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Achieving Desired Outcomes in Policing

**An Examination of Performance Measurement
Techniques for the Halifax Regional Police**

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December 5th, 2013
PUAD 6400
Local Government
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Introduction

Police play an important role in our society. It is almost impossible to quantify police responsibilities, but the more prominent ones include protecting citizens, enhancing perceptions of public safety, facilitating community development, and ensuring those who break the law are held accountable for their actions. While these responsibilities seem straightforward, the reality is that they could not be more complex. Police work is inherently nuanced and it is not always clear when desired outcomes are achieved.

Measuring performance is difficult in this environment. However, the fact that police departments have large budgets, and are accountable to many groups and institutions, necessitates the development of comprehensive and effective performance measurement strategies. The Chief of the Halifax Regional Police (HRP) has made it clear that his department is committed to continuously improving its performance measurement systems. This study will provide HRP with the information it needs to make effective performance management and strategic planning decisions in the future.

Methodology

This study will have two primary components. The first will be a high level jurisdictional scan and literature review. This will provide an extensive review of existing literature on performance management systems as they are applied to police, both in Canada and abroad. The concept of performance management will be outlined, unique challenges faced by police forces will be explained, and existing domestic and international best practices will be identified.

The literature review will be followed by a comparative analysis of HRP's current performance measurement system. HRP's current performance measurement techniques will be compared with best practices from larger Canadian police departments and the recommendations

put forth in a 2013 report on police performance metrics by the Compliance Strategy Group. The information from these two sections will lead into concluding remarks and provide the basis for some general recommendations for HRP going forward.

It should also be noted that the authors of this study participated in a 12-hour ride along with members of the HRP. This experience was not incorporated into the specific content of the study, but it added perspective to the entire research process and reinforced the significance of our findings.

Jurisdictional Scan & Literature Review

Performance Measurement

Performance measurement is broadly defined in the literature as a process which, “provides the basis for an organization to assess how well it is progressing toward its planned and targeted objectives, helps to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, and facilitate future initiatives aimed at improving organizational performance” (Yasin & Gomes, 2010. p.214). From a public sector perspective, performance measurement is seen to have emerged from the New Public Management movement in the United Kingdom in the 1970’s, which saw a greater emphasis placed on improving the performance of public services for the value of money involved (Barton & Barton, 2011). This change in public process is usually recommended to involve a shift from public to business-oriented practices, where efficiency targets known as key performance indicators (KPIs) are set, coordinated, and tracked with local authorities (Drake & Simper, 2004). KPIs allow for clearly identified and articulated strategic targets and goals to be set, with measurable outputs related to specific outcomes, be they quantitatively (financial indicators, ratios), or qualitatively (perceptions/values) measured (Hoque et al., 2004).

Performance measurement has been called “the lifeblood of accountability” (Hoque, 2008. p.469), since it encourages multi-dimensional performance measures in the management of public entities, and is able to tie both qualitative and quantitative targets and results into a framework of financial performance. Setting effective goals, and determining useful KPIs to measure their progress is not a simple process however, which brings us to police adoption of performance measurement.

Performance Measurement Use by Police

Implementing effective performance measurement systems in police services has proven to be quite difficult for a number of reasons. First and foremost is the difficulty in selecting effective KPIs to measure performance. Performance measurement needs to be balanced, taking a full account of organizations complex duties, which has caused some authors to note the express difficulties in implementing this process in public service operational environments (Yasin & Gomes, 2010). With police, the first instinct is to simply measure crime statistics. This is done widely and poses a number of problems. Firstly it has been noted that variability of crime reporting, and police discretion in how crime is recorded mean that crime statistics are not an effective proxy for police performance, to say nothing of the fact that the overall volume of crime is influenced by much wider social and economic factors (Barton & Beynon, 2011). Furthermore, research to date indicates that there is an insufficient understanding of the cause and effect relationships between police interventions and their outcomes, which means that selection of inaccurate KPIs can contribute to dysfunctional procedures that do not address systemic causes of crime (Collier, 2006).

