PERSONNEL AND STRUCTURE: AN ORGANIZATIONAL STUDY

by

Sue Blanshan
Disaster Research Center
Department of Sociology
The Ohio State University

Martin H. Smith
Disaster Research Center
Department of Sociology
The Ohio State University

The research on which this paper was based was supported in part by PHS Grant 5 RO1 MH-15399-04 from the Center for Studies of Mental Health and Social Problems, Applied Research Branch, National Institute of Mental Health.

11/73
PERSONNEL AND STRUCTURE: AN ORGANIZATIONAL STUDY

There is a vast amount of sociological literature which deals with the relationship of organizational membership and organizational change. Recently attention has been focused on deliberate attempts by researchers and others to intervene in organizations (Corwin, 1972). Organizational change programs, irrespective of their goals, frequently attempt to modify the organizational structure through, at least in part, the inclusion of outsiders who are unconventional, creative, flexible, good boundary personnel, etc. (Carlson, 1962; Clark, 1968). In the future, sociological studies of intervention strategies are likely to become more important since increasingly there are programs attempting to manipulate structural variables. Therefore, it will be useful and indeed necessary to have the relationship of variables such as staff composition and organizational structural variables empirically verified. This study of police-community relations (P-CR) units, the findings of which are part of a larger study conducted by the Disaster Research Center (DRC) of the Ohio State University, was undertaken with that intention.

More specifically, police-community relations (P-CR) units were found to have varying staff compositions: some had sworn police officers only (Type I), while others had sworn officers as well as, civilians on their staffs (Type II). When this analysis was initiated it was assumed, on the basis of the literature, that there would be structural differences between units which had civilian ("outsider") personnel and those which did not. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the differences which were found in bureaucratic structure between the two types of P-CR units.

Background

The multiplicity of an organization's environment may lead to the emergence of new and different types of goals and activities which go beyond those traditionally carried out (Eisenstadt, 1959). Such flexibility on the part of the bureaucratic organization is important, and may even be a condition for its survival (Thompson and McEwen, 1958). For an example of goal succession one may turn to police departments. Among the most recent innovations of metropolitan police departments in the United States is the development of community relations units. This innovation reflects a partial change in emphasis within police departments from "guns to human contact." The concern for police-community relations in many cities is a direct result of racial disturbances during the mid to later 1960s (Kreps and Weller, 1973). Prior to 1965, most P-CR activities were centered around public relations procedures designed to "sell" the police department to the general community. However, in response to the environmental pressures of the disturbances during the mid 1960s, many existing units as well as those formed in response to the racial disorders abandoned their exclusive original public relations goals and developed programs to ease the stress and conflict between the local police and segments of the black population. Once again the organization expanded its goal, as these programs were broadened in later years to include all segments of the
community and to include a wide variety of programs and activities. However, this broadening process was not carefully planned with certain goals in mind nor was it responding to clearly enunciated needs. Rather, as with development during the mid-1960s, policy was formulated in response to immediate community problems.

Current P-CR units can be classified in terms of general types of goals which they have: inner and/or outer directed. Many P-CR units are primarily oriented to their own police departments. Their inwardly directed programs are designed to improve police-community relations by changing the attitudes, procedures, and knowledge of police officers through recruitment of minority groups, the teaching of human relations principles to recruits, the holding of seminars, conventions, and in-service training for veteran officers. In addition, many P-CR units also utilize more outwardly directed techniques involving contact with community groups through youth programs, speakers, and other activities involving direct interaction with the public in a non-punitive sense.

Within P-CR units, which traditionally involved only police officers, civilians have also been involved and hired. Civilians fill such positions as high-level administrators, consultants, specialists, community aids, and interns. Some of these positions have themselves been created due to the inclusion of civilians, but beyond this there have been other structural changes in these Type II organizations which will be discussed in the data analysis section.

Procedures

The Sample

Previous studies of P-CR work indicate that smaller cities are far less likely to have P-CR units than larger cities (Urban Data Services, 1970). Since one purpose of this study was to obtain an accurate picture of the structure of P-CR units, DRC distributed a questionnaire to every city in the United States with a population of 75,000 or more which also had their own police department. Therefore, while limiting the study as far as the number of cities included, the universe of the cities most likely to have P-CR units was tapped. Not only had previous studies indicated that smaller cities were less likely to have P-CR units, but also that the response rate of these cities to questionnaires on police-community relations topics tended to be very low (which is probably related to their not having units). In order to examine this potential bias in the study which would favor larger cities, we divided the communities studied into two categories: (1) medium size cities having populations of 75,000 to 100,000 and (2) large cities having populations greater than 100,000. A pretest of 12 cities of varying sizes and regional locations uncovered no major problems in the instrument.

