MOVING TOWARD COMMUNITY POLICING: THE ROLE OF POSTMATERIALIST VALUES IN A CHANGING POLICE PROFESSION

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INTRODUCTION: INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES IN TRANSITION IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

Many of the goals and structural arrangements of public organizations are, to a significant degree, determined by a set of values and beliefs underlying them – values and beliefs found in enabling statutes, budget authorizations, administrative rules and regulations, and related forms of legal provisions. Such formally and officially expressed values provide an underlying philosophical framework justifying the agency’s existence and enabling it to select the specific forms of standard operating procedures and practices it adopts (Brown, 1984; Ott, 1989). To a highly significant degree, however, organizational values are also affected by the values held by the organization’s employees. Two comparable public organizations may share formal and official values (e.g. two police agencies, two local schools, two post-office substations), but behave and operate in significantly different ways owing to the distinctive values of the persons in those organizations.

Individual managers and employees bring their own personal beliefs, policy preferences, and attitudes to bear on organizational roles in
“professionalism” has reinforced the adoption of the Weberian “ideal type” as the preferred organizational form for most police organizations. This model entailed:

...police being apolitical ... advocating centralized control, tight organization, pinpointed responsibility, strong discipline, efficient use of personnel and technology, and high standards of recruitment and training ... Thus, for several decades (especially 1940s through 1970s), a concern with developing techniques to increase the control and efficiency of the police agency occupied those in the forefront of policing (Goldstein, 1990:7).

In such a strongly paramilitary and highly centralized organizational structure, strict obedience to supervisory rank by police officers and the predominance of downward communications in the form of orders constitute highly valued patterns of rank-and-file and administrative behavior. Furthermore, the primary organizational goal of the police organization was taken to be the achievement of maximum efficiency in dealing with crime and disorder; behaviors such as the swift apprehension and arrest of criminals and the frequent issuance of citations to traffic offenders by officers are seen as direct evidence of effective policing (Goldstein, 1990:7; Sandler and Mintz, 1974).

Beginning in the 1970s, police organizations across the nation began a remarkable process of reform of basic organizational values and police practices – much in the spirit of the paradigm-shifting innovation advocated by the “reinventing government” enthusiasts in contemporary public administration (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). Two of the most commonly identifiable reforms along these lines are community-oriented policing (Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux, 1990) and team-policing (Goldstein, 1990; Sandler and Mintz, 1974; Walker, 1983). Common to these new forms of policing is the placement of a high priority on the assumption that police organizational structures ought to change from a paramilitary and hierarchical model to a much more decentralized and participatory (“employee empowerment”) form.

A belief, also widely shared by police reformers today, is that the primary orientation of police agencies should shift from that of being a narrowly focused “crime fighter” to that of being an approachable and trusted partner in the community effort to maintain the general quality of life in a local jurisdiction (Winkel, 1988). Such a broadened role would entail finding a variety of means for reducing the fear of crime (Moore and Trojanowicz, 1988) and the fear of disorder (Kelling et al., 1988). In
consequence of well-articulated and detailed demands for change made externally.

Although a considerable literature exists on the nature of contemporary police reform (e.g. Goldstein, 1987, 1990; Kelling and Moore, 1988; Sparrow, 1988; Spelman and Eck, 1987; Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux, 1990), there is relatively little empirical research available at present regarding the interaction between the values of individual officers and police managers and their support for (or opposition to) this “new paradigm” type of police organizational reform. In particular, it is not clear whether the contemporary reforms evident in American policing are primarily a reflection of changing values among the rank-and-file officers or, more a reflection of management preferences about how external pressures for change should be accommodated (Brown, 1984).

The purpose of this paper is to make use of Ronald Inglehart’s theory of societal value change in postindustrial societies from materialist to “postmaterialist” concerns as a theoretical framework to evaluate an ongoing experiment in organizational reform in a progressive police agency – the Washington State Patrol (WSP). A primary aim of this analysis is to assess the utility of Inglehart’s theory of societal value change, for understanding the reciprocal relationship which exists between individual employee values and organizational reform in contemporary police organizations.

**INGLEHART’S THEORY OF VALUE CHANGE**

One of the most highly regarded theories offered to explain the course of cultural change in contemporary postindustrial societies is the theory of “value shift” developed by Ronald Inglehart. In brief, Inglehart argues that in advanced industrial societies, individual values have gradually changed from reflecting an emphasis on economic and physical security (materialist values) to placing greater emphasis on freedom, self-expression, and the quality of life (postmaterialist values) (Inglehart, 1990:5). This value shift is held to be particularly true of post-war generations in America, Western Europe and Japan where a large number of empirical studies conducted over the course of some 20 years, have documented the salience of the “postmaterial” quality of values in ascendance among younger age cohorts (Inglehart, 1989).

