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Hammer Spur Impressions Physical Evidence in Suicides

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A hammer spur impression can prove to be an important piece of physical evidence in suicide investigations. See article p. 11.

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Community Sensing Mechanisms

A Police Priorities Study

"... the Edmonton Police Department ... conducted a survey ... to determine business community perceptions of current police services, personal safety and security, police priorities, and future programs. ..."

By

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Contemporary theoretical literature makes the distinction between "open" and "closed" organizations, the main difference being the impact of environmental constraints and circumstances on organizational functioning. Increasingly, organizations are viewed as open social systems existing and conducting transactions within a larger environment.¹ Thus, while some organizations continue primarily to be reactive to their environments, many are proactive, using an array of sensing mechanisms to determine the state of their environment.² This article, however, goes beyond a process simply to evaluate current services; rather, it describes a

methodology to establish program priorities and to identify future programs and services. This is important for police managers as a guide for program development, priorities setting, and resource allocation.

Methodology

Recognizing the importance of monitoring the environment within which it operates, the Edmonton Police Department, in conjunction with the chamber of commerce, conducted a survey in 1985 to determine business community perceptions of current police services, personal safety and security, police priorities, and future

programs to better serve the business community. The study was undertaken in two phases. Phase I consisted of informal interviews from a cross-section of the business community in order to identify important police issues and related themes. Phase II of the study was the development, distribution, and analysis of a questionnaire derived from variables identified in phase I. After undergoing various revisions, a pretest of the survey was carried out with a small sample of chamber of commerce members to determine questionnaire validity and reliability.

Distribution of the survey to 3,362 chamber of commerce members began



Mr. Brown



Leroy Chahley
Chief of Police

in April 1985, with a telephone followup to increase the response rate commencing in early May. Returned surveys were categorized by date received, and a response rate was calculated. Survey data coding and entry was a continual process until the survey cutoff date in early July; the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-X) at the University of Alberta was used for statistical analysis. The final report was released in September 1985, at a joint police department-chamber of commerce news conference. Subsequently, study results were tabled with the police commission for consideration in 1986 priority setting exercises.

Results

Overall response rate for the survey was 27.3 percent, that is, 918 of the total 3,362 chamber of commerce membership completed the questionnaire. The largest group of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 49 (63.4%), were male (84.5%), had post graduate or professional degrees (22.1%), represented the service sector (32.8%), conducted their business from

a single shop/business premise (34.3%), indicated corporate annual gross sales as \$3 million plus (42.2%), and employed 10 to 19 persons (15.8%). Because of the 27.3 percent response rate, it was essential to ensure the sample was representative of the community in order to extrapolate and attribute sample results to the chamber membership at large.

Table 1 shows a fairly close relationship by business sector between the percentage of respondents in the survey sample who completed the questionnaire and total chamber of commerce membership. One can conclude, therefore, that the sample is representative of the business community as a whole.

Evaluation of Police Services

This section of the questionnaire consisted of four questions and several subquestions about first-line response services, such as time taken to answer the telephone, respond to the calls, and investigate the situation. Contrary to what one might believe, the business community does not appear to place a

Table 1
Comparison of percentage distributions
between chamber of commerce and survey sample

SECTOR	CHAMBER MEMBERSHIP%	SURVEY SAMPLE%
1. Retail	10.2	10.9
2. Wholesale	4.7	8.1
3. Manufacturing	14.2	10.9
4. Service	43.1	32.8
5. Distribution	4.7	5.1
6. Professional	13.3	20.2
7. Other	9.9	12.0

"An important component of the evaluation was to determine business persons' perceptions of personal safety and security. . . ."

Table 2
Perceptions of personal safety
and security by time and location

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION	TIME OF DAY	
	7:00 A.M.- 6:00 P.M.	6:00 P.M. - 7:00 A.M.
Jasper Avenue	76% secure	29% secure
Parkades	As many insecure as secure	13% secure
Shopping center lots	69% secure	As many insecure as secure
Shopping centers	83% secure	68%
Business premises	84% secure	67%
Residence	84% secure	77%
Neighborhood	80% secure	64%
Public parks	60% secure	20%

heavy demand on police services. In the 3 months prior to receiving the questionnaire, 78.7 percent had not requested police assistance at their place of business on business-related matters; similarly, 75.6 percent of business respondents had not had dealings with the police in the previous 3 months on matters of a personal nature. Of those who had requested police assistance at their place of business on business-related matters, 64.3 percent indicated their request was routine. A high percentage of respondents were satisfied with telephone response time, patrol unit response time, and quality of on-scene investigations. The majority of respondents described the police officer's attitude as pleasant, with the impression of the department unchanged as a result of the service provided or citizen-police contact. Ninety-five percent of respondents indicated they would request police assistance again under similar circumstances.

