

THE REFORM ERA OF POLICING: HOW DOES ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE INFLUENCE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE?

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Abstract

Police organizational culture is very strong force in shaping individual police officers' occupational characteristics. Working as a police officer or as a police administrator modifies individuals. While individual officers try to enforce the law and restrict or control the actions of the public to maintain public order, they intentionally or unintentionally change their personal nature. They identify themselves first as police officers and secondly as individuals. How is such a strong occupational culture formed? Does organizational structure influence organizational culture? This study argues that police culture largely shaped in the reform era of policing due to the structural reforms. Structural components affect perceptions of members of organizations, as well as common beliefs. It has been shown that the police generated their own worldview, which is filled with postulates, cultural themes, and ethos in reform era. The concept of professionalization made police organization a bureaucratic organization. Police organizations are granted the use of force and violence in the name of state by the law because they are expected to prevent crime. Police officers are isolated and alienated from the public, who influences police suspicion by exaggerating actual danger of the occupation. Police solidarity is enforced from perceived threat and negative responses by citizens. police organization tried to be autonomous from the rest of the society and developed a we-versus-them attitude among police officers. Accordingly, it can be argued that organizational structure has impact on organizational culture.

Keywords: Reform era of policing, organizational structure, organizational culture, police

Introduction

An organization with a long, intense and varied history generally has a strong and easily differentiated culture (Schein, 1984). Police

organizational culture is very strong force in shaping individual police officers' occupational characteristics. Working as a police officer or as a police administrator modifies individuals. While individual officers try to enforce the law and restrict or control the actions of the public to maintain public order, they intentionally or unintentionally change their personal nature. Members of policing become not only alien to the public that they serve but also alien to their own personal individuality. Prior to starting their work as a police officer, they were John, George, or Ahmet. However after entering the law enforcement profession, they begin to change and become different individuals. They identify themselves first as police officers and secondly as individuals. Diversity among cops is virtually non-existent. How is such a strong occupational culture formed? How is police organizational culture shaped? Does organizational structure influence organizational culture? If so, how did organizational structure in the reform era of policing affect police organizational culture? This study argues believe that police culture largely shaped in the reform era of policing due to the structural reforms. Accordingly, this article aims to take a close look to reform era of policing.

Organizational Structure

Organizational structure simply refers to how organizations are designed. It is the “way in which the parts of the organization are arranged” (Hall in Gortner, Nichols, and Ball, 2007). It can also be defined as the organization chart that regulates the distribution of authority and task responsibility within the organization (Gortner, Nichols, and Ball, 2007).

Structure is the design of organizations which includes “the table of organizations: a listing of offices, departments, positions and programs” (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, p. 342). These elements are closely linked to organizational goals and policies that organizations are supposed to enact. It is a design of fitting the means, activities, and ends together. It is an impersonal arrangement. The essence of modern bureaucracies lays on organizational structure on goals linked to the structure. Structure can be also identified as the reflection of rationalized institutional rules, according to Meyer and Rowan.

Some scholars characterize organizational structure broadly. Perrow (in Gortner, Nichols, and Ball, 2007), for example, assert that organizational structure is very complex and it includes the environment, technology, communication networks, and even its culture. Structures of public organizations are basically determined by the legislative enactment (Gortner, Nichols, and Ball, 2007).

Gortner, Nichols, and Ball, (2007) intriguingly argue that functions of an organization determine the structure of the organization. From this

standpoint, structure and function are tightly connected. Structure is vital for organizations, Arndt and Bigelow (2000) assert, because organizations derive legitimacy through their structures. Legitimacy and structure are interconnected.

Structure reflects the institutional environment not demands of work intriguingly contend Meyer and Rowan (1977). It is critical to reflect the concerns and goals of the organization. It can be used for “control, coordination, or accountability, but there may be signaling function whereby organizational structure as such conveys information to members and outsiders which could not be disseminated effectively through other means. ...structure provides channels through which messages flow, and some permanence is expected...the structure is the message...As organizations and their environment become more complex, organizational structures are increasingly used for signaling, both internally and externally” (Meyer, 1979, p.482-483). Obviously structure is a clear message and signal of organization to employees as well as outsiders.

Structure includes layers of supervision, chain of command, spans of control, departmentalization, division of labor, centralization or decentralization, functional principles, formal networks, formal communication methods and so on. One might argue that structure is the visible design of the organization with accepted principles to accomplish organizational goals.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is an increasingly important issue in the context of analyzing organizations since it is “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group of people from another” (Hofstede in Chen and Nath, 2005, p. 58). It can be viewed as any employee’s “theory of what his fellows know, believe and mean, his theory of code being followed, the game being played” in the organization he works for (Keeling in Walsh, 2004). Culture in any given organization is “the system of...publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time. This system of terms, forms, categories, and images interprets a people’s own situation to themselves” (Pettigrew in Glick, 1985)

Organizational culture defines a shared, unwritten, and constant value system within a given organization. According to Schein (1984), organizational culture consists of artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts are visible aspects of the organizations such as architecture and technology. Espoused values refer to beliefs that rationalize the behaviors of the members of the organization. Underlying

assumptions contain postulations that determine how group members think, feel, and perceive.

