

ENHANCING POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS VIA A CONFLICT RESOLUTION APPROACH

ABSTRACT

Despite calls for calls for community-oriented policing and the recognition that it results in improved relationship between the police and community as well as improved public security outcomes, police-community relations are arguably at an all-time low. Part of the challenge in achieving police-community relations is a disparate understanding of what each part wants and what each party can provide as well as the prioritization thereof. We present a project that worked to improve police-community relations through a conflict resolution process using the Analytic Hierarchy Process. The project was conducted between a group of police officers serving an urban, predominately African American community and representatives of the community over a period of several workshops. The workshops identified the goals, criteria, and objectives of each party as well as the perception of the other party's goals, criteria, and objectives. The results of the meetings, the priorities generated, and similarities / divergences between them are presented.

Keywords: conflict resolution, police-community relations, policing.

1. Introduction

There is a disconnect between what the police think that they are doing and what the community thinks it is doing. Both the police and community agree on some important aspects of what it takes to achieve effective policing but perceptions of the criteria and priorities for what is necessary to achieve effective policing differ. The community perceives more community-oriented public security activities is needed rather than 'policing'. The Analytic Hierarchy Process is a conflict resolution approach that can help parties with poor relations reduce the divide between them to restore good relations.

2. Literature Review

The initial goal of this project is to help the Police and the Community more fully understand each other, so that a second stage can use these understandings to contemplate measurable improvements in the basic relationships between the two parties. This is consistent with the idea of conflict sensitivity (Hussein et al. 2019, Popovych 2021, and Robinson 2021). Conflict sensitivity is the ability of an organization to:

1. Understand more completely the context in which it is operating, intergroup tensions and the "divisive" issues with a potential for conflict, and the "connecting" issues with the potential to mitigate conflict and strengthen social cohesion.
2. Understand the interaction between its intervention and that context, and
3. Act upon that understanding, in order to avoid unintentionally feeding into further division, and to maximize the potential contribution to strengthen social cohesion and commitment to shared values.

In order for both parties, the Police and the Community, to achieve conflict sensitivity they need to be open to “double-loop learning” and enable communication practices that allow them to evaluate both the suitability and efficacy of the politics and norms that guide them (Argyris & Schon 1978; Cartwright 2002). In the context of police and community relationship where social conflict is particularly high, double-loop learning is necessary to promote adaptiveness on both sides to shift the focus from zero-sum solution spaces to win-win spaces by optimizing the gains to both parties for the concessions made. To achieve such an end-state, there needs to be a process that facilitates “mutual responsiveness, reciprocity, and invitation to a new relationship” (Kelman 2009, p. 182). The negotiators in this process must employ problem-solving tools that take both parties through a process that ensures double-loop learning and ensures that both parties are committed to the process (Johnson and Johnson 2005).

3. Hypotheses/Objectives

The objectives of the study were to facilitate the improvement in relations between a police precinct and community that have particularly poor relationships by understanding what each side expects and the perception of what each are doing.

4. Research Design/Methodology

The police group consisting of seven individuals had a combined experience of over 100 years. Following the guidelines provided above, the group developed the hierarchy. They identified three strategic criteria of the police: Cooperation, Public Approval, and Trust. Cooperation is defined by the group as working with the community. The community group consisted of six individuals from the same neighborhood that the police group serves. The group has two points of view with respect to the police objectives. The community group differentiates between Policing and Service. Policing for this group represents today’s perceptions of police activities. Police officers working in the Pittsburgh Police Department are not required to live in the city.

5. Data/Model Analysis

The police hierarchy is illustrated in figure 1 and the community hierarchies in figures 2 and 3.