Evaluation of Preventive Programs

Questions in this portion of the questionnaire focused on structured programs delivered to the business community on a nonresponse or preventive basis. A major consideration was the level of business community awareness of business-related programs, such as Merchant Crime Alert, Cooperative Policing Program, and others. Unfortunately, the largest percentage of business respondents (53.5%) were only "somewhat" conversant with business-related police programs. Only 2.2 percent were completely conversant, while 6.4 percent indicated they were conversant a great deal.

In addition, business respondents were asked whether they believed in the value of foot patrols and whether they were visible. Overwhelmingly, respondents (98%) believed in downtown foot patrols, with downtown respondents showing the strongest belief. Gen-

erally, downtown foot patrols were not thought to be visible; 375 respondents (45.8%), the largest percentage, indicated downtown foot patrols were only somewhat visible and 12.7 percent stated they were not at all visible.

Perceptions of Personal Safety and Security

An important component of the evaluation was to determine business persons' perceptions of personal safety and security in various commercial and residential locations by time of day. This was seen as being important in that it was a direct reflection of the public's willingness to shop or conduct business in various areas and important information for police intervention strategies and tactics. Specific locations were identified; these included the main downtown shopping corridor (Jasper Avenue), parkades, shopping center lots, one's place of business, one's residence, neighborhood, and public parks.

"A major function of a police priorities study is to obtain feedback. . . ."

Table 3
Summary of responses regarding police programs

PROGRAM	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS				VALUE	RANK
	VERY IMPORTANT 4	MODERATELY IMPORTANT 3	SLIGHTLY IMPORTANT 2	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT 1		
Response To Calls For Service	816	68	12	1	3,493	1
Random Patrols Through Warehouse/Business Areas During Nonbusiness Periods	500	325	59	12	3,105	2
General Patrol Activities	385	436	68	4	2,988	3
Merchant Crime Alert	387	347	101	29	2,820	4
Alarms Monitoring Program	393	308	123	47	2,789	5
Foot Patrols	327	379	132	54	2,763	6
Traffic Control	236	413	195	47	2,620	7
Reportable Vehicle Collision Investigations	224	425	197	45	2,610	8
Cooperative Policing Program	275	387	138	28	2,565	9
Traffic Enforcement	99	335	323	141	2,188	10
Pedestrian Control	99	234	379	179	2,035	11
Active Suppression of Street Prostitutes in the 104/105 St. Area	160	182	300	244	2,030	12
Active Suppression of Street Prostitutes in the 96 St. Area	139	160	330	259	1,955	13

Table 2 clearly demonstrates specific areas where perceptions of personal safety and security are very low, notably, the main downtown shopping corridor (Jasper Avenue) at night, parkades at all times, shopping center lots at night, and public parks at night. It is interesting to note that the percentage (64%) of the business respondents who felt secure in their neighborhoods at night compares favorably with the 60-percent figure generated by the Federal Solicitor General (1982) Victimization

Study. Both figures, however, are at variance with the Edmonton Area Study (1984); in this annual survey, 80 percent of the respondents indicated they felt secure in their own neighborhoods after dark.

Police Priorities

A major function of a police priorities study is to obtain feedback from various stakeholders or constituents about the relative importance of various

programs offered by a police agency. Table 3 illustrates the types of business programs offered and the degree of importance of each.

The results show that response to calls for service is ranked as the most important police program, followed in descending order by random patrols through warehouse/business areas during nonbusiness periods, general patrol activities, and merchant crime alert. The least important police program for the business community at

large is active suppression of street prostitution in two stroll areas of the city; however, a secondary analysis reveals that 77.6 percent of downtown business persons rate suppression of prostitution as being important.

