

The Changing Face of Police Leadership

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If our ideas about **leadership** in the past tended to revolve around the solitary heroic figure, the **leadership** of our future will be defined by inspired teamwork.



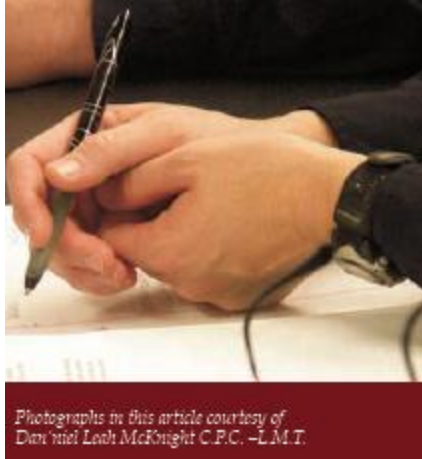
The thing about **leadership** is . . .
never do it alone.

*Mark Moore,
Harvard's Kennedy
School of Government*

The style and practice of police leadership is gradually evolving. Where once the rhetoric of police leadership revolved around the wisdom, integrity, and courage of the solitary leader, the discussion is turning more and more to the dynamic, multifaceted nature of teamwork, inclusion, and

dispersed leadership.² This trend reflects a larger movement that has been under way for some time in other areas of human enterprise.

Shared leadership is a term used to describe an approach to management that routinely disperses workplace power and influence among individuals who are otherwise hierarchical unequals.³ It views leadership as broadly distributed among coworkers rather than concentrated in the hands of one or a few superiors.⁴ Although the focus in police management circles may have begun to shift, observers tend to agree that such shared leadership styles are still not widely practiced in the law enforcement field. Police organizational structure and processes tend to adhere to more traditional hierarchical notions.⁵ This situation persists despite widespread adoption of community-oriented, intelligence-led policing that calls for line officer empowerment and a high degree of autonomy at all levels of the law enforcement organization.⁶



A Case Study

An article in the January 2006 *Police Chief* documented a variety of potential benefits of shared leadership in a law enforcement context.⁷ That article described a case study of the Broken Arrow Police Department (BAPD), a suburban agency of 165 employees in northeastern Oklahoma, which shifted to a participative form of management by creating a cross-functional employee steering committee. The Broken Arrow case study demonstrated that shared leadership can improve employee organizational commitment, pride, morale, motivation, productivity, leadership development, and acceptance of community policing initiatives. The findings also established that shared leadership can bridge the gap that often exists between union and management and between line

officer and senior executive. The BAPD study confirmed the positive outcomes of employee participation that have been documented by researchers in a variety of other fields and extended this body of research to the law enforcement arena.⁸

The purpose of the present article is to more fully explore this new management paradigm and highlight aspects relevant to its implementation in police organizations. In particular, we will discuss three types of shared leadership, each carrying with it certain advantages, considerations, and requirements. Administrators should view these various levels of employee involvement in light of their particular organizational needs and contexts. We will also present the results of a survey of Oklahoma police chiefs that assessed their opinions of shared leadership as a police management tool. Finally, we will examine the role of the chief executive in this emerging model of 21st-century leadership.

Three Levels of Shared Leadership

Shared leadership is a concept that encompasses a spectrum of democratic workplace management practices. A number of classification schemes have been developed based on the degree and type of employee inclusion in decision making, but for discussion purposes we will use a simple delineation among three types of shared leadership: suggestion involvement, job involvement, and high involvement.⁹

Suggestion Involvement: Suggestion involvement describes situations where employees have abundant opportunities to offer information and suggestions but generally lack authority to make decisions. Suggestion involvement relies on an open culture that welcomes the free exchange of ideas at all levels. Open organizations of this type tend to be more collegial than hierarchical. Supervision is informal and lines of communication are relatively open. A company that favors suggestion involvement by employees also generally encourages experimentation and learning at the individual, group, and organizational level. The research indicates that a corporate culture open to suggestion involvement will foster innovation, grow revenue, enhance job satisfaction, and reduce absenteeism.¹⁰

Suggestion involvement appears to be the easiest and, from an administrator's point of view, the least risky form of shared leadership to undertake. Since actual decision-making authority is

retained at the senior management and supervisory levels, there is no real power sharing that takes place. Theoretically, the approach simply entails creating open systems of communication and opportunity for employee input, and then acting on these ideas when indicated. However, these tasks are easier said than done.

