



Case Study: COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE ON EFFECTIVE ENFORCEMENT

This is a true story that took place in a "big" city in the Midwest, the heartland of America. A group of successful professionals purchased a row of old statuesque homes in an inner-city neighborhood. They worked together to restore the homes to their almost historical quality. The homes were stunning and the yards were immaculate. All of the owners were proud of their achievement. Their success was also written up in the local newspaper's home and garden section, which portrayed them as owners with a vision. But, they had an ongoing problem that severely blemished their investments, hard work, and sense of accomplishment. It seems that the street directly in front of their houses had been a strip where prostitutes would meet with their johns for sex. The johns would arrive at 5:00 ... in their lavish new BMWs, Lincoln Town Cars, and even an occasional Bentley. After the sexual encounter, the participants would throw condoms, paper towels, napkins, and other residual paraphernalia on the lawns and street in front of the houses.

The owners reported the problem to the police. Initially, a police officer met with the owners and took a detailed report. However, the prostitution continued. The residents continued to call the police and were told their problem was not a high priority, but the police would look into the situation. A few owners resorted to throwing eggs on the fancy new cars, but that was not much of a deterrent. The owners finally insisted that they talk to the shift commander to report their problem, hoping to get some results. The shift commander listened politely and explained that the police would get to the matter, but at 5:00 ... the time of the commercial romances, the police were always busy with other activities and just could not get to their problem. He tried to explain that "real law enforcement" meant going after the robbers and murderers. He even indicated that the crime analysis section of the department had issued a report that the greatest threat was from burglars who operated from 3:00 to 5:00 a.m. in their neighborhood and not those involved in prostitution and petty drug dealing. To be effective, they had set goals to reduce the number of burglaries in their neighborhood and meeting their goals would make it a safe place to live. The owner talking to the shift commander stated that he appreciated the commander's objectives, but he had discovered a number of police cars parked at the local Dunkin' Donuts at 5:00 a.m. every day for the last week. He sarcastically asked if they were preventing the donut shop from being burglarized. This got the shift commander's attention as the conversation ended.

The owners, represented by a probation and parole agent who lived in the neighborhood, took the shift commander's explanation as inadequate. The agent knew that other things could be done to improve their neighborhood and that, for the owners, the presence of prostitutes and pimps in the morning was unacceptable. He also knew that his employer, the department of corrections, was implementing a new program whereby probation and parole agents would work with police officers to detect and apprehend probation and parole violators. He suspected that many of the prostitutes were on probation and parole and in violation of their conditions, thereby giving him a new tool to remove them from the streets and in particular from their street. At a subsequent face-to-face meeting, the agent suggested to the shift commander that he work with the department of corrections to pursue the prostitutes for being suspected of violating the conditions of their probation and parole.

The shift commander, of necessity, thought the idea was a good one because he would not have to devote his limited resources to the problem and could work with probation and parole agents to address the problem. Probation and parole officials could administratively revoke the probation and parole statuses of the prostitutes without having the police arrest them. In addition, the only police resources that would be needed involved the actual taking into custody of the prostitutes when called by a probation and parole officer. This arrangement satisfied both parties, but it also raised questions regarding what we mean when we say an organization is effective or ineffective. For the police, effectiveness was gauged by a reduction in burglaries relative to available resources; for residents, organizational effectiveness meant their neighborhood would be free of petty crimes that affected their quality of life.

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Whose definition of effectiveness is correct? Are they both correct? Explain.
2. Should crime analysis be done in consultation with community residents?
3. To what extent should effectiveness be evaluated by community residents or other groups external to the police?
4. Which model of organizational effectiveness presented in this chapter would you use to assess this police organization?