In addition, Inglehart proposes the use of a specific survey instrument scale for assessing the postmaterialist vs. materialist-value
environmental protection, favor gay rights, support gender and minority equity, and pay considerable attention to political affairs). In addition, if individuals choose postmaterialist values at the macro level, they are more than twice as likely as materialists to manifest postmaterialist values at the micro level (Inglehart, 1990:169).

THE INTRODUCTION OF “TEAMS” IN THE WSP

The Washington State Patrol (WSP) was established in 1921 with a mandate restricted to the enforcement of traffic laws on state highways (Gray et al., 1991). In 1933, however, the WSP was mandated to exercise full state police powers. In 1975, the strengthened WSP had a statewide field workforce of 812 commissioned officers, with an organizational structure which was strictly hierarchical and an organizational culture which was decidedly paramilitary. Upper level managers generally exercised rather complete control over operational decisions, and any significant deviations from standard and accepted practices on the part of line officers were strictly forbidden (Beckley, 1987).

Beckley (1987) suggests that a combination of conditions – primary among them being dissatisfaction among line officers, the unionization of troopers, and the advent of new management with a new chief – led the WSP to reconsider rather thoroughly its organizational values, goals and administrative structure. This reconsideration resulted in the organization embarking on a systematic reform of its organizational structure and operational norms by means of the implementation of a program designated TEAMS in January, 1986. This program achieved considerable recognition across the country inasmuch as it was selected in 1986 as one of the 25 finalists (from 1,000+ applicants) in the annual Innovation in State and Local Government Competition underwritten by the Ford Foundation and operated by the John F. Kennedy School of Public Affairs at Harvard University.

According to Beckley (1987), the program implemented in the WSP introduced the following changes to the traditional patrol approach. First, operational decision-making moved from a paramilitary, centrally-directed format to a more decentralized, participatory system. Considerable decision-making authority in field police work was transferred to the patrol units organized into detachments of eight to ten troopers. Detachments are encouraged to exercise considerable discretion over how to accomplish their jobs, and to set their own goals for traffic
respondents also match the population surveyed. These characteristics of the respondent pool indicate that, together with the high rate of response, we have a sizeable and likely quite representative cross-section of the WSP in our dataset. The survey contained a number of questions designed to assess officer attitudes about the TEAMS program and participative management as an appropriate management philosophy for the WSP. The survey also contained Inglehart’s measure of postmaterialist vs. materialist values.

As noted above, Inglehart proposes the use of value indicators designed to tap personal values at both macro (societal) and micro (workplace) levels. With regard to macro level value orientation, WSP employees were asked which of the following four national goals was most important to emphasize as a national priority, and which was their second choice:

1. Maintaining order in the nation.
2. Giving people more to say in important government decisions.
3. Fighting rising prices.
4. Protecting freedom of speech.

Respondents who chose the second and fourth choices are classified as possessing postmaterialist values, and those who chose the first and third responses are labeled materialists. Any other combination is designated as having “mixed” values.

The same survey format is employed for the designation of micro level value orientations. Respondents were asked which of the following four items were first and second most important in his or her working environment:

1. A good salary so that you do not have any worries about money.
2. A safe job with no risk of closing down or unemployment.
3. Working with people you like.
4. Doing an important job which gives you a feeling of accomplishment.

Among these four items, the third and fourth are scored as postmaterialist responses and the first and second are viewed as
postmaterialist value indicators to the analysis of the support of the TEAMS program, then, it would be expected that respondents with postmaterialist values would be more likely to support TEAMS than would either materialists or those with “mixed” values. If this line of thought applies to the TEAMS settings, it seems clear that the WSP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value Scale</th>
<th>Troopers</th>
<th>Sergeants</th>
<th>Command Staff</th>
<th>Washington Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materialist</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmaterialist</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Findings from the first statewide survey conducted by the WSP in 1992 as part of an annual assessment of citizen perceptions of agency performance.

Figure 1:
RATIOS OF POSTMATERIALISTS

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...
TEAMS program constitutes an “élite-mediated”, as opposed to bottom-up, modification in the organizational life of the WSP.

