set short timelines for achieving measurable results: police problem-solvers' response options are narrowed and those responses that can be implemented quickly and without need for securing external authority, support, or resources are preferred (see Moore, 2003).

CONCLUSION

When one reflects on the litany of factors and conditions that seem essential for any POP project action plan to actually be put into effect, and the concomitant factors and conditions that can preclude implementation, it is a wonder that police get anything accomplished at all. And yet they do. Among governmental bureaucracies, police seem especially capable of getting things done. Indeed, oftentimes that is precisely why some problems are left to, or assumed by, the police to address. Policing is at its core an action-oriented occupation. It tends toward impatience with deliberate analysis in favor of immediate and dramatic action. The overriding sense one gets from reviewing POP initiatives - both the successfully and the unsuccessfully implemented - is that when police really want something accomplished, it usually gets accomplished. Police POP project managers are remarkably adept at navigating the shoals of implementation failure. The determining factor, therefore, is police desire. And, as with most human endeavors, desire is driven by individual or organizational self-interest, however determined. Problem-oriented policing is a promising means of enlightening that self-interest through rigorous analysis and careful weighing of alternatives, but the underlying desire to get problems solved through a new course of action would appear to be extrinsic to the concept itself. Accordingly, researchers and practitioners alike who are interested in advancing problem-oriented policing would do well to better understand why the best laid plans go off awry.



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NOTES

1. Others have conceptualized program implementation as comprising such distinct phases as interpretation (translating the response into written guidelines and regulations), organization (assigning responsibility for tasks), and application (carrying out the tasks): see Larson, 1980.

2. This example is known to the author from personal experience and involvement in the initiative.
3. This example is known to the author from personal experience and involvement in the initiative.
4. For further reading on how police can overcome opposition to their implementation plans, see Buerger (1998), Scott (2005), and Scott and Goldstein (2005).

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