Notwithstanding the difficulties in using crime statistics as an effective reflection of police performance, the diversity of roles that the police fulfill mean that crime statistics cannot

be used as the exclusive measure of police performance, especially since such a large majority of police time is spent “providing quality of life, public perception, and non-emergency services” (Collier, 2006. p.166). KPIs need to take these areas of performance into account as well.

Another challenge faced by police services in implementing effective performance measurement is accountability. Regulatory requirements at the provincial level in Canada, for example the 2007 New Police Act in Nova Scotia that defines requirements for self-audits by police services (Cukier et al., 2012), mean that police services’ performance can be held accountable to their provincial or municipal masters. The literature has noted both in Canada and abroad however that performance measures are both used and influenced by a large number of parties to which police are also held accountable. Hoque (2008) notes that an annual performance report’s official purpose may be to hold police commissioners in the UK accountable to the relevant minister, but they are also reviewed by police force members, government officials, and the general public, who indirectly fund their operations.

Not unlike Canada, police forces in England and Wales are officially accountable not only to a senior minister, but also to police authorities made up of citizens, who ensure efficient and effective operation, and accountability to citizens (Jones & van Sluis, 2009). This is to say nothing of the various other stakeholders to which police forces in Canada, the UK, Australia and elsewhere are also accountable, including national police forces, unions, communities, legislators, and the media (Hoque et al., 2004). Such a wide number of stakeholders and their conflicting political agendas can make establishing effective and consistent targets and measurements a challenge (Yasin & Gomes, 2010).

It is interesting to note that despite the centralized political origin of the calls for public sector organizations to adopt business practices in measuring their performance to improve

accountability, this has over time, resulted in a more decentralized, and professional police forces with greater discretion over their strategic directions. In a study of English, Welsh, Dutch and German police forces, van Sluis et al. (2009), noted a trend in the reduced political control over police forces, which they attribute to greater professionalism. In the Netherlands specifically this has been observed to contribute to an improved balance between the national steering function setting *direction*, and the local *discretionary* steering functions (Cachet & Marks, 2009). These increases to professionalism and local autonomy in recent years have allowed for police forces to embrace more horizontal forms of governance, and strengthen ties with local communities (Terpstra, 2011). This sets the stage well to examine best practices in performance measurement adopted in Canada and abroad.

Best Practices

A recent study examining Canadian efforts to implement quality assurance and performance measurement in Canadian municipal, provincial, and federal law enforcement agencies noted that while there is virtually no published research to date examining the use of these tools, a large body of literature is available from the agencies themselves (Cukier et al., 2012), which will be examined in greater depth in the next section of this paper. The key to these processes in a police context is “the activity of providing, to all concerned, the evidence needed to establish confidence that the quality function is performed adequately” (Cukier et al., 2012. p.296). This is consistent with analysis by Hoque et al. (2004), who contend that external legitimacy is the integral component of organizational survival, resulting in the implementation of new controls, tools, and techniques to secure their futures.

Although performance measurement was found to be widely used in Canada, a lack of collaboration has meant that performance measures of municipal forces have evolved similarly to

quality measures of other municipal activities, and vast inconsistencies exist between municipal forces, in addition to larger federal and provincial services (Cukier et al., 2012). This has prevented widely adopted best practices from being established, and inhibits inter-force comparison and benchmarking, which is seen widely outside Canada as being very important.