Questionnaires were sent to the 154 cities with populations greater than 100,000. Seventy-seven percent of these were returned. Questionnaires were sent to 74 medium-sized cities with populations between 75,000 and 100,000 which had their own police departments. A 70 percent return was obtained. A follow-up
questionnaire was sent to those police departments which had not responded to the first mailing. The follow-up resulted in an increase of 12 responses among the larger cities and an increase of 5 among the medium-size cities. The final response rates were 85 percent for the larger cities and 77 percent for police departments in medium-sized cities. In all, we obtained data from 187 departments, or 82 percent of the universe being studied. Although the returns would seem to bias our data somewhat in favor of the P-CR units in the larger cities, this is an artificial bias as most of the cities that did not respond do not appear to have P-CR units (Urban Data Service, 1970).

**Indicators and Measures**

A questionnaire based on the literature and on field studies of police departments previously conducted by DRC (Kreps, 1971) was constructed. The 47-item questionnaire primarily covered the following topics: the organization and structure of P-CR units, inter-unit lines of interaction, goals and task, criteria for evaluating staff and recruiting new members, and the rankings of success in meeting goals.

Data on staff composition were obtained from 154 units. Of these, 61 percent had staffs composed of both officers and civilians (Type II) and 39 percent utilized police personnel only (Type I). Thirty-three police departments had no separate P-CR units within their organization.

Type I and Type II organizations were compared on several dimensions of bureaucratic structure: status system, hierarchy of authority, division of labor, centralization of decision-making. The two types of P-CR units were also looked at with respect to their size and goal achievement.

**Analysis**

As a bureaucratic organization, a police department is divided into specialized units such as narcotics, traffic, detective, and in some cases, police-community relations. When the department does have a P-CR unit, this specialized unit typically exists at the same level as the other units. However, the internal structure or organization of the P-CR unit may differ somewhat from other departmental units or divisions due to the nature of its responsibilities and goals as well as the involvement of civilian staff members. Generally one pictures police departments as the typical Weberian bureaucracy which is formally organized in such a way that the social relations are impersonal, detailed rules govern actions, a strict hierarchy of authority exists, jobs are specialized, and goals are clear. But when we look at P-CR work the picture changes. The efforts of a P-CR unit are typically in three areas: police department in-service training, public information (or public relations), and community relations rather than the traditional field of law enforcement and crime prevention. As a consequence of these distinctive responsibilities, P-CR units are often more correctly classified
as professional bureaucratic organizations, meaning that they are more informally organized and involve personal relations, general policies rather than detailed rules, colleague authority, and broad definition of goals. This type of structure allows the staff to handle the various types of tasks with greater ease for it allows the flexibility, important for such an organization's relationship with its environment.

Following these structural differences which exist between P-CR units and the more traditional police departmental units, one may now look at the differences between the two types of P-CR units -- those with and those without civilian personnel. It was noted earlier that a deliberate attempt at organizational change may involve the inclusion or hiring of "outsiders" by the organization. Whether or not Type II P-CR units intentionally hired civilians as a means to implement change can not be stated as a finding in this study, however there do appear to be structural modifications in Type II units, perhaps as unanticipated consequences. In general, the effect of civilian involvement appears to be a further modification of the units' bureaucratic components: standardization, centralization, and interchangeability (Corwin, 1972). If civilian involvement were resulting in increased bureaucratization, there would be a tightening of the organization's control system through an increased emphasis on: the official status system, rules and procedures, and the division of labor. At this point, it will be useful to turn to some of the empirical findings.

The important findings of this study fit within four general areas of organizational study: supervision and status structure, decision making, goals, and demographic factors. Supervision and status structure have been combined due to their interdependency. For example, the type and extent of supervision is greatly affected by both the official and the unofficial status structures. Under the topic of decision making, the role and/or importance of official rules and policies, staff meetings, and extent of centralization are considered. Goals are considered from the point of view of the organization's perceived achievement. And finally, demographic factors include the age of the units, city size, and number of locations.

**Supervision and Status Structure**

A P-CR unit, as other specialized police units, generally has one officer who is responsible for its activities. This individual is of course subordinate to the Chief of Police. The commanding officers of P-CR units most often hold the high rank of Lieutenant, and somewhat less frequently that of Captain or Sergeant. The higher the rank of the unit's head may be interpreted to be positively correlated with the unit's autonomy from the department. Although there is no difference in the rank of the commanding officer between Type I and Type II units, Type II units are 10 percent more likely to have a full-time commanding officer. Perhaps this greater resource allocation indicates that where civilians are involved, police community relations work has higher status and/or priority ranking by their departments.
A factor important both for the supervision of and complexity of the status structure of P-CR units is the size of the staff. The mean size of the staffs of P-CR units is 10.8 members. Again the distinction between the two types of units is interesting. For Type I units, the mean size drops to 6.5 members. But in Type II units, the mean size increases to 13.4, of which 7.8 are officers and 5.6 are civilians. As the literature indicates size may be related to organizational complexity (Blau and Scott, 1962), for Type II units more frequently have three or more different ranks. However, it is important to note that while size may be related to complexity, as indicated by the number of ranks, it is not necessarily related to bureaucratization, or the increase in the amount of administrative apparatus. In this particular instance, a growing unit with an increasing staff, which is drawn from the police department, probably would by the nature of this recruitment hire personnel of varying ranks.

