



Consulting on Crime and Public Policy

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Inspectors at District Stations: An Evaluation of a Pilot Project in San Francisco

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Executive Summary

This evaluation examines the activities of four Assistant Inspectors who were detailed to the Taraval Station and the Central Station from July 1999 to February 2000. This pilot project is a part of the San Francisco Police Department's effort to implement innovative programs within a community policing context.

We conducted interviews with key participants, observed inspector activities, examined log books, memos, and procedures, and compared the SFPD decentralization effort to other departments across the country.

We find that the pilot project was a success in terms of community policing principles and traditional measures. All of the inspectors interacted with the community, solved problems, and provided quality service to the community and to fellow officers. They attended community meetings and examined problems that were of importance to both the neighborhoods and police. They solved serious offenses and day-to-day problems that would have been overlooked. They interacted with their peers and colleagues at the Investigations Bureau and the Gang Task Force. They assisted patrol officers with cases and investigations. These accomplishments provide strong evidence that the program should be continued and expanded to all districts in the department.

Recommendations include three options:

Option 1: Re-institute the program immediately by placing 20 inspectors at all district stations.

Option 2: Re-institute the program immediately, but place 10 inspectors in five stations now and 10 inspectors in the remaining five stations in one year.

Option 3: Re-institute the program by placing four inspectors at two stations now. At six-month intervals place four inspectors at two stations until all ten stations have two inspectors each. In two years all districts will have two inspectors.

To determine which stations receive inspectors first, Captains should be required to submit a brief proposal that includes a plan for how inspectors will be used, how proper equipment (desks, cars, phones, cabinets, etc) will be provided, and where the inspectors will be located at the station (visibility is important both for other officers and the community).

For all three options, SFPD should conduct a staffing study in the Investigations and Field Operations Bureaus to assist in the transition of inspectors to the stations. Because resources are a key issue for patrol and investigations, a study that examines allocation of officers and inspectors is needed.

The department should also determine the criteria for selecting inspectors who work in the stations. It appears that inspectors who are willing to return to the districts, work with the community to solve problems, and have a positive attitude about the program will be more successful in their endeavors.

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Introduction

Decentralizing investigative functions is one of many organizational changes that occur in police departments that adopt community-policing principles. Law enforcement executives seeking closer ties to the community, enhancement of the authority of commanders, and faster resolution to specific crimes have moved detectives and inspectors out of headquarters and into district stations. Some agencies break up their entire investigations bureau and physically move them to district areas. Others may keep investigators at headquarters but disburse their responsibilities according to geographical boundaries. Still others will decentralize some functions like burglary, theft, disorder, and fraud, but maintain homicides, robberies and sex offenses at headquarters. The San Francisco Police Department decided to experiment with this idea in 1999 and placed four Assistant Inspectors in two (of ten) district stations, the Taraval and the Central.

This report examines the work of those four Assistant Inspectors over a period of eight months, from July 1999 to February 2000. We report on their activities and impact in the context of SFPD's community policing principles. We provide specific changes and recommendations for the program.

Methods

The author conducted periodic interviews with the four inspectors either in-person or over the telephone during the 8-month project. He also interviewed district captains, sergeants and officers, other inspectors in Fraud and Sexual Assault, and a captain and

lieutenant in the Investigations Bureau. He observed the activities of the inspectors (in court and on the street), examined their logs and case files, and read other written material provided by the SFPD (memos and SOPs). He conducted an extensive search of the San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner for any and all newspaper articles on inspectors from July 1, 1999 to February 29, 2000. Finally, to obtain a national context for community policing and inspectors Dr. Uchida contacted other researchers and police chiefs about this issue.

Traditional Role of Inspectors

What do we know about San Francisco inspectors and their work? What has been their role within the Investigations Bureau?

The Investigations Bureau is one of five bureaus in the SFPD, with a Deputy Chief, commander, captains, lieutenants, sergeants, and inspectors. Located at the Hall of Justice it is separate from the ten district stations and patrol officers. Except for this pilot project, functions of the Bureau are centralized.

Like other traditional detective bureaus, SFPD inspectors work in reactive environments -- they react to crimes after they have occurred. Typically, inspectors are assigned cases after patrol officers make an arrest or take incident reports. General work, homicide, robbery, sex crimes, burglary, fraud, fencing, fugitives, auto theft, domestic violence, and night investigations are among the units within the Bureau. Inspectors assigned to these units have relatively high status among their peers and usually have more attractive duties and hours than patrol officers. In San Francisco as in other large agencies, it appears that inspectors have greater initiative and are freed from much of the

direct supervision experienced by patrol officers. For the most part San Francisco inspectors are able to control their own time, their pace of work, and even their choice of civilian clothes.