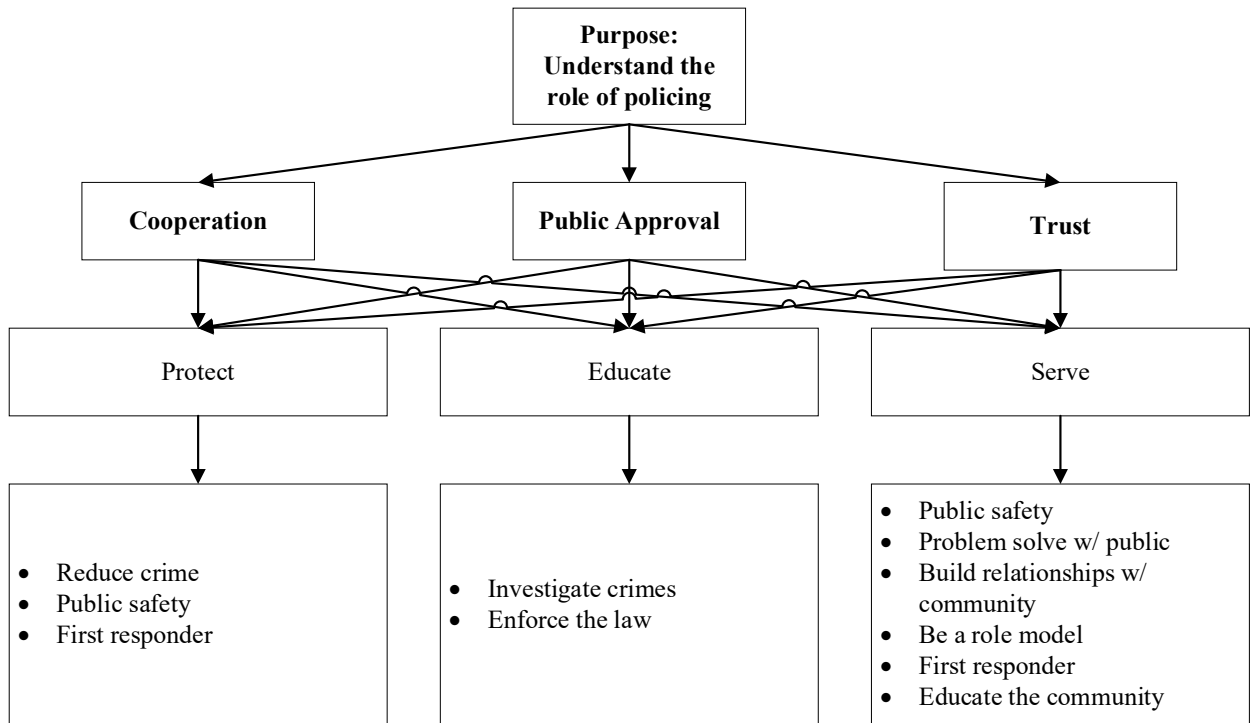


Figure 1. Hierarchy of Objectives

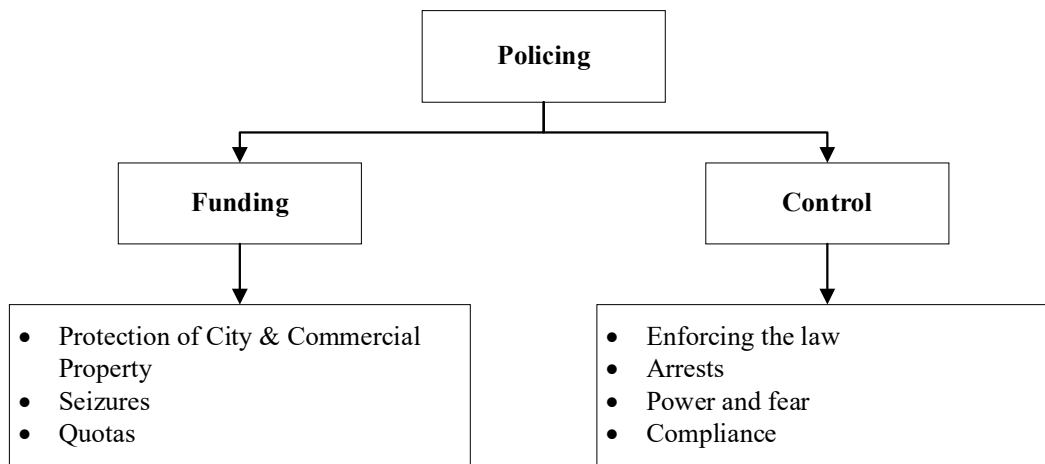


Figure 2. Policing hierarchy

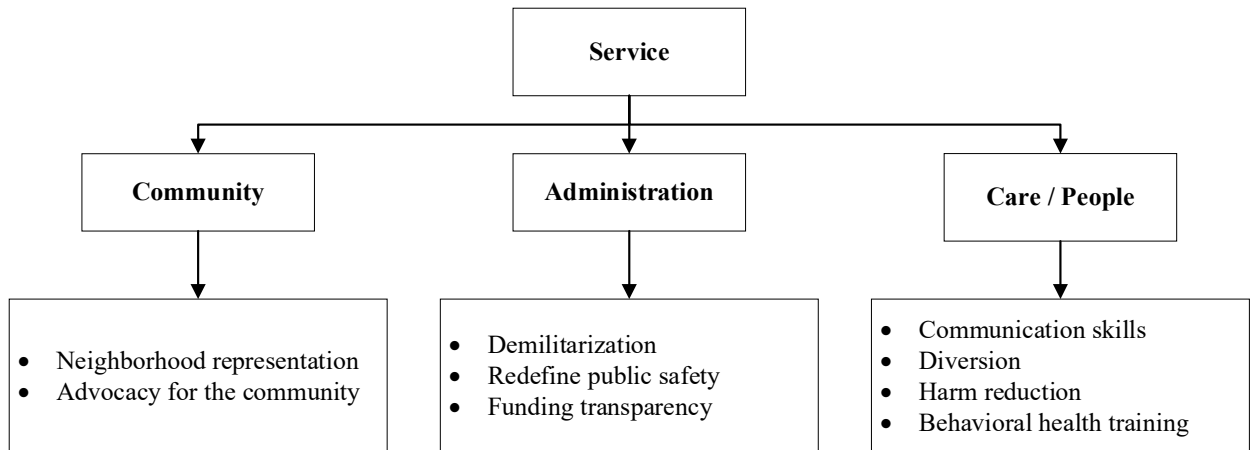


Figure 3. Service hierarchy

6. Limitations

This is just the initial step in the process to resolve the tensions between the police and the community. It was only carried out with one community and police precinct. These results are likely not generalizable and this would need to be conducted in each area where one would like to improve relations.

7. Conclusions

While the community developed a set of action items that the police might take to achieve the goals, we still need to find what steps the police need to take to enhance relations with the community, and vice versa, what should the community do to make sure the police are doing what they say they are doing. In other words, how to enhance mutual trust.

One natural extension of this project is to conduct similar activities in other communities. Not all communities or police organizations will prioritize the goals and objectives in the same way, let alone have the same goals and objectives. Communities and the police that serve them are very distinct and any attempt to set priorities ought to be localized. However, what we presented here is an approach to open a dialogue between the two groups to develop an understanding how each party perceive what it needs and wants along with the corresponding proprieties. There is a need to attempt to validate these findings in other communities to gather more data to convince the police of the need to change the existing training models.

The lack of symmetry in perceptions herein demonstrates that law enforcement and the community, albeit believing they speak the same language, as we have learned, do not. The data compellingly demonstrates an unbridgeable dissonance, absent recognition of this, and the need to change proactively the existing training model.

8. Key References

List here only those 3 to 5 references that are key for the study at hand. As an example:

Saaty, Thomas L., and Luis G. Vargas. 2007. Dispersion of Group Judgments. *Mathematical and Computer Modelling* 46(7-8): 918-925.

Saaty, Thomas L., and Luis G. Vargas. 2012. The Possibility of Group Choice: Pairwise Comparisons and Merging Functions. *Social Choice and Welfare* 38(3): 481-496.

Saaty, T.L., & Peniwati, K. (2007). *Group decision-making: Drawing out and reconciling differences*. Pittsburgh, PA: RWS Publications.

Saaty, T.L., & Shang, J.S. (2007). Group decision-making: Headcount versus intensity of preference. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, 41, 22–37.

