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Police Performance Metrics

BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

Few police services publicly demonstrate that they apply performance measurement principles in a sophisticated way. Police service board members have indicated little understanding of how to apply performance metrics in decision making. Performance measurement in policing is improving.

Background

Cost-of-service trends are a major concern for the Canadian policing community and the public sector in general. In calendar year 2011 alone, total operating expenditures for Canadian local policing was roughly \$12.9 billion. In response, innovative Canadian police services have begun to adopt a new management paradigm focusing on the use of performance indicators to help to: 1) rethink what services are of highest priority; 2) generate improved outcomes; and 3) better control service delivery costs.

Methodology

This paper set out to provide an evidence-based snapshot of publicly-available police performance metrics and how Canadian civilian police boards interpret and apply them. A content analysis of documents collected from police service websites or provided by police boards and structured interviews with police board members across Canada were carried out to assess the extent to which, and the ways in which, police boards use police performance measurement tools.

Findings

Governmental Standards

In Canada, there are no legislative requirements that control or dictate the use of specific performance

measures or standards in policing. Some provinces, such as Ontario, do require that police report on specific indicators of performance under municipal reporting regulations. Even scanning internationally, only a handful of American police services apply International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards to their management of organizational performance. Overall, there are no evidence-based performance standards or existing “industry accepted” measurement frameworks available for police services to follow in Canada.

Police Services

The overall assessment of the selection of police performance metrics outlined by police services reveals that the police services that have the most advanced performance measurement frameworks are generally larger, urban or regional policing services. This study defined performance measurement frameworks as being “balanced” when they were characterized by being comprehensive and sophisticated. Those few police services meeting the criteria for a “balanced” performance framework tended to apply their indicators in a relevant manner. The seven dimensions of a “balanced” framework included tracking performance metrics in the following categories: 1) reduce criminal victimization; 2) call adult and youth offenders to account in appropriate ways; 3) reduce fear of crime and enhance personal security; 4) increase safety in public spaces; 5) use financial resources fairly, efficiently, and effectively; 6) use of force and authority legitimately, fairly, and effectively; and 7) satisfy citizen demands for prompt, effective and fair service.

The research also showed that some individual police services are developing their own performance metrics and business planning

structures; however, they are often based on ad hoc peer-to-peer consultations within the policing community. While such peer consultation is useful, adapting new indicators into a coherent performance metrics framework can be a challenge. Although there is some sharing of information on performance metrics between police services, and this sharing is laudable, some of the information on indicator design and selection being shared can be inaccurate. Too often police services have set up their performance metrics in a catch-all fashion trying to measure “everything and anything” related to police work. In fact, much of what is put forward under the rubric of “performance measurement” is more in the nature of broad environmental scanning indicators than those related to effectiveness or efficiency of police services. It is suggested that measurement frameworks consequently require a clearer focus on core policing outcomes.

It is important to note that those police services that scored in the low relevance category in their use of performance metrics were not clear with regard to what was being measured. Further, whole categories of important performance indicators were often absent, most significantly indicators that measured effectiveness, efficiency and quality of service.

Performance Measures

Most police services not using performance metrics or lacking an effective measurement capacity were from smaller municipalities and rural areas. However, there were also a few examples from large urban jurisdictions of police services that demonstrated little capacity to apply performance metrics. In both instances, there were no meaningful regional variations in terms of the size of the police services. Four of the five police services considered to have the best developed performance measurement frameworks represented medium-sized jurisdictions; the fifth was a large urban police service.

The content analysis of police performance metrics indicates that there was no common model or framework for measuring the performance of police organizations. Among the police services studied, each emphasized different dimensions of service delivery performance. A troubling finding was that key dimensions of performance such as effectiveness and efficiency, which are essential to any well-designed performance management model, were rarely applied.

When valid and reliable quantitative performance metrics were included they were most often operational indicators. The validity of many of the measurement outputs and outcomes of police performance were difficult to assess in the content analysis, because police publications were unclear as to what type of data were being measured in many of the output, outcome or result metrics.