As has already been mentioned, the working atmosphere of P-CR units tends to be informal and personal relative to other police units. However, when we focus on judgments of the importance of individual staff members' ability to form personal working relationships with other staff members, the data indicate that 64 percent of the P-CR units do not use this for job evaluation and 60 percent do not use this as a criteria in recruitment of staff members. It is interesting to note, though, that civilian involvement in a P-CR unit makes it more likely that the ability to form personal working relationships will be important for job evaluation (significant at the .05 level), thereby indicating a greater emphasis on the unofficial status structure than on the official.

Decision making

While the P-CR unit's commanding officer generally reports directly to the Chief of Police, the lines of authority within the unit may vary considerably. However, two main types of authority structures are distinguishable. The first, which may be called colleague authority, involves a one-step chain of command in which everyone reports directly to the commanding officer of the unit, but beyond that interaction is informally structured. This arrangement actually allows for a good deal of autonomy by minimizing supervision. The second type of authority structure has at least two steps in the chain of command. This arrangement creates a hierarchy of authority since the commanding officer has a very small number of assistants who report directly to this person, and all other staff persons report through these assistants. This survey found that 60 percent of the P-CR units had a colleague authority structure. However, this type of authority structure tended to be more common among Type II staffs (significant at the .05 level).

There are other organizational mechanisms through which the degree of authority and supervision may be minimized while control is still maintained, by the administrative official(s), over the decision making process. One such mechanism is the use of staff meetings. The infrequent or nonexistent staff meetings among the P-CR personnel would serve to minimize their general involvement in current issues and concerns of the unit, while an increase in the frequency of these meetings would tend to increase their involvement. Staff meetings expand the input
channels of communication for the lower levels to the commanding officer. Although 78 percent of the P-CR units in this study reported having regular staff meetings, Type II units were even more likely than the other units to have meetings regularly (significant at the .05 level). A combination of the professional authority structure and the regularity of staff meetings emphasizes the staff interaction aspects of decision making in Type II P-CR units, while it plays down the importance of formalized and written procedures and policies.

Goals

The importance of goals for P-CR units is derived from the definitional basis of a bureaucracy as a goal oriented organization, as well as the goal adaptations which P-CR units have made since their formation in response to a changing environment. Since their establishment P-CR units, in a collective sense, have had a succession of major goals, as mentioned earlier. The events of the mid 1960s signaled a change in emphasis from public relations work to resolution of conflict between black communities and police. It would indeed be interesting to know if P-CR units felt more or less successful in achieving their goals during the mid 1960s than they had prior to that time. It might be proposed that part of the explanation for this succession of goals rested on a dissatisfaction with achievement of public relations goals, however; this is only conjecture. The second noteworthy succession of goals has resulted in the broadened scope of the community relations work to include the entire community, rather than emphasizing blacks to the exclusion of other sectors. Again one may conjecture that this alteration of goals was in part motivated by an attempt to deal with a population which would allow P-CR units to feel more successful in achieving their goals. Whether or not this was actually an underlying factor, P-CR units do feel relatively successful in goal achievement. This was measured by asking the units to rate themselves in terms of their success as compared with other units and in terms of success in meeting their own goals. The overwhelming response to this question was positive with very few units giving themselves less than a score of 4 on a 7 point scale. However, despite the fact that most scores are positive, P-CR units utilizing civilians (Type II) evaluated themselves more positively than those utilizing officers only (Type I). The data indicate that when judging themselves in terms of their own particular goals, the difference in goal achievement scores is significant at the .05 level. When comparing themselves with other P-CR units the difference is still quite large, but not significant.

Demographic Factors

As the work of P-CR units increasingly embraced more outwardly oriented activities, a trend toward decentralization of services began (Ponting and Teuber, 1970). The establishment of offices at more than one location in a city for the P-CR unit is a part of this trend. Often these "storefront offices" are located in socioeconomically depressed areas of the city as an attempt to facilitate communication between the police and the particular neighborhood. Type II units
are twice as likely to have more than one location as are Type I units (significant at the .01 level). As could be expected, the use of "storefront offices" is more frequently found in the larger cities (100,000 and over) than in those of medium size. Large cities are also more likely to have Type II units than to have Type I, while the smaller cities are equally likely to have either. The larger cities are more frequently confronted with a well diversified population and therefore their decentralization of services and use of a more diversified staff composition are sensible responses to their situation.

