Measuring, Managing, and Enhancing Procedural Justice in Policing: Promise and Pitfalls

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Questions

• If measures of procedural justice in police-citizen encounters are incorporated into management accountability systems, what will managers do with the information?
  – Does performance in procedural justice terms improve?

• Are survey-based measures valid reflections of officers’ behavior?
Research Sites

• Syracuse, NY
  – City of 145,000
  – Department of approximately 450 sworn
  – No extraordinary history or climate of misconduct or police-community tension

• Schenectady, NY
  – City of 66,000
  – Department of approximately 160 sworn
  – Subject of DOJ pattern-or-practice investigation 2001-2012
    • Mayor publicly discussed disbanding agency in 2009
Methods

• Police Services Survey
  – People with police contact through calls for service, stops, or arrest
  – 100 per city per month over 18 months
  – Summarized at monthly Compstat meetings

• Patrol Interviews
  – Officers and supervisors at 2 points in time

• “Armchair” Observation
  – SSO of police-citizen encounters based on video & audio recordings in Schenectady
Citizens’ Judgments

• The police …
  – treated me with dignity and respect
  – considered my views
  – tried hard to do the right thing
  – made their decision based on facts
  – respected my rights
  – paid attention to what I had to say
  – explained their actions
  – were very/somewhat [un]fair
  – were very/somewhat [im]polite
Examples of Monthly Feedback

Satisfaction with Treatment by Police

Police Considered My Views

Satisfaction with Treatment by Police

Police Made Their Decision Based on Facts
The Management Continuum

**Intermittent attention**
- Occasional mention at roll call - the *what* but not *why*
  - “Watch your tone out there”
  - “Try” to think about customer service “if possible”
  - “Don’t swear if you don’t have to”

**No attention/resistance**
- No mention made to subordinate officers
- Supervisors undermined command staff expectations
  - “Officer safety is the goal, not customer service”

**Regular attention/support**
- Regular emphasis at roll call - the *what* and *why*
  - “Don’t use jargon, explain what you are doing. It makes people feel better which makes your job easier.”
- Shared monthly Compstat presentations
- Supervisors responded to calls and gave feedback on quality of the interaction/completed Service Quality Control Reports
Subjective Procedural Justice over Time

Syracuse
Overt Procedural Justice

Procedural Justice

- Very high: 41.5
- High: 35.5
- Moderate: 14.5
- Low: 8.5
- None: 3.1

Procedural Injustice

- High: 56.5
- Moderate: 30
- Low: 10.5
- None: 3.1
Overt Procedural (In)Justice over Time
Changes in Overt Procedural Justice

Platoon 1
Platoon 2
Platoon 3

Pre-feedback | Post-feedback

Bar graph showing changes in overt procedural justice for three platoons before and after feedback.
Conclusions

• In organizations like police departments, what gets measured may not get managed
  – Structures – such as Compstat – may be loosely coupled with practice
  – Process-based policing is subject to interpretation by officers & supervisors

• Needle of public trust is difficult to move
  – Baseline levels of subjective and overt procedural justice are high
  – Citizens’ judgments are not strongly affected by officers’ behavior