

Translational Criminology

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Inside this issue...

The Evolution toward Integrating Science
and Evidence in U.S. Department of Justice
Agencies—An Insider's Reflections

Body-Worn Cameras—Rapid Adoption
in a Low-Information Environment?

Back to the Future with the American Society
of Criminology's New Division of Policing

Summer Jobs and Youth Violence

Knowledge Transfer in Action: Crime Reduction
through a Regulatory Approach

The Distinguished Achievement Award
in Evidence-Based Crime Policy

Evidence-Based Policing, "What Works"
and Stratified Policing, "How to Make It Work"

Understanding Citizen Support for License
Plate Readers

Fulbright@CEBCP: Richard Adams

Evidence-Based Policing, “What Works” and Stratified Policing, “How to Make It Work”

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Finding ways in which police can effectively institutionalize evidence-based practices is the true meaning and purpose of translational criminology. There is significant evidence today about “what works” in policing to reduce crime, but there is a lack of research that shows us “how to make it work” within the police organizational structure and operations. For example, we know that hot spots policing is effective and why (Braga, Papachristos, & Hureau, 2014; Weisburd, 2014), yet there needs to be more guidance for police to implement hot spots policing organizationally and operationally that gives answers to the questions: How often do we identify new hot spots? Who responds to hot spots? Who makes sure responses are appropriate and enough? How do we know when to stop responding and who decides when to stop?

Over the last 11 years, we have worked with police agencies and sheriff’s offices of different sizes around the United States and internationally in implementing an approach we developed for employing evidence-based crime reduction practices and crime analysis—called **Stratified Policing**. This approach is a structure that standardizes crime analysis, the problem-solving process, and accountability within a police department while providing the flexibility to implement different evidence-based practices as they are deemed relevant for the nature of crime and environment of the jurisdiction (Boba & Santos, 2011).

The primary goal of Stratified Policing is to systematize implementation and sustain evidence-based practices for all types of activity, from crime and disorder to quality of life issues. It takes “what works” and “makes it work” in the police organization. Too often, police agencies address crime and quality of life problems with one division or unit, through a grant, or by a police department over a short period of time or on an ad hoc basis (e.g., task force). To sustain evidence-based crime reduction strategies, we believe a structure must be laid out and organizational change must take place. Thus, Stratified Policing provides a framework for processes, products, and meetings that must be tailored to a particular agency’s needs, organizational structure, and available resources.



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Stratified Policing begins with the idea that the police address crime, disorder, and quality of life issues at different levels of activity for which evidence-based strategies are implemented. The levels vary by their temporal nature and complexity and generally include immediate incidents, short-term clusters, and long-term problems. Its structure is fundamentally organized (i.e., stratified) around these types of activities, which make up the breadth of what police address on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. By breaking down what police do into different levels, a stratified structure for addressing them is defined, organized, and carried out in a standardized way within the organization.

Stratified Policing institutionalizes crime reduction efforts just as responding to calls for service and investigations of crimes already are institutionalized in policing. For example, what would happen if an officer refused to respond to a 9-1-1 call for service? The answer is obvious, and the point is that there is a structured system for response to calls for service that includes strategies, policies, resources, supervision, and accountability. Stratified Policing extends a structure to institutionalize more complex types of activity that include the following:

Significant incidents, which occur at the *immediate* level, are notable cases, normally crimes that require significant attention and investigation or are politically sensitive, such as violent armed robberies, incidents with political officials, or those that are racially sensitive.

Repeat incidents, which occur at the *short-term* level, are when two or more incidents that are similar in nature happen at the same place (i.e., repeat calls), are disorder or interpersonal criminal incidents (e.g., domestic violence, neighbor disputes), and happen within hours, days, and in some cases, weeks of one another.

Patterns, which also occur at the *short-term* level, are groups of crimes that share key commonalities that make them distinct where there is no known relationship between victims and offenders (e.g., robbery, residential burglary, and theft from vehicle).

Problems, which occur at the *long-term* level, are sets of related activity that occur over several months, seasons, or years that stem from systematic opportunities created by everyday behavior and environment. Problems can consist of quality of life activity as well as serious criminal activity and can be broken down into problem locations and areas, problem offenders and victims, and problem property types.

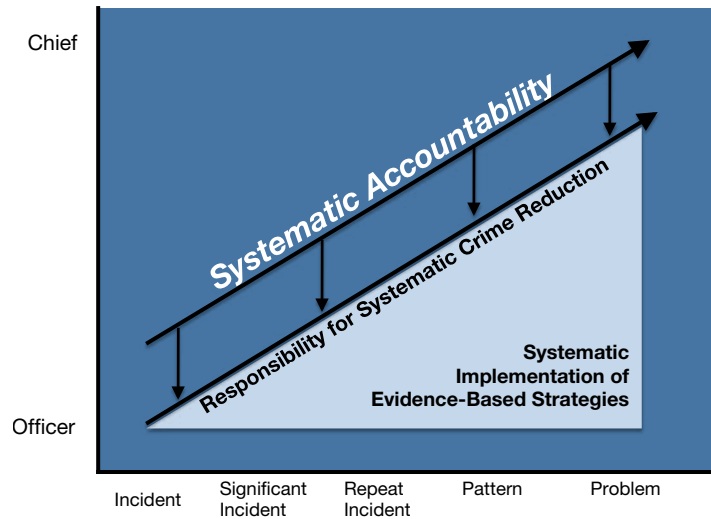
Simply laying out the types of activity and standardizing the processes for analysis, response, and evaluation for each is not enough to provide a structure for a police agency to sustain its practices, so this approach matches the stratification of activity with the stratification of ranks within the police organization. Police officers and detectives are already given the responsibility of addressing calls for service and investigations, so as the activity becomes more complex, higher ranks are assigned responsibility for addressing them.