On the other hand, a positive observation was that many police services used comprehensive methodologies to determine community policing priorities. These priorities were used to develop aspects of most performance measurement frameworks. Common methods for prioritizing policing needs included conducting environmental scans, conducting SWOT analyses (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) and applying SMART criteria (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely).

Of the performance measures that were reported by police services many could be classified as being strategic in some way. In fact, many police services do appear to be attempting to focus more on measuring progress towards strategic goals than measurement of operational, tactical objectives.

In some instance, as police improve their performance measurement frameworks, there is an opportunity for tactical or operational performance metrics to be converted into more sophisticated, strategic performance metrics by adding another dimension to the measure, such as reporting the business activity as a rate or proportion of another relevant measure.

The analysis documented that the use of police performance measures is evolving in Canada. At the bottom of the “evolution curve” there is a cluster of police services that have no performance measures in place, while further along the curve some services have implemented rudimentary frameworks, and at the top of the curve a few services are making good progress in developing frameworks that meet appropriate standards. Police services with less experience in the development of performance measures tend to have a large gap between those measurement tools considered to be ideal and the ones that are actually used.

A number of police services appear to track a significant amount of performance data and create performance ratios, but it was unclear as to what, if any, analysis is used to determine whether goals are being achieved. Where ratios or descriptive data were presented, further data analysis and explanation appears to be required to tie the measures to organizational goals. A relatively small portion of police services had a well-designed portfolio of performance indicators that shed light on core policing outcomes, service delivery productivity and overall value. Not surprisingly, where they were present, these indicators were used in a relevant fashion, extending well beyond simple public reporting, in the police service's annual reports.

Police Boards

While many of the boards representing larger urban police services have full- or part-time professional staff, not all the large urban services in the sample had well-developed performance measurement expertise. A lack of understanding of indicators or the structure of decision making processes means that performance metrics often have little or no impact on police board decision making. However, it is evident that members of boards representing larger policing services, with more board members and benefit from full- or part-time professional staff to provide research support, appear to be more aware of the uses and limitations of various performance measurement tools.

The role of some police service boards, and their rapport with police chiefs, does not allow their review to directly lead to reallocations within police budgets or between municipal services. However, the application of more sophisticated police performance metrics could provide useful information to help direct and allocate costs once a budget has been completed and implemented.

The research found that police service board members had no specific training on police performance measurement. However, it is important to note that the individual board members who know the most about police performance measurement tools usually had the benefit of serving more than one term. Moreover, it is notable that the use of performance information is nonetheless becoming an important part of the planning and budgeting process in many jurisdictions. As such, the lack of adequate training can leave board

members vulnerable, especially when they are expected to make decisions based on information they do not feel they know how to assess. Although the level of knowledge and understanding of performance measurement is low amongst most members of police service boards, once information is provided on performance metrics, and it is explained how they can be incorporated into planning processes, board members often appreciated the utility of applying such metrics in their oversight and management role.

Moving Forward

Many police boards and police services will make design changes to bring their performance measurement tools into alignment with their outcome based service delivery goals, service level standards, and budgetary decision making. The improvement of police performance measurement will be an ongoing, iterative process occurring over several years and will likely require guidance and support. As police performance measurement tools evolve via real life successes, there will be a better understanding of what kinds of indicator design improvements can be achieved.

Police performance measurement is not an end unto itself. Even the most sophisticated and perfectly considered performance metrics will not improve organizational performance unless they are applied in decision-making. All the data and performance measures are of little use to police boards if these boards lack a clear idea of how to use them to ensure accountability, improve quality of service and reduce costs. There is no one magic performance measure, nor is there a need to be excessively broad in trying to measure all activities.

Performance measures will continue to evolve, and board members will decide on the managerial purposes to which performance measurements may contribute to their organization. To achieve a positive evolution and accomplish cost management results while maintaining policing quality, there appears to be a pressing need to build "best practice" measurement system design and implementation capacity within both the police boards and policing services.

Kiedrowski, John, Michael Petrunik, Todd Macdonald, and Ron Melchers. (2013) *Canadian Police Board Views on the Use of Police Performance Metrics*. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety Canada.

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