The most advanced and coordinated examples of performance measurement initiatives studied widely in the literature are found in Australia and Europe, with particular focus placed on English and Welsh police services. In the UK, instead of simply measuring crime statistics, ‘sanction detections levels’ are measured across six criteria of offences (violence against the person, sexual offences, burglary, fraud and forgery etc), which measure the amount of crime detected by police, as well as charges or penalties laid (Barton & Beynon, 2011). Based on a combination of both qualitative and quantitative performance data, forces are measured along seven performance areas: reducing crime; investigating crime; promoting safety; providing assistance; citizen focus; resource use; and local policing. These promote a focus on end results delivered or outcomes, rather than outputs, and are subjected to two assessments. First, performance is compared with the same police force’s performance over the past year to determine improvement or decline in the quality of each area, which allows for benchmarking. Second, and perhaps more significantly, performance is compared over the past year to a group of ‘most similar forces’ (MSFs). Where before forces were measured and compared across national force rankings, MSFs are seen to provide a more fair and accurate reflection of performance, by taking regional differences in geography, demographics, and municipality size into account (Barton & Barton, 2011).

By and large, Canadian police are not measuring their performance against one another. The exception to this is the Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative (MPMP), where both

qualitative and quantitative KPIs are measured and compared by eight participating municipalities of varying size (Cukier et al., 2012). The advantages to MSF and MPMP comparisons in the UK and Ontario, is that where high performance levels on key indicators are identified, strategic initiatives to share best practices allow for collaborative tested solutions for targeted improvement, rather than expensive innovative ones.

Issues that have arisen, especially in larger forces in Canada and abroad have in some cases surrounded acceptance and engagement of new organizational cultures resulting from performance measurement strategies. The RCMP for example, in attempting to widely implement what they call Human Performance Technology, found that while these new methods were well accepted by frontline officers, senior and management ranks were less accepting (Pullen & Gallant, 2009). Strong human resource management engaging all levels through empowerment and understanding is necessary for any measure of success in implementing these types of programs, since they require widespread understanding and acceptance (Barton & Barton, 2011).

The final challenges in performance measurement have to do with selection of KPIs. As mentioned above, external legitimacy is crucial. If inaccurate measures are selected, police focus can shift to simple rituals of legitimization in order to present themselves in the best possible light (Collier, 2006). Another challenge is that some KPIs selected for measure will inevitably also be influenced by a range of other bodies, such as private, volunteer and other emergency services (Jones & van Sluis, 2009). Newsome (2007) also recognizes this, providing the example of selecting number of fatal traffic accidents as a KPI. Highway authorities, police, the justice system, health authorities, vehicle manufacturers and government education campaigns can all influence this KPI. Therefore, Newsome suggests targeting joint responsibility areas

cooperatively to improve desired outcomes, improving community cooperation and engagement. It is noted in the literature however that performance measurement will only ever be capable of measuring those activities and indicators of police that can be measured, and will never encompass all of their shared responsibilities (Jones & van Sluis, 2009), indicating that the number of KPIs measured across MSF should be effective and limited in number.

As strategies and priorities continue to change, definitions and outcomes can and should change as well to reflect these changes (Hoque, 2008), but some consistency needs to be applied if benchmarking performance is to function effectively (Collier, 2006).

Comparative Analysis

Critical analysis of Halifax Regional Police's performance measurement

Performance measurement amongst Canadian police departments varies in terms of the data collected and the terminology used. This is due to the fact that there are no legislative requirements in Canada that control or dictate the use of specific performance measures or standards in policing (CSG, 2013). Despite an inconsistency in performance measurement approaches, Canada's largest police departments have developed what can be described as a set of best practices. These practices are consistent with the performance measurement recommendations outlined by the Compliance Strategy Group in a 2013 report to the Law Enforcement and Policing Branch of Public Safety Canada. This section will compare Halifax Regional Police's current performance measurement techniques with best practices from other jurisdictions and the Compliance Strategy Group's recommendations. Doing so will provide HRP with information that will help them in their future decision-making.

Compliance Strategy Group's 2013 Report

In 2013 the Compliance Strategy Group published a report entitled “Canadian Police Board Views on the Use of Police Performance Metrics.” The report emphasized that the most innovative police services have begun to adopt new management strategies that use performance indicators to rethink what services are of highest priority, generate improved outcomes, and best control service delivery costs (CSG, 2013). The report claims that the best police boards use a balanced approach to performance measurement and organize their performance metrics along at least seven dimensions: reducing criminal victimization; calling adult and youth offenders to account in appropriate ways; reducing fear of crime and enhancing personal security; increasing safety in public spaces; using financial resources fairly, efficiently, and effectively; use of force and authority legitimately, fairly, and effectively; and satisfying citizen demands for prompt, effective, and fair service (CSG, 2013).

