Introduction

Since the 1980s, many law enforcement agencies in the United States have transitioned from traditional policing to community policing and problem-oriented policing organizational models. Today there are multiple variations of both models that are individually developed for implementation in communities. The traditional policing model strongly prevailed in the United States for decades but is now diminishing. Traditional policing exacted a primary mission of crime control, viewing law enforcement officers as crime fighters who reacted to the commission of crimes by solving them with the arrest of criminals. Police service calls within the community were viewed as secondary to the mission of crime fighting. A swift response time to crime scenes was of major importance and there was an emphasis on felony crimes. The prevailing belief was that criminal acts were a problem to be addressed solely by the police, who were viewed as the professionals. The law enforcement approach was reactive in most respects. Proactive crime prevention was of modest interest.

Police agencies were highly centralized with the expectation of the organization's personnel to comply strictly with all policies, procedures, rules, and regulations adopted by top-level management. As the traditional policing model has diminished, law enforcement agencies have decentralized their organizations and become more flexible and participatory.

Community Policing

In contrast to the traditional policing organizational model, community policing fosters a pronounced change in the role of the police. Walker & Katz (2008) found the following:

While the police have traditionally defined their primary mission in terms of crime control, community policing seeks to broaden the police role to include such issues as fear of crime, order maintenance, conflict resolution, neighborhood decay, and social and physical disorder as basic functions of the police. (p. 317)

The police and public strive to develop and maintain a positive community partnership by proactively addressing the crime problem with a concentration on crime prevention through consultation with citizens and mobilization of programs.
Problem-Oriented Policing

While traditional policing organizational model concentrates on generally vague categories (crime, order maintenance, and service) and community policing broadens this focus to include police-community partnerships that are lacking in traditional policing, problem-oriented policing goes further. The book, *Policing a Free Society*, introduced to the United States the concept of problem-oriented policing by stating that police need to break down the categories into discrete problems to which they then develop specific responses. This was labeled problem-oriented policing (Goldstein, 1977).

Problem-oriented policing is differentiated from community policing by its focus on the end product of policing instead of the means by which policing is performed.

Law Enforcement Organizational Change

With the advent of community policing and problem-oriented policing, law enforcement organizations have undergone changes. Those agencies that have embraced either organizational model have learned to become more flexible and to seek police-community partnerships aggressively and foster strategies for innovative problem solving. Successful law enforcement managers have advocated empowerment of field officers to address and solve a host of community problems directly or indirectly related to crime issues and general service to citizens. This has evolved into an organizational culture change in which law enforcement officers view themselves not only as crime fighters but also as community service practitioners who interact with citizens to address matters of concern. Such organizational change has slowly occurred but continues to formulate a new philosophy of policing. The traditional policing organizational model is being progressively replaced with community policing or problem-oriented policing throughout the United States.

References