Inspectors' work appears to have specific tasks: look at patrol reports, interview victims, witnesses, complainants, and bystanders; determine who committed the crime, apprehend the offender, charge him/her with crimes, and forward cases to the district attorney. Performance by San Francisco inspectors can be measured by re-bookings, arrests, cases, and the percentage of arrests that result in conviction.

Non-traditional Policing: Inspectors in a Time of Community Policing

Given the traditional reactive role of inspectors, what happens when they are asked to participate in community policing -- a proactive, prevention oriented philosophy? In order to answer this question, we must briefly examine the core elements of community policing to see where and how inspectors fit into the scheme.

Defining Community Policing

The San Francisco Police Department defines community policing as “problem solving through innovative law enforcement and community partnerships to promote public safety.” The SFPD’s framework for community policing includes three strategic components: 1) Community involvement in public safety activity; 2) Problem-solving through targeted enforcement; and 3) Organizational change that improves customer service inside and outside the department. These elements are the means to achieve the goals of controlling crime, maintaining order, and empowering citizens for the purpose of improving the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Community involvement in public safety activity

In San Francisco, community policing is founded on the premise that the police must first develop respect, trust, and support with the community, and then build upon this foundation through a series of active partnerships with the community. Community involvement calls for police to become familiar with the many cultures in the city, their structure, and the activities of the community. This operational strategy means that a continuous information input and feedback process exist between the police and the community. Through its 10 district stations and community liaisons (through SAFE and Neighborhood Safety Partnerships), the SFPD works with its many communities to establish and maintain social order by assisting in alleviating social problems that may lead to crime. These activities include, but are not limited to:

- attending meetings of community groups;
- forming district forums;
- conducting police/community/youth programs (e.g., school liaison programs, mentoring programs); and
- assisting in programs that solve problems over a long term.

With inspectors working with patrol officers and the community, we need to know: How much interaction occurs between inspectors and citizens? Does local outreach take place? Do community groups, associations, and others know the inspectors? Are community needs and priorities acknowledged and addressed? Are citizens informed about outcomes? By whom and how often?

Problem-solving through targeted enforcement

Herman Goldstein first called attention to problem solving and problem oriented policing as an alternative to traditional law enforcement strategies in 1979.¹ He contends that the process of problem solving is flexible and dependent upon the nature of the problem, the cooperation of the agencies involved, and the degree of commitment to problem resolution. Eck and Spelman² advocate the use of the SARA model to engage in problem oriented policing. Basically this involves **S**canning the problem, **A**nalyzing the depths of the problem, **R**esponding with appropriate solutions conducive to a long term resolution, and **A**ssessment of the efficacy of the problem solving strategy. Tailoring solutions to specific community problems is a crucial component of problem solving strategies.

In San Francisco, problem solving is used as an enforcement tool. This means targeting specific crime and disorder problems. In the Tenderloin, the Taraval, the Ingleside, and other district stations, problem solving has occurred with varying levels of success over the past five years.

For inspectors, what is their involvement in the problem-solving process? What is the value-added to the patrol officers? Are cases cleared more quickly? Are problems solved more quickly and efficiently? From the Newport News study (Eck and Spelman, 1987) we know that detectives and inspectors were involved in identifying problems and to a limited extent, took on specific problems themselves, but we do not know the impact of their work on a broader scale.

¹ See, Herman Goldstein, Problem Oriented Policing, NY: McGraw Hill, 1990, and Herman Goldstein, "Improving Policing: A Problem-Oriented Approach," Crime and Delinquency, 25:236-258, 1979.

² John Eck and William Spelman, Problem Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News, Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1987.

Organizational Change

The SFPD has made a commitment to change its organizational philosophy and adopt a “customer service” attitude within the agency and toward the community. This is one facet of a number of organizational changes that are occurring in San Francisco.

Getting the message out to the department and community with a “customer first” attitude is an important aspect of community policing. Another mode is to change the way in which officers’ work. In both instances changes need to occur within the organizational structure and within the way a department conducts its business. Training curricula, decentralization of responsibility, and the culture of policing are among the areas where change is planned. The shift of inspectors to district stations is part of a major organizational change.

Because inspectors have been de-centralized, do they know their role within this structure? What is the relationship between the inspectors and patrol officers? What is the relationship between inspectors in decentralized locations and those at headquarters? What are the ramifications for these changes? How do we compare the work of the “centralized” inspectors to those in the precincts? What types of measures can we use? Do the inspectors take a customer service attitude both internally and externally?

