

The BJA Executive Session on

Police Leadership

2018

The BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership is a multi-year endeavor started in 2010 with the goal of developing innovative thinking that would help create police leaders uniquely qualified to meet the challenges of a changing public safety landscape.

In support of an integrated approach to creating safe and viable communities across America, the project directors recruited 20+ principals from a range of disciplines. The principals, in turn, led national field teams of practitioners focused on the work of policing and the organization of the future.

To gain new insights on leadership, the *BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership* engaged police chiefs in documenting their own paths and invited leaders to participate in various audio and video forums to tell their stories and discuss the future of policing and police leadership.

Please visit our website, <http://bjaleader.org>, to learn more about this project and to access a broad array of interactive, multimedia resources.

The principals are supported in their work by a team that includes project co-directors Darrel W. Stephens and Nancy McKeon, and BJA Senior Policy Advisor Steve Edwards.

Leadership and Employee Retention in the Greenville Police Department: Results and Recommendations for Law Enforcement

by
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Over several months in 2015, Greenville South Carolina Police Chief Ken Miller met with Clemson University professors to discuss strategies to improve organizational focus, performance and public satisfaction with its services, and to discuss employee retention. The Department had experienced an annual turnover rate averaging nearly eleven percent, and Chief Miller pursued opportunities to reverse that trend.

As a recently appointed chief from North Carolina, Chief Miller had completed an initial reorganization to better align the department with community policing goals, but had largely sought to walk the department through a more comprehensive planning process to improve its enrollment in – and ownership of - broader organizational change and realignment. In Mil-

ler's view, "A critical and often overlooked factor in successful organizational change requires employees to become involved in formulating the change they want to see. As leaders, it is our role to help them reach, to chart the path and to align systems to support and validate progress along the way."

Like many executives, Chief Miller viewed change processes as leadership development opportunities that can encourage an organization to thrive. In these discussions, a common theme emerged: successfully managing Greenville's police culture as a foundational element in effective organizational change. Early dialogue resulted in a partnership with Clemson University Professors Jane Layton, Gail DePriest, Tom Zagenczyk, and Russ Marion, with the desire for support in the following areas:

- Revisiting the mission and vision of the Police Department;
- Conducting research on the culture of the Department;
- Determining best practices to address recruitment/retention issues.

Preliminary Activities

In August 2015, a two-day Command Staff session was held at Clemson University with Clemson MBA Director of Executive Leadership Gail DePriest. The agenda included understanding brain dominance styles, using coaching skills, a discussion of five team dysfunctions, and drafting new department vision and mission statements to contain values most important to department leaders.

According to research by Rhoades and Eisenburger¹ increasing support to leaders and workers results in increased gratitude, obligation and identification with the organization; attitude improvement; increased intent to stay; and increased pro-organization behaviors. In December 2015, Clemson professors attended Greenville Police Department roll calls in order to explain the purpose of a proposed cultural research study to its police officers. They discussed a regression model analyzing "intent to stay" factors such as:

- Connectivity with leaders (supervisors),
- Networking among individuals for support and resources, and
- Friendships and relationships among workers.

The Leader Exchange Model (LMX)

While a number of studies analyze police attrition through the lens of community attitude and support, there is less research examining this issue through Leader Member Exchange, or LMX². LMX is the theory that there is a dyadic power relationship between managers and employees that can have positive or negative effects upon an organization. According to Brunetto, Shacklock, Teo, and Wharton-Farr³, organizations that indicate a high level of LMX tend to have low levels of turnover due to reciprocity norms.

¹Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002. *Perceived Organizational Support: A Review of the Literature*.

² Ibid.

³ Brunetto, Shacklock, Teo, and Farr-Wharton, 2014. *The impact of management on the engagement and well-being of high emotional labour employees*.

LMX is based on social exchange theory, which explains that if individuals feel that they are being treated well by others, they will feel happier within their organization, and will want to reciprocate by treating others positively. Leader-member exchange theory explains that a relationship between a leader and a follower develops. The extent to which this relationship is perceived to be positive by the follower strengthens, or weakens, the desire for the follower to positively contribute both to the leader and the organization. If an individual perceives that their leader treats them fairly, with kindness, and is genuinely interested in their well-being, the follower will tend to have higher levels of satisfaction and will be more effective in job performance.

Police organizations have a vested interest in LMX for many reasons, most specifically for retention and morale. Research indicates that employers are facing a workforce that approaches employment differently than previous generations. The 2015 Deloitte Millennial Study⁴ indicates that by the year 2020, 50% of workplace will be made up of millennials. Police departments will need to consider that millennials are interested in social values, want a focus on employee wellbeing and development, and seek people and purpose—not simply products and service. They are more likely to change jobs frequently, and desire meaning and satisfaction from the work they do.

Research shows that even in professions where emotional stress is higher than others—such as policing—job satisfaction and retention are linked to levels of LMX within the organization. Researchers believe that even individuals working in an emotionally stressful field, such as policing, tend to have higher intent to stay if they have strong ties with their leader (LMX). Given the recent national increase in police attrition, Clemson professors conducted this study to assess Leader Member Exchange (LMX) as a possible explanation for turnover rates within the Greenville Police Department. The hypothesis was tested using sworn and civilian law enforcement personnel working for the City of Greenville, SC.

