
1967 President's Commission: Has Higher Education Met its Obligation in Reducing Cultural Conflict in Criminal Justice and Society?

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Criminal justice has long recognized the need to improve the officer and organization through education. The 1967 President's Commission suggested a four-year degree for all criminal justice officers to "reduce prejudice, bias, and excessive force". However, until recently, no specific courses were identified to address these issues. While higher education has benefited most officers, it has had limited impact on the organization. This article discusses four main areas: the efforts to provide education, the lack of courses to address cultural conflict (this was the original purpose of the 1967 President's Commission), issues in the workplace, and the influence that the "Philosophy of Punishment" has on officers and criminal justice organizations.

Education has been seen as essential in the efforts to improve the individual and society. While most would argue that the goals/approaches would be different, some believed the improvement of the individual would also result in the improvement of society. Education was viewed as a means of challenging old ideas, beliefs, and values which therefore allows new ideas, beliefs and values into the culture of an organization. Individuals need to

be encouraged to learn new concepts, techniques, procedures and gain empowerment (Northouse, 2001).

Education was also seen as the means to improve the officer and the criminal justice organization. While studies did show improvement of the officer, education had limited impact on the organization. The educated new officer was introduced to the old adages, "This is the way we have always done it", "This is the traditional method of doing things" and the "Officer is the punishment" philosophy (Delaney, et al. 2015). However, as society has changed, the emphasis to improve the criminal justice organization has risen. The organization must learn to change in order to succeed (Butler, 2001; Perroncello, 2002; Fullan, 2004).

The Need for Education

The formal education of law enforcement officers began with the London Metropolitan Police Act of 1829. Sir Robert Peel introduced efforts to "reform and create the modern police force." (Florida State Board of Community Colleges, 1996, p. 12). In 1908, August Vollmer,

the police chief in Berkeley, California, established the first police academy in the United States. Vollmer contacted the University of California at Berkeley to develop the first courses for a minor in criminology. He recruited new police officers from the Berkeley police education program. The first associate degree in criminology was offered by San Jose State in 1930. The need for more advanced education and college preparation for police officers has been recognized by several national commissions and research studies during the last 96 years. (Florida State Board of Community Colleges, 1996).

Law Enforcement Assistance Act (1965)

In 1965, the Law Enforcement Assistance Act (LEAA) provided grants to develop and improve education in criminal justice, and decrease state crime. This resulted in the creation of evaluation and planning commissions, community relations programs for police departments, courses in police science in colleges and universities, comprehensive education in corrections within prison and probation, and the establishment of state police education standards and training in riot prevention and control. The 1965 Act provided specific education programs at colleges and universities for the improvement of officers and supervisors. Programs were also established for the development of advanced education in rural areas, the establishment of regional corrections centers in the South and management education for supervisors (Dept. of Justice, 1968).

1967 President's Commission

While efforts were being made to improve the criminal justice system, society saw little change in criminal justice organizations. The civil rights disturbances in the 1950s and 60s resulted in the creation of the 1967 President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Advancement of Justice. The Commission determined that all officers should possess a four-year degree because

Well educated persons are less prejudiced toward minority groups than the poorly educated. A degree should have a significant positive long term effect on community relations.

Police personnel with two to four years of college should have a better appreciation of people with: different racial, economic and cultural backgrounds, should have the innate ability to acquire such understanding, less bias, prejudice and excessive force (Winslow, 1968).

The commission believed that a degree would result in better officers. However, higher education was seen as an individual effort and not an organizational mandate. Unfortunately, the Commission did not suggest any specific courses.

Minnesota Study

Minnesota is the only state which requires a four-year degree as a condition of employment. According to the Minnesota Police Officers Standards and Training (POST) (1978), the police chiefs and sheriffs exhibited no preference in

college degree area possessed by the officer. Administrators were more concerned about skills the officers acquired during college:

- critical- thinking skills,
- oral and written communications,
- adequate research prior to taking action,
- ability to handle stress,
- successful group presentations,
- adequate introduction to world, ethnic and gender issues.

The accomplishment of a degree was seen as an effort by the individual, having little influence on the organization. There was no standard or priority for the “adequate introduction to world, ethnic and gender issues” except in the general sense (Minnesota Department of Public Safety, 1978).

Individual Responsibility

The development of basic and advanced education has taken several directions since the 1960s. While a few departments have focused on a basic academy and in-service education, most departments left the responsibility for higher education to individual officers. Community colleges and universities developed curricula in law enforcement administration and other criminal justice areas (Stevens, 1983). Johnson (1986) noted officers in Kansas primarily attended in-service and college education for four reasons; personal development, promotion, to learning how to resolve specific situations, and to increase involvement in community service. Many officers were attending college even before the enactment

of mandatory education requirements for recertification. Miller (1994) noticed that the need for specific education, the amount of education, and the quality of education were influenced by three items; the location of the department (rural versus urban), size of the department (large versus small), and the number of officers who needed additional education. Educational levels of administrators were also a factor in the emphasis on education.

Totzke (2002) noted the educational level of the police chief or sheriff determined the emphasis on education for officers. The majority of the police chiefs or sheriffs believed that it was easier to work with a college-educated officer, and that for criminal justice professionals to be perceived on the same level as lawyers and doctors, educational requirements must be raised. College-educated officers had fewer complaints about excessive use of force, disciplinary actions and other infractions (Wymer, 1996). They were seen as having increased flexibility in dealing with difficult situations, better interaction with diverse cultures, better verbal and written communication skills, and greater flexibility in accepting and implementing change (Wymer, 1996; Varricchio, 1999; Totzke, 2002).