Findings

National Context

Based on contacts with other agencies and a recent national study of investigations and community policing, San Francisco is among a handful of agencies that are experimenting with the decentralization of inspectors.

Site visits to Austin, TX, Honolulu, HI, and Newark, NJ by staff of 21st Century Solutions during 1999 provide insight into the decentralization of investigations. As part of their overall community policing strategy these three agencies decentralized part of their detective bureaus. The Austin Police Department recently decentralized patrol and investigators to six Area Commands. Eight investigators are assigned to each Area commander. They handle general assignments (similar to SFPD's "General Work"), burglaries, and thefts. Homicides, robberies, and sexual assaults remain centralized. New SOPs, performance measures, rules and regulations have been put into place. In Honolulu a similar change took place in 1997. Instead of three patrol districts, the department expanded to six and moved property crime detectives to the stations. In Newark, property crime detectives are assigned to four district stations. They report to the district captain. Homicides, robberies, sexual assaults, and auto theft are centralized.

Because these changes occurred in the last three years it is difficult to assess their effectiveness. However, it appears that the changes in Honolulu and Newark have been accepted by patrol officers and detectives, as they seem to work well on joint projects and problem solving. In Austin the changes took place in mid-1999 (at about the same time that San Francisco started its program), but an evaluation of the effort has not been undertaken.

Recently, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) conducted a national study of the role of inspectors in community policing.³ In particular, PERF was concerned about changes that police and sheriffs' departments made in the structure and function of investigations' bureaus. Departments serving 100,000 or more residents and

³ Colleen Cosgrove and Mary Ann Wycoff, "Investigations in the Community Policing Context," unpublished paper, Police Executive Research Forum, 1999.

having at least 50 sworn personnel were included in the survey design. PERF received 602 useable surveys and then conducted case studies in seven jurisdictions -- Arlington, TX, Boston, MA, Sacramento and San Diego, CA, Spokane County, WA, Mesa, AZ, and Arapahoe County, CO.

Of the 602 agencies responding to the survey, about 15 percent reported making “major changes” in investigations, 20 percent said they had made some changes, and 24 percent said they had started planning for change. Of particular interest to our evaluation are the largest agencies – municipal agencies with over 350 sworn officers (n=97).

Cosgrove and Wycoff report that 83% of the large agencies (80 of 97) have begun to decentralize their investigative units. The researchers classified the 97 agencies into four different models of organizational structuring – 1) detectives are centralized and have citywide responsibilities (n=38); 2) detectives are centralized, but assigned to specific geographic areas (n=27); 3) detectives are decentralized and report to an investigative chain of command (n=57); and 4) detectives are decentralized and report through an area command (n=23).⁴

San Francisco does not fit neatly into any of these categories. Its inspectors are decentralized, report to district captains and central command, and are responsible for handling all crime types except for homicide, sex crimes, child abuse, fatal traffic accidents, and domestic violence. Nonetheless, the PERF study and the information gathered from three other sites show that the SFPD decentralization project is among the leaders in community policing innovation. The department is one of many agencies attempting an important organizational change.

⁴ Unfortunately, the draft report does not indicate how many departments “fit” into each of the four categories.

Back to the Street: Inspectors at the Taraval and the Central

In July 1999, four new Assistant Inspectors were detailed to two District stations. Rob Ziegler and Brian Danker were sent to the Taraval and Garret Tom and Phil Wong were dispatched to the Central. These officers were selected for a number of reasons. First, they were newly appointed inspectors who had a "nexus to the district stations"-- that is they could relate to patrol officers and interact with them more easily than the veteran inspectors who had worked at headquarters for a longer period of time. Second, they were more flexible and open about the work they were about to undertake. Third, they were enthusiastic about the assignment and wanted to work at the district level.

Three of the four inspectors went through training and rotations in different investigative units during the previous six months. Inspector Ziegler went through training, but only worked in Night Enforcement and did not have the opportunity to rotate through other units.

Inspectors Tom and Wong returned to the Central, where they had served as sergeants and patrol officers in previous years. Both speak Cantonese and are well acquainted with the culture and lifestyles of the Chinese community in the Central. They had also worked with the SFPD Gang Task Force and were familiar with Asian gang problems in the community. Their knowledge and experience would lead to arrests of escaped felons and investigations of fraud, extortion, and thefts in the Central. For Inspectors Ziegler and Danker, the transfer to the Taraval meant new experiences. Danker, a 14-year veteran patrol officer worked at the Portrero Station and in the Housing Task Force. Ziegler worked at the Northern Station for almost ten years as a patrol officer. While they had a steeper learning curve than Inspectors Tom and Wong

they were able to make a number of arrests for fraud, burglary, thefts, and other crimes and to engage in a number of problem-oriented policing projects.