In contrasting P-CR units' budgets, it is clear that those units which have the larger budgets have more civilians on their staffs than those with smaller budgets, or that Type II units are more likely to have larger budgets. Another factor which is positively associated with civilian involvement is the age of the P-CR unit. The longer a unit has been in operation the more likely it is to have civilians on its staff.

**Discussion**

The findings presented in this paper indicate that there are differences in the structure of P-CR units with differing staff compositions. We had assumed this would be the case at the inception of this analysis. But what might account for the differences?

From its establishment, a bureaucratic organization is constantly in interaction with its environment and must develop means of coping with the pressures brought about by this interaction. The interaction of P-CR units, in a collective sense, with the American society has already been traced and the resulting succession of goals outlined. However, all P-CR units did not experience the same pressures from their immediate environments nor did all units respond in identical fashion when faced with similar situations. Therefore, while it is correct and certainly useful to refer to the changes in P-CR units, this is done in a generic sense rather than on an individual unit basis.

Structural characteristics do not develop in a social vacuum but are closely related to the functions and activities of the bureaucratic organization in its environment. Therefore we may look for a partial explanation of the structural differences between Type I and II P-CR units in their orientations to their environment (Eisenstadt, 1959). When P-CR units were engaged primarily in public relations work they were structured very similarly to the parent organization. Most staff members were sworn officers, the size of the staff was relatively small, and the unit had only one location -- the police department. However, as P-CR units increasingly found themselves functioning as intermediaries between the police and the community, they found it necessary to both affect change within the police department through recruit training, in-service training, seminars on minority group-police relations, etc., and, at the same time, to reach out into the community with youth programs, speakers' bureaus, "storefront offices," and other service projects. When the emphasis of P-CR work was on public relations, the use of civilians was minimal. But, as a part of this trend, the need and demand for civilian involvement appears to have increased.
There are three possible outcomes of interaction with the environment for an organization: (1) the bureaucratic organization maintains its autonomy and distinctiveness, (2) bureaucratization, and (3) debureaucratization. Bureaucratization would entail an increased preoccupation with administrative matters perhaps to the extent that the original objective is lost sight of and replaced by organizational maintenance goals. In debureaucratization the unique characteristics of the bureaucracy, both with regard to its autonomy and its specific rules and goals are minimized (Eisenstadt, 1959). The data have shown that Type I P-CR units have generally had the first kind of interaction outcome and maintained their original structure and processes. In contrast to this, the Type II P-CR units have changed and in the direction of debureaucratization rather than bureaucratization. The literature indicates that the development of bureaucratic organization in the direction of debureaucratization may be connected primarily with the growth of different types of direct dependence of the bureaucratic organization on segments of its clientele (Blau and Scott, 1962). The Type II units, those which involve civilians and the associated structural patterns, are those P-CR units which seem to have responded more fully to the pressures of their environments; perhaps their communities were most affected by events of the sixties. The police, in general, and P-CR units more specifically became more dependent on its clientele (the public) in the last decade, for if there were disturbances the police were "obviously" not doing their job of maintaining "law and order." As has been already stated, Type II units are more likely to judge themselves as more successful in reaching their own particular goals which indicates one or both of the following: civilian involvement itself increases self-perceptions of success; or the structural patterns associated with civilian involvement are more conducive to self-perceptions of success. Following from the results of this study it would appear that the latter is most likely.

Conclusion

There are differences between P-CR units with civilians and those with only police officers on their staffs. There are also differences between older P-CR units and more recently established units. Both of these matters we believe are related to goal succession. Blau and Scott have asked an important question:

Is it correct to speak of increased bureaucratization in those organizations where original goals are succeeded by more advanced ones? Yes, in the sense that change involves increased scope and power for the bureaucracy; no, in the sense that it involves less preoccupation with administrative procedures as ends-in-themselves. The strain is toward innovation, not rigidity, and in this sense represents a debureaucratizing tendency."

Rather than expanding the bureaucratic elements of the P-CR units, the succession of goals and the inclusion of civilian personnel have tilted the balance to the side of innovation and structural change.
References

Blau, P. and R. Scott  

Carlson, Richard O.  
1962 Executive Succession and Organizational Change: Place-Bound and Career-Bound Superintendents of Schools. Chicago: Midwest Administrative Center.

Clark, Terry  

Corwin, Ronald G.  


Eastman, George D. and Esther M. Eastman  

Eisenstadt, S. N.  

Kreps, Gary A.  

Kreps, Gary A. and Jack M. Weller  

Ponting, J. Rick and Erwin B. Teuber  

Ross, James L.  

Thompson, James  

-9-
Thompson, James and William J. McEwen

Urban Data Service

Weber, Max

Wilson, James Q.

Zald, Mayer N. and Patricia Denton