Education is still seen as a means of improving the officer and criminal justice organization (Seiter, 2013). Studies support that a college degree reduces the level of bias and prejudice in both law enforcement and corrections (Telep, 2011). However, not all officers have attended college and

this has had a limited impact on criminal justice organizations.

Limited Impact

According to Moore (1997) the intent of the 1967 President's Commission was to change the system. Not to necessarily control crime, but rather to create justice. He felt the intent of having academia help create this change never really materialized, but research did increase. Academia did increase the skills of the officer, but it did not provide the information and stimulus needed to change the system. Moore (1997) stated there are three major concepts of professionalism in criminal justice:

1. Technically competent people
2. People committed to the right values,
3. People who feel authorized to imagine and act

This view has resulted in better leadership and professionalism in criminal justice. Buerger (2004), held that community college and university criminal justice curricula were in conflict with the criminal justice system. After the 1967 President's Commission suggested a four-year degree, colleges/universities combined several existing courses together with a few courses on criminal justice. He felt criminal justice curriculum was designed as a social science, not necessarily to resolve issues in the streets. He stated there was a need to create an educational program which raised awareness and enhanced critical thinking to better deal with situations on the streets (Buerger, 2004).

Cultural Conflict and Education

Culture is the collective beliefs and values of those working within the organization. Some organizations can be characterized as dysfunctional primarily due to problems with their internal culture. Conflicts among other staff members can cause stress, as well as lack of productivity and lack of focus on the organizational mission. While it is important to provide advanced education to achieve the primary goals of the organization (e.g. criminals, inmates, students), it is also important to address the issues that create barriers and conflict.

Bynum (2007) conducted a study involving 187 police officers, deputies, corrections officers and criminal justice professors in Southern Arizona. The study looked at the effectiveness of criminal justice curriculum to address problems in the workplace and society. Respondents were asked several questions regarding the effectiveness of criminal justice education to improve workplace relations and resolve issues. There is an old saying in corrections "It is not the inmates that drive us crazy, it is the staff. We can do things with inmates, we cannot do anything with staff" (unknown).

The summary was that the need for education was determined by the individual in each career stage or life (Bynum, 2007). Some realized education was needed for promotions, personal development, transfer to a specialized unit, or to reach the next stage in their career. Some decided that they had reached a stage in life where additional education was no longer needed.

Buerger (2004) noted most advanced education in criminal justice focused on basic issues. Advanced material should be added to the

information being presented in the basic academy. The training should address specific situations covering the functions of the job, cultural issues, personal development and working with others. Curricula presented by colleges and universities were general in nature and did not adequately prepare the individual for work situations (such as cultural conflict and dealing with other staff members)

Basic Academy as a Filter

A study done in Queensland, Australia (Wimhurst & Ransley, 2007) illustrated the differences between two models using college education in criminal justice. Both models were designed to use education to resolve major issues in the criminal justice system. The first model required all police recruits to attend two semesters at a local college prior to attending the police academy. The second model was college after the academy. If a police recruit had positive beliefs on specific issues, those beliefs would often erode during the academy. Those beliefs would then further erode during the field training sessions. The academy and field training sessions were often taught by current officers of the organization. The instructors introduced the recruits to the existing culture, therefore limiting the impact of the college education. The college degree, by itself, did not guarantee better officer performance or a change in the organization (Worden, 1990). While a college education was shown to benefit the officer, organizational benefits were not as easily identifiable (Wimhurst & Ransley, 2007).

Philosophy of Punishment

How a society decides to punish may vary depending on its culture. Many views of punishment can exist in a criminal justice culture:

- “Eye for an Eye” (equal retribution for a wrong.)
- “Just Desserts” (punishment occurs in the future and may include the offender being assaulted or killed while in jail/prison.)
- “Lock the door and throw away the key” (a conservative view that sees the need to be “tough on crime.”)
- “Rehab for everyone” (a liberal view that wants to reform the system to better address the needs of the offender and society.)
- “The offender is also a victim” (radical point of view that considers the offender as a product of a bad environment.)
- “The officer is the punishment” (the U.S. Supreme court has ruled the “separation from society” is the punishment, not the officer or the system.)

These beliefs exist in the criminal justice system and are often in conflict with each other. Although most officers try to provide a “firm but fair” approach, this may conflict with the “lock the door and throw away the key” and “the officer is the punishment” philosophies of other officers, administration, and elected officials. These

philosophies of punishment have an impact of the behavior of the officers. This creates conflict within the culture of an organization and society.

Cultural Conflict Curriculum

Many in criminal justice and higher education have recognized the need to better educate officers and improve the criminal justice organization. There is debate on which topics should be presented to the officers (firearms training, first aid, driving skills, report writing). The 1967 President's Commission opined that a four-year degree would result in "lower bias, prejudice, and excess use of force". The Minnesota Study (1978) remarked that the skills the officer obtained in college were the most important.

Corley, Nalla, & Hoffman (2005) conducted a study on the issues upon which corrections officers felt higher education should focus. They noted "while corrections staff thought race and ethnic relations should be a focus of a graduate corrections curriculum" (p.390) a review for race and ethnic relations found fewer than three-fourths of introductory textbooks contained information on the subject. Most criminal justice textbooks provided one chapter on the topic (Corley, Nalla, & Hoffman, 2005). A review of the curricula of criminal justice programs in 30 colleges/universities showed at least one class on cultural diversity, ethics, or decision making on each academic level (associate, bachelor, masters, doctoral). Eighteen programs showed classes in all three of these areas (cultural diversity, ethics, or decision making) or similar courses. Eastern Kentucky University has a Social Justice degree.

When the criminal justice professors (Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences members) were asked if one class on cultural diversity was sufficient to change the beliefs and behaviors in criminal justice, all responded – it was not.

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