When the inspectors first began their work at the district stations there was some confusion over their role and place within the districts. Basic needs had to be filled -- office space, desks, phones, cars, file cabinets were unavailable. Eventually the captains and inspectors found space and equipment, but the program got off to a slow start as a result. Once the inspectors settled in, however, they were able to perform their tasks and work within the stations comfortably.

Captains Michael Yalon and John Goldberg provided the inspectors with guidance and direction at their respective stations. Lt. Marlene Ottone and Captain Sylvia Harper made sure that they followed proper procedures, completed case files, and kept track of their work at the Investigations Bureau.

Community involvement in public safety activity

One of the expectations of the inspectors was their attendance at community meetings to report on neighborhood investigations. Inspectors Wong and Tom attended meetings once every three weeks (11 total meetings) while Inspectors Danker and Ziegler attended meetings twice a month (16 total meetings). At these meetings they learned about neighborhood problems and talked about their own activities as inspectors. These meetings often led to problem solving projects described below.

More important than the meetings however, was the interaction with businesses and residents at the Central. Inspectors Wong and Tom walked the beat at least once a week and talked with people regularly. On Thursday evenings, for example, they would

encounter all sorts of people in gambling dens, on the street, in restaurants and shops. Through their visibility to the public they were able to obtain information, maintain the confidence of shopkeepers, and learn about the "good guys and bad guys." Inspector Tom also reported that he and Inspector Wong received anonymous letters thanking them for their work in dealing with extortionists. He also mentioned that individuals within the Chinese community would seek his assistance in translating letters, dealing with their children's performance in school, and explaining legal issues.

Captain Yalon and Captain Goldberg report that the interaction with the community was a major asset to their community policing efforts. By attending community meetings and participating in District forums, the inspectors could exchange information and explain their work on specific problems.

Problem solving through targeted enforcement

At the Taraval, Inspectors Danker and Ziegler were involved in a number of short- and long-term problem-solving efforts. Under the direction of Captain Yalon and based on input from the community, the inspectors worked on at least seven projects -- tire slashings, West Portal burglaries; Asian gang burglaries; Stonestown shoplifting and fraud cases; horticultural thefts; gang activity at Lincoln High School; and thefts by a plumber's assistant at an apartment complex. These efforts varied in terms of problem type, duration of project, and involved agencies. For example, at Stonestown the inspectors met with store managers and security directors about shoplifting and fraud within the mall. By communicating with these individuals they coordinated surveillance activities, alerted stores to the individuals involved in the thefts, and explained police

procedures. They also notified Taraval officers about the pattern of crimes occurring at the mall. In another project, inspectors assisted in the development and establishment of the Interagency Tire Slash Task Force or "ITSIT". This problem solving effort pulled together over 100 cases of tire slashing to identify patterns and similarities.

At the Central, Inspectors Wong and Tom also worked on problem solving partnerships. Gangs, extortion of businesses in the Chinese community, thefts and shoplifting at the Embarcadero, and bootlegged or "knock-off" Rolexes were among the projects and problems assigned to them by Captain Goldberg. Because of their background on gangs, they became involved in problems created by the "Jackson Street Boys" -- a group that operates meter thefts in San Francisco and Burlingame. By working with the Burlingame police and the gang task force, they assisted in the recovery of burglary tools, cut-off parking meter heads, meter keys, hundreds of dollars of quarters and other stolen property. A second problem type was extortion in the Chinese business community. Based on information from beat officers and their knowledge of the community, both inspectors talked with business owners about extortion during Chinese New Year. An annual ritual among extortionists is the delivery of plants to shopkeepers and restaurant owners. They surreptitiously deliver a large houseplant as a New Year's "gift" and then return within days to pick up their "red envelopes" or protection money (a common practice among the Chinese is to give money as gifts to people in red silk envelopes). This practice occurred in February 2000 and Inspector Tom was attempting to catch the extortionists when they returned for the money. Unfortunately, by the time a warrant had been obtained and served the extortionists eluded the police.