Results

Officers and civilian personnel voluntarily participated in the web-based survey. **Structured by functional work groups at all organizational levels, employees were asked to respond** to the questions concerning their primary and secondary work groups and supervisors. The questions measured:

- **Trust. The level to which the individual is willing to be vulnerable with their coworkers.**
- **Organizational Communication.** How satisfied the individual is with organizational communication.
- **Leader-Member Exchange.** The quality of their relationship with their supervisor.
- **Supervisor Communication (employee-related).** Satisfaction with communication from their supervisor.
- **Supervisor Communication (supervisor-related).** Supervisor satisfaction with communication with their subordinates.
- **Turnover.** Intent to stay with GPD in the next year.

⁴ Deloitte, 2015. Mind the gaps: The 2015 Deloitte Millennial survey.

Study results indicated very low levels of Leadership Member Exchange between the work groups and their work group leaders (Sergeants and Lieutenants). Greenville Police relies upon line-level supervisors to create cohesive work environments, and the LMX ratings cause concern about the effectiveness of these workgroups. Employee satisfaction was consistently low department-wide; and there were numerous “isolates” who appeared in the results. Isolates are individuals who are disconnected from work groups and support networks. These employees are easily disenfranchised, and are less likely to fully invest or engage in contributing to agency success. The study also identified the presence of a handful of informal leaders, well-connected communicators of information who were identified by their peers. In conjunction with chain of command personnel, engaging with these informal leaders can assist the department in implementing positive change and ensuring buy-in from other officers.

Recommended Plan of Action

After reviewing the results, Chief Miller committed to enlisting in focused planned change initiatives in order to reduce the number of isolates, strengthen workgroups, and ensure personnel resilience and self-awareness. The graphic below⁵ displays the importance of a cohesive team in the high-pressure policing environment, and the tangible organizational benefits resulting from a committed team who is able to engage in open discussions and debate within their teams to resolve problems.



Based on the results, researchers recommended three key areas of improvement:

1. Improve quality of leadership with leaders and informal leaders;
2. Improve social relationships between officers; and,
3. Strengthen networks, as network ties are a source of job-related support and social support.

⁵ Lencione, The Table Group.com

Findings about deficiencies in trust and culture encouraged Greenville Police Department command staff to make organizational changes. In the Greenville Police Department, daily work groups—including teams that incorporate Sergeant, Master Patrol Officer, and officers—are responsible for impacting culture and improving morale. A cohesive team consistently demonstrates behaviors that encourage commitment, accountability, trust, and measurable results. Planned change efforts challenge officers' immediate work groups to encourage collaboration, critical thinking, and networks of trust and confidence. Encouraging teamwork provides benefits beyond accomplishing work goals; officers establish trust and networks that build social support and strengthen LMX measures.

Clemson University professors recommended training department-wide, utilizing informal leaders to lead and coach officers on a quarterly basis regarding team successes and areas for improvement. Regularly engaging with teams, and reinforcing social networks between officers, should strengthen relationships and trust within workgroups. Clemson University is co-designing a program with Greenville Police Department that includes a trainer, onsite, working with officers on self-management skills, goal setting, and employee development.

The Center for Creative Leadership's recent article about building psychological capital⁶ demonstrates that efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience can be taught and reinforced with personnel. As part of a more comprehensive plan to develop management skills and leadership, results of this study support setting department goals to ensure personal health, mental wellness, and resilience. Concentration areas include:

1. Training of leaders and selected informal leaders to facilitate interactive meetings in which officers share best practices, work through challenges and develop one-on-one coaching skills. The purpose of these interactive meetings is to improve quality of leadership skills, improve social relationships, and strengthen networks between employees.
2. Leader & Informal Leader Quarterly Meetings for review and recalibration of objectives, and continued education of leaders and informal leaders.
3. Basic Mindfulness Training - The Heart Math Methodology⁷, used by Navy Seals, is scientifically-based training that can help with emotional self-regulation, confidence and resilience, which are important to general health, but also to managing oneself and decisions in tense or high-pressure work environments.
4. Brain Science 101 - Understanding how Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relationship and Fairness can provide psychological safety according to the research at the Neuroleadership Institute.
5. Administering the Herrmann Brain Dominance to all officers to encourage better understanding of different styles of thinking, processing information, and problem-solving—and to ultimately increase engagement and retention.⁸

⁶ Marian N. Ruderman and Cathleen Clerkin, 2015. Developing Leadership by Building Psychological Capital.

⁷ www.heartmath.org/articles-of-the-heart/police-officers-search-coherence-resilience/

⁸ www.herrmannsolutions.com/improving-employee-engagement/

Chief Miller’s engagement with personnel to address concerns about health and well-being bodes well for the future of this agency; and Greenville Police Department is optimistic about making demonstrable improvements in morale, cohesiveness, and trust within their organization.

This paper was developed by the “Culture and Change” initiative of the BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership.

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Cite as: DePriest, G., Dorn, S.C. and Miller, K. (2018) “Leadership and Employee Retention in the Greenville Police Department: Results and Recommendations for Law Enforcement.” A paper of the BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice; and St. Petersburg, FL: Center for Public Safety Innovation, St. Petersburg College.

2/22/2018

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This project was supported by Grant No. 2009-D2-BX-K003 and 2015-CP-BX-K003 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance to St. Petersburg College. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the SMART Office, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.



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