HRP currently collects data that reflect five out of the seven dimensions listed above. Crime rates on persons and property reveal Halifax’s criminal victimization trends. HRP’s collection of solvency rates and citizen satisfaction information indicates sufficient attention to reducing fear of crime and enhancing personal security. Client service measures (including emergency response times) and measurements of public safety perceptions measure the degree to which citizen demand for prompt, effective, and fair service is being satisfied. Data pertaining to the number of traffic collisions demonstrates attention to increasing safety in public spaces, but current measures are not exhaustive of all public spaces. Finally, HRP’s measurement of citizens views on the quality of policing / police’s visibility and presence indicates whether the department’s force and authority is being used legitimately, fairly, and effectively (HRM, 2013/2014).

HRP does not currently collect information on whether adult and youth offenders are being appropriately held to account. Conviction rates are not present in HRP's performance measurement data. An example of such a measure might be the number of convictions per violent criminal offense (CSG, 2013). HRP also does not collect information on whether financial resources are being used fairly, efficiently, and effectively. No performance data is collected comparing budget allocations to performance. This is clear through HRP's lack of efficiency measures for crime and perceptions of public safety (HRM, 2013/2014).

HRP is ahead of many other jurisdictions in terms of using performance data to help facilitate strategic planning, especially given their relative size. According to the CSG report, most jurisdictions do not analyze their data in the pursuit of strategic goals, but rather towards achieving operational or tactical objectives (CSG, 2013). HRP has begun to set strategic goals and is collecting a lot of the right information. This is a positive trend and bodes well for the department's future performance measurement aspirations.

The Search for Best Practices: The Toronto Police Service

The Toronto Police Service (TPS) uses performance measurement as part of a comprehensive strategic plan. TPS lists many issues and desired outcomes in its annual business plan, but identifies the seven objectives that are going to be given the most attention in the coming year. These seven objectives are then assigned relevant indicators that can easily be measured through ratio performance analysis.

The TPS's use of performance measurement to test primary objectives is a best practice. Performance measurement should be focused on the most desirable outcomes in order to ensure that core objectives are being achieved. Measurement of hundreds of desired outcomes would

decrease the significance of the data collected. By focusing performance measurement, the TPS is able to provide the public and its police board with more relevant performance information.

HRP currently collects performance information related to crime levels and public perceptions of safety. While these are undoubtedly relevant, HRP's list of objectives and desired outcomes is not nearly as comprehensive as the TPS. A similar sized list may not be necessary given that Halifax is a much smaller city than Toronto. Also, HRP does not have the same human and financial resources. Nevertheless, HRP should attempt to add to its list if it wants to improve the impact and efficiency of performance measurement. Once a sufficient list is collected, HRP needs to think about which objectives are the most important. The objectives chosen should then be assigned relevant performance measures, similar to those put in place by the TPS.

The Search for Best Practices: The Vancouver Police Department

The Vancouver Police Department (VPD) is arguably the most advanced police department in Canada in terms of strategic planning and the effective use of performance measurement. The VPD has been using strategic planning as part of its operations since 2008 and currently has a plan that goes through 2016. The VPD stresses the importance of setting organizational goals and using performance measurement to track achievement: "The establishment of organizational goals is critical, and success can only be accurately determined through effective measurement. The Strategic Plan identifies a number of potential measurements that are available to quantify organizational success relative to each of the goals" (VPD, 2013). The VPD also conducts quarterly reviews of their key performance indicators. This allows them to quickly identify issues and adjust their operations accordingly. The VPD's

dedication to strategic planning and its continuous monitoring of key performance indicators can be identified among Canadian police forces as best practices.