**Connection Between Macro and Micro Level Values**

Based on his numerous cross-national surveys, Inglehart (1990:169) observes that if a respondent chooses postmaterialist value alternatives at the macro level he/she would be twice as likely as others to select the same value at the micro level. Our findings indicate that this generalization does not apply to the state police personnel studied here. The results displayed in Table 3 indicate that WSP commissioned officers demonstrate little evidence of Inglehart’s predicted pattern of value coincidence. Macro level postmaterialists are only marginally more likely than materialists to express postmaterialist values at the micro level. This result is a likely consequence of the uniqueness of police personnel vis-à-vis the general citizenry studied by Inglehart and his associates and replicators.

This disparity between Inglehart’s findings and the results of the WSP survey likely stems from an artefact of the macro level measure developed by Inglehart and used here. In the case of the WSP, the police constitute a particular occupational group which is quite different from other professions in the society. As the primary guardians of public safety,
The survey results displayed in Table 4 lend considerable support to our arguments. More than three out of four troopers and sergeants indicate “maintain order in the nation” as either their first or second choice among the four items of choice provided. It is clear that this particular value choice has distinctive meaning for police professionals, and consequently the macro level indicator developed by Inglehart for general citizenries has only limited utility for use among police personnel. Given these findings, we shall rely on the micro level values indicator for the analysis of the degree to which postmaterialist values might be associated with support for organizational reform or — alternatively — might be associated with “élite-challenging suspicion” among rank-and-file troopers.

Postmaterialist Values and Support for Organizational Reform

It is clear that postmaterialist values are related to sentiments about community policing in systematic ways, both for the troopers and the sergeants of the WSP (Table 5). With respect to initial reactions (“expectations” held for reform or change), postmaterialists tend to hold slightly higher hopes for movement toward community problem solving and employee empowerment than others not sharing that value orientation. It is interesting to note, moreover, that the sergeants as a group were significantly more inclined to hold high expectations for change toward community policing than the troopers. Whereas something over a third of the troopers indicated that their initial reaction to the TEAMS program was positive, over two-thirds of the postmaterialist sergeants and over 60 percent of the nonpostmaterialist (mixed and materialist value types) sergeants felt positive regard for the idea. This finding adds further evidence to the surmise that planned organizational change in the WSP was more a result of élite-mediation than a response to “bottom up” demands.

Even more dramatic than this evidence, however, are the findings relating to the assessment of the outcomes attributable to three years of effort to promote the TEAMS program. There is again a difference in sentiments tied to postmaterialist values, but in this case that difference is not consistent across trooper and sergeant ranks. In the case of the troopers, the postmaterialists are somewhat less inclined to ascribe failure to achieve improvements to the TEAMS program than their nonpostmaterialist colleagues. As for WSP sergeants, however, this
group composed of representatives from across the ranks and divisions of the WSP whose charge is to identify specific organizational barriers to progress toward fuller implementation of the goals of the TEAMS program and to make specific recommendations for action following their analyses. The VER TEAM has been in operation over the course of the past five years, and its many recommendations for action have been responsible for a number of positive steps toward community policing goals. Most important, perhaps, has been the creation of a forum wherein the cynical sergeant, the hopeful but suspicious trooper, and the well-intentioned but distrusted captain can all meet and share their concerns, doubts, and hopes in a context of considerate attention to all observations. This process has often lead to the building of greater trust across ranks and divisions and the formulation of some creative approaches to organizational problems.

CONCLUSION

This first attempt to apply Inglehart’s theory of societal value change to assess a police organizational reform has produced useful findings. A focus on the “value dimension” does reveal some insight into the extent and dynamics of organizational change (Hooijberg and Petrock, 1993). The analyses presented here suggest that the initiation and support of the TEAMS program in the WSP came mainly from the command staff and the middle management/first-line supervisors rather than the rank-and-file officers. Our findings are similar to those presented in the work of Scott and Hart (1989). They speculate, from their analyses of private organizations, that rank-and-file members of a formal organization are not likely to be the initiators and major supporters of any significant organizational reform (1989:152). Further, they suggest that professional people who are in the upper level of an organization should be, for a number of reasons stemming from their “boundary scanning” roles, the major parties responsible for an organizational reform. William Bergquist has arrived at very much the same conclusion from his analysis of the “postmodern” organization phenomenon (1993:149-170).

The use of Inglehart’s value measure in the analysis brought to our attention the likelihood of the emergence of cynicism among the ranks of the middle managers — cynicism among those holding the highest expectations of what organizational reform might mean for the agency. It would appear that, while these critical actors are inclined to be prepared to experiment with employee empowerment and responsible risktaking for the sake of