Implementation of Stratified Policing is tailored depending on the size and organizational structure of an agency with the overarching goal to match crime reduction work with the scope and responsibility of a given rank. Organizations with more ranks can spread crime reduction responsibility wider and thinner, where those with fewer ranks must assign more responsibility to each rank. The most important aspect is that *every* rank in the agency is responsible, actively involved, and held accountable for crime reduction work. Similarly, crime analysis is stratified in that different types of products are necessary at each level to facilitate response and evaluation.

The figure illustrates the idea that more complex problems are addressed by higher ranks in the organization and that the organizational structure ensures that people are being held accountable by the rank above them. This ensures that the entire organization moves in the same direction and individuals play a specific and appropriate role in addressing crime, disorder, and quality of life issues. We liken this to an offense of a football team. All players have a job to do and have a common goal to score points. The players' roles are based on their abilities and specific "responses" are expected of them. Just as the team would not have linemen act as wide receivers on a regular basis, in this approach, a police agency does not ask line-level officers to conduct crime reduction work that is not within the scope of their positions. That is not to say that individual officers (or linemen) are not capable of the work, but that the responsibility of each rank within the overall agency is realistic and fits its authority, experience, training, abilities, and scope. This is one of the most important components of Stratified Policing because it ensures standardization and sustainability, since crime reduction and prevention become part of the job—expected, and conducted every day, by everyone.

The accountability process within Stratified Policing is important since organizational change within a police department cannot occur

Stratified Policing Figure



without accountability. Just as officers are inspected by their sergeants for their weapons and equipment to be in compliance with agency policy, individuals in each rank are held accountable for their work by their direct supervisors. The system of accountability centers on creating realistic expectations for evidence-based strategies, reviewing progress of those strategies, documenting the work being done, and evaluating the success of the strategies. In Stratified Policing, accountability occurs every day, but more generally, it employs a structure of meetings that is also stratified by the levels of activity. They include

Daily roll calls facilitate *action-oriented* accountability at the line level for evidence-based strategies implemented for immediate and short-term problems.

Weekly meetings facilitate *action-oriented* accountability because individuals from the various divisions of the organization (e.g., patrol, investigations, crime prevention, and media relations) come together to coordinate, track, and assess responses to short-term activity—repeat incidents and patterns. This meeting does not include a review of any statistics or crime counts since its focus is on “action” (i.e., response).

Monthly meetings facilitate *evaluation-oriented* accountability. Specifically produced crime analysis products and maps are used to assess whether short-term strategies are effective as well as to identify emerging long-term problems and to monitor ongoing long-term strategies.

Semi-annual meetings facilitate *evaluation-oriented* accountability for the entire organization based on the agency's crime reduction and prevention goals. The results of this meeting are shared with the agency as well as with city government to show how the chief is holding the entire agency accountable for crime reduction.



In 2014, Roberto Santos (center) was inducted into CEBCP's Evidence-Based Policing Hall of Fame for his work on incorporating crime analysis and evidence-based policing processes into practice in the Port St. Lucie Police Department.

What is important to understand is that Stratified Policing provides specific proactive processes that assist the organization in standardizing the implementation of evidence-based strategies. On a continuous basis, the various types of activities are each identified by crime analysis and assigned to a specific rank to address. For example, there would be no need for patrol district commanders to ask crime analysis to identify the current long-term hot spots because crime analysis *automatically* provides them, and the patrol chief *automatically* assigns them to the commanders. In monthly meetings, crime analysis (not the patrol district commanders) provides evaluation analysis that the patrol chief (not the patrol district commanders) uses to determine if the hot spot has been resolved. This proactive process is the same for each level of activity, and there is no guessing whether problems are being identified in a timely manner (i.e., not simply after a problem becomes too big) or whether they are being addressed.

In summary, Stratified Policing provides a comprehensive structure that can be tailored for a particular police agency to infuse evidence-based strategies in a realistic, sustainable way. At the broadest level, the tasks that an agency must do to set up the stratified structure and ensure consistency in the agency include

1. designating rank responsibility for each level of activity
2. setting meeting structure
3. setting parameters for action-oriented analysis products at each level of activity
4. setting operational system of response
5. selecting evidence-based strategies
6. setting rules for evaluation analysis and standards for documentation at each level of activity

Last, the specific evidence-based strategies employed should be those that the agency believes best suit its community's problems and can change over time. For a specific breakdown of the problem-solving processes, crime analysis products, and accountability meetings at each level and how they can be implemented, we have written a comprehensive guidebook funded by the COPS Office called *A Police Organizational Model for Crime Reduction: Institutionalizing Problem Solving, Analysis, and Accountability* (Boba & Santos, 2011). We recognize that Stratified Policing is just one answer to the question of "how to make evidence-based policing work"; however, over the last 11 years, we have seen its successful implementation effect organizational change to better facilitate crime reduction efforts in many police and sheriff organizations around the country.

References

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