In reality, suggestion involvement may be the most difficult form of shared leadership to create and maintain. For senior executives, middle managers, and first-line supervisors accustomed to a traditional command and control police environment, suddenly shifting gears and adopting more inclusive management styles is no easy transition. Strong interpersonal communications, coaching, facilitation, mentoring, and inclusive decision making may be skill sets for which traditional managers were not promoted, do not have much training in, and as a result probably do not have much confidence in. This is one reason police organizations have not generally developed into adaptive learning organizations.¹¹ Police agencies typically are not effective at engendering cross-organizational communications and tend to engage in single-loop learning that does not foster feedback. Suddenly trying to foster two-way communications, creating new conduits of information, and more importantly acting on employee suggestions, can be exercises in futility. If nothing in the agency culture really changes, initiatives that purport to create an open culture will be recognized by the rank and file as empty rhetoric.

Therefore, formal structures that share information and create feedback loops are recommended for fostering suggestion involvement. These systems may entail formal, regular cross-functional meetings between units, such as CompStat, or they may take other forms: quality circle arrangements at the unit level in which employees can discuss problem solving and process improvement; formal suggestion systems and project management tracking software; and simple electronic or printed newsletters that share information and publish employee suggestions and innovations. Such institutionalized procedures can be underpinned by personnel appraisals that place a high value on employee participation, recognize innovative initiatives, and reward personal involvement in agency systems. Without formal structures that legitimize and institutionalize suggestion involvement, efforts to create open systems may not last long.

In addition to formal structures that encourage and capture the productivity of employees, intense training is a critical component of an open system of inclusion and learning. Organizations that use suggestion-involvement strategies also tend to invest heavily in human resources, recognizing the potential return such investments can reap. In fact, some proponents contend that training and development of subordinates is one of the primary functions of executive leadership in shared leadership contexts.¹²

Suggestion involvement can be an effective low-risk method of engaging employees in the daily operations of a police department. It can help people feel more valued by their agencies and give them a greater stake in its operations. The most effective way to make suggestion involvement take root is to look for ways to institutionalize workforce feedback; conduct intensive supervisory training around listening, facilitating, mentoring, and coaching skills; and convey the message at every opportunity that opinions at all levels matter.

Job Involvement: Job involvement refers to systems that give workers a degree of autonomy over immediate day-to-day working conditions. Quality circles and total quality management are

examples of job-involvement approaches, provided that employees have direct implementation authority. Job involvement has been shown to produce benefits similar to other types of involvement, but temporary involvement tends not to sustain these benefits.¹³

Job involvement is most appropriate at the unit level. Here, line employees can be brought into routine decision making concerning equipment, training, problem solving, process improvement, service delivery, and even unit-level strategic planning. For example, this type of involvement was recently implemented within the Broken Arrow Police Traffic Unit. Officers in the unit were empowered to develop a long-term strategic plan for addressing community traffic concerns, as well as overall unit development. Traffic supervisors and patrol watch commanders played a role in the process, but the dialogue and decision making was driven by traffic line officers. Ultimately, the plan defined unit working hours, deployment strategies, training and equipment needs, staffing, and a long-range vision for the unit.

Like suggestion systems, job-involvement strategies are relatively low-risk ventures. Generally, the level of empowerment is limited by boundaries set by management. The administration may determine the ground rules up front depending on what sort of decisions and authority it feels comfortable with delegating to these semi autonomous work groups. Yet the process offers significant benefits.

When employees are allowed to practice job involvement they assume a level of control over local working conditions that directly affect them. This, in turn, engenders a level of ownership that results in greater motivation, communication, and innovation. Problem solving and process improvement at the point of service delivery becomes more efficient because those doing the work are empowered to make timely adjustments. In addition, regular process improvement meetings help employees see how their local conditions and decisions impact other units. Higher managements function shifts to coordination, facilitation, and boundary management.

High Involvement: The most advanced, and perhaps riskiest, form of shared leadership is high involvement. This form encompasses both suggestion and job involvement and adds a significant management function. High involvement entails power and information sharing, advanced human resource development practices, and frequently incorporates task-force or policy groups to make strategic company decisions. But high-involvement organizations are uncommon. Previous studies have found that although nearly 80 percent of the Fortune 1000 companies used employee involvement in some form, only a fraction of these practices would constitute high-involvement strategies.¹⁴ The upside of high involvement is that it has the potential to yield the most dramatic workforce benefits: greater employee commitment, positive organizational citizenship behavior, better perceived organizational support, increased productivity, higher job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism, better labor-management relations, and improved overall organizational performance.¹⁵

The Broken Arrow Police Departments Leadership Team is a high-involvement structure because it operates at the policy level.¹⁶ This cross-functional policy group, whose 12 members serve irrespective of rank, makes binding decisions on a wide array of organizational issues. The leadership team format is an example of representative shared leadership in that its members are elected by peers, appointed by the chief, or appointed by the police union (the Fraternal Order of

Police) to act as representatives for their coworkers. As much as possible, these team members represent the diverse divisions, units, and functions in the department. Team members have equal voting rights, and decisions require a two-thirds majority. The teams co-chairmen, one representing the administration and the other the union, act primarily as facilitators for the group. Embedded in department policy, the leadership teams bylaws empower it as an independent body with authority to effect change and make binding decisions on policy issues, working conditions, and strategic matters.