Respondents were also asked whether there were services or programs being provided by the department that ought to be discontinued or transferred to private security agencies; 86.7 percent answered "no" to the question of discontinuing services or programs, while 79 percent answered "no" to the question of transferring services or functions. Of the 13.3 percent (105 respondents) who thought services ought to be discontinued, radar enforcement drew the largest response. Again, a small minority (20 respondents) argued against active suppression of street prostitution. (See table 4.)

Similarly, of the 20.7 percent (160 respondents) who thought services ought to be transferred, traffic enforcement (radar) again was the most important issue, followed in descending order by the alarms monitoring program, traffic control, and reportable vehicle collisions and random patrols through warehouse/business areas. Table 5 shows the complete list of programs or services to be transferred.

Future Programs or Services

The purpose of the last portion of the survey was to identify new programs or services business persons thought were important. This was done by incorporating key themes and issues from the interview process in the questionnaire. The analysis is interesting in that there is slight agreement, but a wide variety of opinion, on new program development. These results provide the

department with direction, but not necessarily strong support for such new programs or services as executive security programs, resource for computer security, prosecution for computer security abuses, business security training, and consultation internal theft investigations.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article describes in some detail a cost-effective sensing mechanism to provide municipal police managers with current information on quality and delivery of current programs, priorities assessment, and identification of future programs and services. It provides long-term direction to police managers in the establishment of or ranking of program priorities and the proper allocation of police resources.

The obvious question is whether such an exercise has cost benefits. It

Table 4
Programs to be discontinued

PROGRAM	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RANK
Traffic Enforcement (radar)	55	1
Active Suppression of Street Prostitutes in the 96 St. Area	20	2
Active Suppression of Street Prostitutes in the 104/105 St. Area	20	2
Reportable Vehicle Collision Investigations	13	3
Pedestrian Control	11	4
Alarms Monitoring Program	9	5
Traffic Control	4	6
Merchant Crime Alert	2	7
Response to Calls for Service	2	7
General Patrol Activities	2	7
Foot Patrols	1	8
Total Responses	139	

"... a cost-effective sensing mechanism [can] provide municipal managers with current information on quality and delivery of current programs, priorities assessment, and identification of future programs and services."

Table 5
Services to be transferred

PROGRAM	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RANK
Traffic Enforcement (radar)	43	1
Alarms Monitoring Program	40	2
Traffic Control	36	3
Reportable Vehicle Collision Investigations	27	4
Random Patrols Through Warehouse/Business Areas During Nonbusiness Periods	27	4
Pedestrian Control	23	5
Merchant Crime Alert	7	6
Response to Calls for Service	4	7
General Patrol Activities	4	7
Foot Patrols	3	8
Cooperative Policing Program	1	9
Active Suppression of Street Prostitutes in the 96 St. Area	1	9
Active Suppression of Street Prostitutes in the 104/105 St. Area	1	9
Total Responses	217	

has been argued that the methodology provides a valuable source of information for management and operations decisionmaking, that is, the establishment of correct program priorities and proper allocation of resources.

What do the results of the survey show? First, preventive programs delivery to the business community has produced only a "somewhat conversant" result. Why is the preventive business program not reaching business persons? Are there too few resources being expended? Is the program really essential? Is there a problem with delivery? Should more resources be allocated? Should the program be

discontinued? These are the types of policy issues arising from this type of survey which goes beyond a simple evaluation of current services. In a similar way, the methodology has raised policy questions about beat programs (strong belief in, yet low visibility of, in downtown area), active suppression of street prostitution (lack of support generally yet very important program for downtown business persons, hence suppression activities remain at constant level), impetus for police department input in creation of defensible space through environmental design (important as results indicate for parkades and shopping center parking lots), radar enforcement (the judicious

use of radar to focus on specific traffic problems rather than a "duck pond" approach perceived primarily to be a civic revenue generator), and finally, creation of new programs and services (in this case, there is direction but not strong support from the business community for specific new programs and services).

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Footnotes

¹D. Katz and R.L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (New York: Wiley and Sons, Inc.), 1966.

²W. J. Brown and L.K. Ng, "Operation Citizen Participation," *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, vol. 11, No. 2, 1983; T.H. Plister and J.C. McDavid, "Victim's Evaluations of Police Performance," *Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 6, 1978, pp. 133-149; F.F. Fustenberg and C.F. Wellford, "Calling the Police: The Evaluation of Police Service," *Law & Society Review*, vol. 7, 1973, pp. 393-406.