Organizational Change -- Improving customer service

One of the primary elements of SFPD community policing is providing better service within the department and to the community. All four inspectors achieved the goal of improving customer service. For the community, the inspectors picked up cases that would normally "fall through the cracks". This was a common theme expressed by the District Captains, the inspectors themselves, officers in the stations, and other inspectors. An example of this were the events that led to the arrest of Clarence Ma, an 18-year old murder suspect who had been inadvertently released from jail by sheriff's deputies in June 1999. Inspectors Wong and Tom apprehended Ma after receiving a tip from a suspect in a fraud case. The suspect, You Lian Jiang (who spoke only Cantonese), attempted to cash a check for \$2,000 from the Bayview Bank. A uniformed officer at the Central made the arrest and turned him over to the inspectors. During questioning, Jiang wanted to provide information about the whereabouts of Clarence Ma in exchange for his release. The suspect led Inspectors Wong and Tom to a gang "safe house" where Ma was hiding. A surveillance was set up and when Ma arrived in a car they made the arrest. The inspectors seized three guns and burglary paraphernalia from the safe house. Through this case they were also able to obtain information that eventually led to the arrest of Steven Pan, a suspect in a Chinatown shooting that injured seven people. Pan had eluded police for over four years. Lastly, from additional information acquired from the original fraud suspect, Jiang, the inspectors were able to prevent school shootings at two high schools.

The arrests of Clarence Ma and Steven Pan, the seized guns, burglary tools, and violence prevention efforts at the schools occurred because Inspectors Wong and Tom

talked to and questioned a bank fraud suspect. Prior to the pilot project, the case would have been referred to the fraud section. It is likely that the case would have been dropped because no inspectors in fraud spoke Cantonese.

The inspectors also worked at improving relationships with patrol officers. They attended lineups of day and swing watches to talk with officers about crime trends and to provide and receive information that might lead to arrests and the solution of problems. The inspectors were also available to take cases immediately and begin their investigations. This was a critical factor in the case of Clarence Ma described above. In January at the Taraval, officers and inspectors worked together to solve a serious vandalism incident that took place at a middle school and a local recreation center. Five high school students were arrested for breaking 37 windows and slashing tennis nets. Through the cooperation between officers, inspectors, parks, and schools the problem was solved quickly.

All four inspectors interacted with other inspectors and the Gang Task Force. Inspector Danker indicated that he would call inspectors for assistance and advice on all types of cases. He felt that he had a good rapport with other inspectors and wanted to learn as much as possible from them. During his six-month rotation he had worked in fraud, general work, and burglary and maintained relations with those inspectors when he went to the Taraval.

The four inspectors worked closely with the Gang Task Force on a number of cases. They attended meetings and briefings, shared information about their arrests, and sought guidance from the task force on how to proceed with specific cases.

Other measures

The Investigations Bureau collected information on a routine basis from the inspectors on re-bookings, number of cases, number of arrests, and number of community meetings attended. They report the following activity for the period of July 10, 1999 to January 31, 2000:

Activity	Central Station	Taraval Station
Cases Assigned	66	73
Arrests	15*	29
Re-bookings	10*	33
Meetings Attended	11	16

*The log book for Inspectors Wong and Tom shows 25 arrests and 15 re-bookings.

Summary

Overall, the pilot project was a success in terms of community policing principles and traditional measures. All of the inspectors interacted with the community, solved problems, and provided quality service to the community and to fellow officers. They attended community meetings and examined problems that were of importance to both the neighborhoods and police. They solved the most serious offenses by apprehending a murder suspect and seizing guns. They also solved day-to-day problems of horticultural thefts, shoplifting, thefts from autos, bad checks, and vandalism. They interacted with their peers and colleagues at the Investigations Bureau and the Gang Task Force. They assisted patrol officers with cases and investigations. These accomplishments provide strong evidence that the program should be continued and expanded to all districts in the department.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we recommend the continuation of project and an expansion to all 10 district stations, with the following options and suggestions:

Option 1

Re-institute the program immediately by placing 20 inspectors at all district stations.

Option 2

Re-institute the program immediately, but place 10 inspectors in five stations now and 10 inspectors in the remaining five stations in one year.

Option 3

Re-institute the program by placing four inspectors at two stations now. At six-month intervals place four inspectors at two stations until all ten stations have two inspectors each. In two years all districts will have two inspectors.

To determine which stations receive inspectors first, Captains should be required to submit a brief proposal that includes a plan for how inspectors will be used, how proper equipment (desks, cars, phones, cabinets, etc) will be provided, and where the inspectors will be located at the station (visibility is important both for other officers and the community).

For all three options, SFPD should conduct a staffing study in the Investigations and Field Operations Bureaus to assist in the transition of inspectors to the stations. Because resources are a key issue for patrol and investigations, a study that examines allocation of officers and inspectors is needed.

The department should also determine the criteria for selecting inspectors who work in the stations. It appears that inspectors who are willing to return to the districts, work with the community to solve problems, and have a positive attitude about the program will be more successful in their endeavors.