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Economics of Policing – An Operational Response Model Analysis

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

As crime rates fall, Canadian cities and towns continue to struggle with the economic pressures associated with providing safe communities.¹ According to Public Safety Canada, total policing expenditures more than doubled between 1997 and 2010, thereby raising concern about the sustainability and delivery of policing services in Canada.²

Amidst a \$13 billion industry, there has been very little discussion on quantifying police costs on a per call type basis (crime type). Nor is there a wealth of research explaining the exponential rise in policing expenditures despite declines in police-reported crimes and the Crime Severity Index.³ As a result, governments are being forced to examine the manner in which services are delivered to Canadians as the current economic framework is unsustainable.

STUDY AIMS

Research Question: “How should operational response models (policing) change in the context of the modern era in order to remain economically viable?”

In other words, “What activities should the police respond to and investigate given finite resources and current economic conditions?” For clarity, the term “operational response model” (ORM) is defined as those incidents that require police involvement or assistance.

METHODS

Various collection methods were used to solicit feedback from front-line personnel and senior police leaders with a view to identify efficiencies and curtail police expenditures. A central component of this research project involved capturing the perspectives of 1,189 front-line Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) members providing policing services in “K” Division (Alberta).

Collection methods also include focus group discussions, interviews with senior police executives and the costing of call types. In an effort to quantify policing costs on a per call type basis, statistical information was extracted from the Police Retrieval Occurrence System (PROS).

In addition, a frequency analysis was performed as identified by Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) codes, for all RCMP jurisdictions in Alberta (2012). Predicated upon this information, a formula was derived which allows for the costing and quantification of police activities by call type (538 UCR codes) while accounting for municipal and rural differences.

RESULTS

Sixty-three percent (63%) of respondents supported revisions to the “K” Division ORM. This finding is augmented by the discovery that 66% of those surveyed believe that the “no call is too small” policing philosophy should be retired.

This information, coupled with the quantification of police costs by call type, support the need to revisit the ORM currently employed in “K” Division. The data also reveals insight into the barriers experienced in policing, organizational strategy, and RCMP culture.

The findings demonstrate that cost savings could be achieved by eliminating several activities from the ORM and through the exploration of alternate service strategies. It is estimated that between \$18.8 – \$92.6 million/annum, in potential savings, could be achieved by eliminating specific call types and examining alternate service strategies.

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Top 10 Calls for Service in “K” Division 2012	
Description of Occurrence Type	Number of Calls
False/Abandoned 911 Call	43401
Traffic Collision(s) - Property Damage - Reportable	40168
Mischief - Damage to, or Obstruct enjoyment of property	38492
Other Moving Traffic Violations - Provincial/Territorial	38305
False Alarms	36291
Disturbing the peace	25389
Moving Traffic - Speeding Violations - Provincial/Territorial	19524
Assault	19061
Suspicious Person/ Vehicle/ Property	17109
Other theft under \$5000	16394



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Top 10 Occurrence Types by Total Hours and Total Cost in “K” Division 2012				
Description of Occurrence Type	Total Hours	Total Cost	Number of Calls	Number of FTEs (FTE = 1600 hrs)
Impaired Operation (by Alcohol) of Motor Vehicle	103844	\$ 15,070,818	15107	65
Disturbing the peace	89708	\$ 13,019,331	25389	56
Traffic Collision(s) - Property Damage - Reportable	81834	\$ 11,876,562	40168	51
Assault	80009	\$ 11,611,768	19061	50
Mischief - Damage to, or Obstruct enjoyment of property	78452	\$ 11,385,744	38492	49
Other Moving Traffic Violations - Provincial/Territorial	59048	\$ 8,569,690	38305	37
Mental Health Act - Other Activities	47087	\$ 6,833,730	9672	29
Other theft under \$5000	40178	\$ 5,830,983	16394	25
Liquor Act (Provincial/Territorial) - Offences Only	37585	\$ 5,454,782	11747	23
Uttering threats against a person	37376	\$ 5,424,317	8233	23

DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected, overwhelming evidence was gathered which supports the reform of the “K” Division ORM as a means of limiting expenditures, achieving operational efficiencies and crafting effective strategy. It is argued that front-line personnel are integral to financial reforms, including changes to the existing ORM, if true efficiencies are to be realized.

Faced with an uncertain future, executives are not only challenged with delivering effective services, they are also tasked with limiting expenditures in an unpredictable world. It is believed that these externalities should move the police lexicon towards an investment model of policing. Amidst heightened expectations, law enforcement agencies must create new ways to deliver services in a more financially responsible manner. Namely, a return to one’s core.

CONCLUSIONS

Police executives need to be versed in the disciplines of crime reduction, financial stewardship, and the importance of competing in a global marketplace while remaining willing to embrace a new paradigm and navigate the waters of a complex and uncertain future. The evidence gleaned lends support to the need to adopt a business model approach to operations and return to core policing functions.

However, the more arduous test will be to educate the public about the cost of policing and re-shape expectations. If this is achieved, police organizations will be poised to initiate a quantum leap, effect transformational change and curb the rising cost of police expenditures. Akin to successful business, who focus on their core competency, law enforcement organizations must return to their core as they can no longer be all things to all people.

REFERENCES

1. Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada (2012).
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