Perhaps the VPD's most impressive performance strategy is the department's identification of 'Champions'. 'Champions' are Deputy Chiefs, Superintendents, Inspectors, and civilian Directors whose expertise is drawn upon to achieve particular goals (VPD, 2013). Each 'Champion' is assigned a goal and then tasked with forming a team of subject-matter experts within the VPD to collaboratively develop strategies for the following year (VPD, 2013). The success of the 'Champions' program has led to the implementation of a 'Champions tool,' an electronic template that facilitates the identification of strategies and the steps and measures necessary to achieve success (VPD, 2013). The 'Champions' tool is undoubtedly a best practice for improving performance in key areas. It combines the best of strategic planning, effective use of departmental resources, and performance measurement techniques.

The Benefits of Consolidating HRP's Performance Measurement Information

HRP is accountable to many groups and institutions. The department is responsible for providing these groups with performance information. This is particularly challenging because each interested party wants access to different measures. HRP should develop of a set of strategic outcomes that reflect all of their demand requirements. Doing so would allow them to compile their performance measurement information in a single report available to all viewers. Not only would this make HRP's job easier, it would provide the interested groups with performance information that they may not have considered. This might lead to unanticipated and better decisions.

Access to higher volume of more relevant performance information would especially benefit the Halifax Police Board of Commissioners. It is clear that not all of HRP's current

information is being analyzed at the Board level to help with budget allocation decisions. If HRP wants its budgeting to be based on comprehensive outcomes, its Board must look beyond the hard statistics pertaining to number of shootings, assaults, etc. The HRP board is only looking at crime rate statistics. It needs to start considering all seven dimensions if the 'balanced' approach to performance measurement is to be achieved.

HRP is more advanced than most Canadian jurisdictions when it comes to performance measurement. However, improvements can potentially be made through adherence to the 'balanced' scorecard approach recommended by the CSG and the best practices from Canada's largest police departments. These best practices include using performance measurement to test primary objectives, the development of long-term strategic plans, quarterly monitoring of key performance indicators, and the implementation of a 'Champions' program. If HRP can develop a comprehensive list of key objectives and straightforward performance measurements to test them, it can provide all interested organizations with a single data report. This would make HRP more accountable to these organizations and help them make more informed decisions in the future.

Concluding Remarks

This study has provided an overview of how performance measurement systems are used by police services to track and measure progress in setting and achieving strategic goals. The primary objective of this study was to help the Halifax Regional Police establish and refine their own performance measurement systems and address organizational challenges. Through an extensive literature review on domestic and international performance measurement systems, and a comparative analysis of best practices in large Canadian police departments, a number of themes and conclusions can be drawn.

Despite a distinct lack of collaboration between Canadian police services, a set of best practices in performance measurement have been established. Several major forces are becoming advanced in this respect and this is consistent with much of the existing literature on the subject. HRP has adopted many of these processes. As a regional municipal police force with responsibility over a large and disproportionately populated geographic area, HRP has unique financial and human resource challenges that add complexity to its performance measurement processes. HRP modelling of TPS or VPD strategies needs to be realistic and take scope and individual challenges into account. HRP needs to tailor its objectives and KPIs to address its own needs. With that said, there is no need for HRP to operate in a vacuum. Research has shown that greater collaboration in the form of benchmarking and shared processes will help police forces to better achieve their objectives.

Another theme that emerged throughout the research process is that performance measurement will never sufficiently encompass all of the responsibilities performed by police in their diverse roles. This fact was reinforced for the authors of this study in a ride along with HRP. Police influence on society on a shift by shift basis can never be captured with statistics. However, setting and tracking KPIs using performance measurement is essential to achieving strategic goals and improving the accountability and legitimacy of police services in managing public funds and delivering key services.

A special thanks to Sergeant Darla Perry, and Constables Tony Gillis, Jonathan Hayes, and Jody Prior from 4 Watch Central for putting up with a couple grad students for a shift. It was a great experience.

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