High-involvement strategies, such as the BAPD Leadership Team, can be somewhat tenuous propositions in that power is shared at the highest levels of the organization. Under the BAPD model, the primary administrative safety valve is the chiefs control of the teams agenda. Under this arrangement, the chief must decide at the outset whether an issue is appropriate for consideration by the team. In situations where decisions properly should be made at other levels of the organization, issues are redirected accordingly. There are also stipulations: the team may not take on specific personnel issues, render decisions that violate legal or contractual provisions, or unduly expose the agency to civil liability.

The theory of high-involvement shared leadership generally posits that delegation of significant power elicits a reciprocity response, whereby employees perceive this power-sharing as an expression of administrative trust and, in turn, develop more intense feelings of commitment to the agency, ultimately exerting greater effort on its behalf.¹⁷ In a sense, employees come to view themselves as owners in the organizational endeavor.

Shared Leadership: What Do Chiefs Think?

In order for shared leadership to be a viable concept for law enforcement, police chiefs must be willing to seriously consider it. What do chiefs think about the idea of suggestion involvement, job involvement, or high involvement of police employees in decision making?

Seeking an answer, the authors polled a group of police chiefs during a recent conference in Oklahoma. During the conference, the authors presented a workshop on shared leadership to a group of senior Oklahoma law enforcement executives. They explained the theory of shared leadership and described the outcomes of the Broken Arrow Police Department case study. In addition, a group of BAPD employees participated in a panel discussion. At several points during the workshop, attendees were asked to fill out a questionnaire concerning their understanding of the concepts, their opinions concerning the applicability of shared leadership to law enforcement, and their reactions to the training. Fifty of them completed a questionnaire before, during, and after the workshop.

Respondent Demographics: The average age of the respondents was 47 years, 94 percent were male, 54 percent had at least a bachelor's degree, and 70 percent were chief executives of their agencies. Most (55 per cent) had been in their position for at least two years, and 68 percent had been in law enforcement for at least 20 years. Seventy-four percent worked for municipal agencies, 16 percent for tribal police departments, six percent for campus agencies, and four percent for state agencies. Like American law enforcement executives in general, most came from smaller agencies; 70 percent represented agencies that employed 50 officers or fewer, and

74 percent came from jurisdictions of fewer than 50,000 residents, including nearly one-third who policed jurisdictions of fewer than 10,000 people.

Due to the purported link between community policing and the imperative for line officer empowerment, the respondents were asked about their agencies community policing practices. The participants were also asked about overall morale in their departments, relations with their labor unions, and the number of labor grievances filed in the last three years.

Fifty-three percent of the respondents indicated their agencies actively practiced community policing. Nearly half (44 percent) described morale in their organizations as "poor" or "average." The mean number of labor grievances for the sample was 3.2, and nearly one-third (29 percent) reported relations with their unions to be "poor" or "average."

Poll Results: At the start of the work shop, more than half of the participants (54 percent) described their understanding of shared leadership, participative management, or employee empowerment as "poor" or "average." At or the midway point of the presentation and after receiving the theoretical foundation underlying shared leadership, 86 percent of respondents agreed that employee involvement and empowerment were viable concepts for law enforcement agencies. Interestingly, 50 percent of the group claimed to already use some aspects of shared leadership in their agencies. At the conclusion of the presentation, which included details of the BAPD case study and a panel discussion with employees, the proportion of participants that favorably assessed shared leadership rose to 96 percent.

Although most of the chiefs agreed on the efficacy of shared leadership for law enforcement, they varied considerably on the appropriate level of employee involvement. One quarter (24 percent) of the workshop participants felt that high involvement of employees at the policy level was a good idea, 40 percent saw job involvement as the appropriate model of participation, and 32 percent thought suggestion involvement was the best approach. The remaining four percent favored traditional management. Perhaps paradoxically, more than half of the group (54 percent) also worried that shared leadership may be a possible erosion of management rights.

Some interesting correlations were revealed during the statistical analysis. The age of the respondent was negatively correlated with assessment of the viability of the concept; that is, older respondents tended to be more reserved in their reaction to the idea of police officer empowerment. On the other hand, education was positively associated: the more education the respondent had, the more positive his or her assessment of shared leadership. This finding concerning the correlation between age, education, and shared leadership is in line with previous research in other occupations.¹⁸ Similarly, younger respondents with higher educational attainment tended to feel less threatened by line officer empowerment as an "erosion of management rights."