Vargas, Luis G., Cristina Moreno-Loscertales, and José María Moreno-Jiménez. 2021. Conflict Resolution in the Era of Cognitive Multicriteria Decision-Making: An AHP-Retributive Approach. *International Transactions in Operational Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/itor.13088>

9. Appendices

| Goals | Cooperation | Public Approval | Trust | Priorities |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------|------------|
| Cooperation | 1 | 7 | 5 | 0.7015 |
| Public Approval | 1/7 | 1 | 1/7 | 0.0586 |
| Trust | 1/5 | 7 | 1 | 0.2399 |

Table 1: Global priorities for police group

Table 2. Priorities of Objectives' Categories

| | Cooperation | Public Approval | Trust |
|----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------|
| Protect | 0.374 | 0.369 | 0.21 |
| Educate | 0.197 | 0.208 | 0.310 |
| Serve | 0.429 | 0.422 | 0.48 |

Table 3. Priorities of goals and objectives

| Priorities of Goals -> | 0.7015 | 0.0586 | 0.2399 | Global |
|--|-------------|-----------------|--------|---------------|
| | Cooperation | Public Approval | Trust | Priorities |
| Reduce Crime | 0.0559 | 0.2058 | 0.036 | 0.0599 |
| Public Safety | 0.2414 | 0.1912 | 0.1923 | 0.2267 |
| First Responder | 0.2525 | 0.1174 | 0.1698 | 0.2247 |
| Investigate Crimes | 0.0901 | 0.1715 | 0.0902 | 0.0949 |
| Enforce the Law | 0.1074 | 0.0368 | 0.2202 | 0.1303 |
| Problem Solve with Public | 0.0579 | 0.0659 | 0.07 | 0.0613 |
| Build Relationship with Community | 0.0944 | 0.1168 | 0.1386 | 0.1063 |
| Be a Role Model | 0.0324 | 0.0287 | 0.0257 | 0.0306 |
| Educate the Community | 0.068 | 0.0659 | 0.0572 | 0.0653 |

Table 4. Priorities of Policing point of view

| Priorities of goals -> | 0.75 | 0.25 | Global |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Control | Funding | Priorities |
| 1 Enforcing the law | 0.20 | | 0.146 |
| 2 Arrests | 0.19 | | 0.142 |
| 3 Power and fear | 0.39 | | 0.289 |
| 4 Protection of city and commercial property | | 0.13 | 0.033 |
| 6 Seizures | | 0.20 | 0.051 |
| 7 Quotas | | 0.67 | 0.167 |
| 8 Compliance | 0.23 | | 0.173 |

Table 5. Global priorities of Service point of view

| Priorities of goals -> | | 0.315 | 0.123 | 0.563 | Global Priorities |
|------------------------|---|-----------|----------------|-------------|----------------------|
| | | Community | Administration | Care/People | |
| 1 | Neighborhood representation. | 0.36 | | | 0.113 |
| 2 | Communication skills. | | | 0.18 | 0.101 |
| 3 | Advocacy for the community. | 0.64 | | | 0.202 |
| 4 | Diversion. | | | 0.3 | 0.169 |
| 5 | Demilitarization. | | 0.32 | | 0.039 |
| 6 | Redefine public safety vs. policing. | | 0.43 | | 0.053 |
| 7 | Harm reduction | | | 0.3 | 0.168 |
| 8 | Funding transparency. | | 0.25 | | 0.031 |
| 9 | Proper behavioral health training with accountability. | | | 0.22 | 0.124 |

Table 6. Side-by-side comparisons of Harris' and the Community's objectives

| Harris' Objectives | Community's Objectives | Priorities |
|--|--|--------------|
| | Community | |
| • Partnership | • Neighborhood representation | 0.113 |
| • Identifying with the community | • Advocacy for the community | 0.202 |
| | Administration | |
| • An open and accessible citizen complaint process | • Demilitarization | 0.039 |
| • Independent external oversight | • Redefine public safety vs. policing | 0.053 |
| • Critical incident review | • Funding transparency | 0.031 |
| • Policies made public | | |
| | Care/People | |
| • Focused deterrence against violence | • Communication skills | 0.101 |
| • A modern use-of-force policy | • Diversion | 0.169 |
| • Bias-free policing | • Harm reduction | 0.168 |
| • Early Intervention Systems | • Proper behavioral health training with accountability | 0.124 |