There was also a strong direct correlation between opinions about community policing and shared leadership. Those who favored and practiced community policing were more likely to strongly approve of participative management styles, particularly high involvement.

Hierarchical regression analysis also uncovered significant relationships between community-oriented policing, shared leadership, and officer morale. Respondents who reported that their departments practice community-oriented policing but do not use any form of shared leadership also tended to report lower morale among their officers. In other words, implementing community policing without empowering officers is associated with lower morale. Similarly, respondents who reported that their agencies did use some form of shared leadership but did not actively practice community policing also indicated lower officer morale. The implication appears to be that empowerment in police work seems to work best when it is paired with community-oriented policing, and vice versa.

To summarize, a representative group of Oklahoma chiefs overwhelmingly approved of shared leadership and saw it as a viable approach to administering law enforcement agencies. In fact, half claimed to practice some aspect of shared leadership already.

Nearly one quarter of these chiefs were ready to experiment with high-involvement practices, and most were willing to offer their employees individual- or unit-level empowerment. This was somewhat unexpected, in that the conventional wisdom suggests that, as a rule, police chiefs are traditional, protective of their authority, control-oriented, and distrustful of line officer autonomy. Police chiefs, at least in Oklahoma, appear receptive to the idea of shared leadership in its various forms at the same time that they remain protective of their management rights.



The Chief's Role

There may be a tendency to view power-sharing management styles as an abdication of leadership. To the contrary, shared leadership in any form calls for what Manz and Sims have called "superleadership."¹⁹ The authors assert that shared leadership systems require the vertical leader to

be some body who leads followers to lead themselves through empowerment and the development of self-leadership skills. Cultivating self-leadership in followers requires conscious attention to human resource development, careful management of internal and external organizational boundaries, appropriate delegation of authority, and continual support and trust building. Beyond cultivating self-leadership in subordinates, leaders in empowered cultures must practice transformational behaviors that mold organizational values and provide an energizing vision of the future.

Participative management seems to work best when driven by transformational leadership styles. The transformational leader has the capacity to articulate a mission that calls for organizational movement and is able to enlist follower support through charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.²⁰ Such leaders set the playing field and become the torch bearers for the shared vision and values that define the organization. By setting high expectations and continually articulating those standards, transformational leaders are able to energize followers in an endeavor greater than themselves and in the process help them to develop self-leadership.

This is an ideal role for police chiefs in a shared leadership system. Once self-leadership has taken root, the chief executive becomes a facilitator and supporter of the process. This role calls for posing questions more than offering answers, listening more than telling, and supporting more than directing. What's more, since routine decision making has been delegated to empowered subordinates, the vertical leader is less distracted and has more time to scan the environment for emerging threats and opportunities.

Shared leadership, especially of the high involvement variety, is really a balance of power. For instance, in the case of the Broken Arrow leadership team, significant power is held by the police union, as well as management and peer-elected representatives of the rank and file. But the balance is tipped slightly in favor of the administration due to the chief's control of the leadership team's agenda. This represents what Edwin Locke calls an "integrated system," in that each sphere of power balances and supports the others, while certain prerogatives remain the exclusive domain of vertical leadership.²¹ This is as it should be, given that a chief must be attentive to community and administrative expectations. A chief's perspective is unique, holistic, and vital, an aspect of leadership that cannot be shared.

21st-Century Leadership

In order to stay relevant, modern law enforcement will have to become more adaptive. In an increasingly complex environment, it is frequently the case that no single person, or even senior management group, has all the information or expertise necessary to respond in an appropriate and timely way, let alone an innovative way.²² Ongoing expectations for community engagement, counterterrorism responsibilities, generational and cultural differences, police unionism, technological innovation, workforce retention, and perpetual change are multifaceted challenges that continue to pressure police organizations. Shared leadership cuts across all these issues by seeking to engage a highly sophisticated workforce in empowered problem solving.

To the degree that the data reported here is representative of the larger law enforcement audience, police chiefs already seem to realize this and are ready to involve their employees in meeting these challenges. But it is equally apparent that the profession may require additional grounding in the concepts behind empowerment, as well as practical implementation models. Although the level of employee engagement in organizational decision making may vary according to agency and situational needs, there is little doubt that the face of police leadership is indeed changing.

If in the past our ideas about leadership tended to revolve around the solitary heroic figure, the leadership of our future will be defined by inspired teamwork. Leaders will oversee organizations that are flatter, with fewer levels of management and fewer clear distinctions between them. As the lines of demarcation between leader and follower continue to blur, empowering strategies and inclusive decision-making styles will not just be recommended management practices; they will be essential competencies of police leadership