It is noteworthy that Schein's culture definition makes emphasis on individual perceptions rather than shared values. "An individual's basic assumptions-invented, discovered, or developed, as he or she learns to cope with problems of external adoption and internal integration- that have worked well enough to be discovered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein in Shivers-Blackwell, 2006). These perceptions shape behavioral basis for organizations' members. Organizations' members act according to these behavioral base when they face a problem during work. Accordingly, it can be argued that an organization's culture can be internalized only by the employees of the organizations.

It is also notable that these perceptions ensure consistency in solving problems. Members of organizations constantly apply same perceptions to problems over time which enables organizations to solve problems in a uniformed way. One, therefore, can predict an organization's behavior in any particular situation by reviewing past behaviors and solutions. Put differently, perceptions of individuals in organizations are integrated and a collective attitude is formed to overcome the problems or to accomplish organizational goals (Heck and Marcoulides, 1993).

Organizational members tend to take for granted these basic underlying assumptions of organizational culture (Chen and Nath, 2005; Nahm, Vonderembse, and Koufteros, 2004). Unconscious assumptions are more powerful but taken for granted since they are less noticeable than espoused values (Schein, 1984).

Organizational culture has four core characteristics; "(a) that it is stable and resistant to change; (b) that it is taken for granted and less consciously held; (c) that it derives its meaning from the organization's members; and (d) that it incorporates sets of shared understandings" (Langan-Fox, 1997, p. 274). An organization's culture substantially affects its members and their activities. That is to say that culture identifies organizations from one another (Schein in Prajogo and McDermott, 2005). Organizational culture shapes behaviors of members of an organization. Changing organizational culture is difficult issue since all aspects of it are stable and difficult to alter (Langan-Fox and Tan, 1997). In other words, organizational culture is the mirror of traditions in any given organization.

Impact of Structure on Culture

Organization size, complexity of hierarchy structure, control mechanisms, and division of labor directly and indirectly influence organizational outcomes. These structural aspects also affect administrative

behaviors and individual behaviors within the organization. Accordingly, structure drastically influences organizational culture (Blau, Heck and Marcoulides in Heck and Marcoulides, 1993). Large organizations, for example, can employ workers with more diverse values and orientation and with different skills, which in consequences affects organizational culture (Wise, 1999). Accordingly, one can argue that organizational structure affects organizational culture.

It is argued that organizational culture “is clearly a multidimensional construct, comprised in this model of several underlying, interconnected processes including organizational structure / purpose, values, task organization, climate and employee attitudes about their work” (Heck et al., in Heck and Marcoulides, 1993, p.216). Briefly organizational structure has an impact on organizational culture through affecting members of the organization. Structure is, according to Parsons and Perrow (in Gortner, Nichols, and Ball 2007), so critical for organizations that it determines what happens and what can be done in organizations.

Organizational structure may affect organizational culture in several ways. First, selection processes of organizations are critical since it can be used to attract, select, and preserve meticulous personality characteristics in organizations (Shivers-Blackwell, 2006). Selection processes can also be used to reinforce or alter behaviors within organizations. Similarly, as Shivers-Blackwell discusses, reward structure influence organizational culture because it can be used to promote certain attitudes and behaviors within organizational context. Unquestionably, promotion practices can function in the same way. Structure may also affect culture through its impact on leadership style because different organizational structures ease different types of leadership, which shapes organizational leaders’ behaviors and attitudes (Shivers-Blackwell, 2006). Certainly this affection eventually influences behaviors of members of organizations and in this way organizational culture. Structure is the most effective way to coordinate and control formal networks related to work activities within organizations (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Feldman and Pentland (2003) by referring structure to organizational routines notably maintain that structure is a source of change. Similarly, they use organizational routines as a referent to actual performances of routines by particular employees, at particular time, and at a particular place. They also argue that organizational routines are source of organizational learning. Subsequently, it can be discussed that if an organization learns new knowledge, it is possible to change its daily routines. If daily routines are changed, organizational culture can adjust itself to new situations and routines. Therefore, if organizational routines, structure, are changed, then culture is subject to change. This is so because new organizational routines

require reinforcing new actions and behaviors. Managers and reward structure are likely to reinforce acting expected behaviors appropriate to existing routines, structure. Departing from these requirements indicates the issue of deviance in the workplace. Supposedly, no employee wants to be a deviant in the organization. Individuals in organizations tend to perform according to existing routines and structure. Consequently, structure has impact on organizational culture.

It is believed that organizational structure is critical for organizations to take external demands into account (Gortner, Nichols, and Ball, 2007). Structure also affects leadership within organizations (Shivers-Blackwell, 2006). This affection causes subsequent effects. For example, perceived role requirements that can be influenced by leaders' expectations may change according to organizational structure.

As earlier noted, Feldman and Pentland (2003) by referring structure to organizational routines notably maintain that structure is a source of change. Therefore, if organizational routines, structure, are changed, then culture is subject to change. This is exactly what happened in the reform era of policing. After the political era the structure had been changed. This new structure gave new perceptions about the nature of the job and occupational responses to problems. Moreover, it can be said that culture is the interaction of an individual with his/her organizational setting.

Structure & Culture in the Reform Era of Policing

History of policing in the U.S. is generally examined into three eras: Political era (from existence of policing to until early twentieth century), reform era (from early twentieth century to 1970s), community problem-solving or community policing era -1970s till today (Kelling and Moore, 1999; Williams and Murphy, 1999; and Stretcher, 1999). Since the political era and community policing era are out of the scope of this study, we will focus on the reform era.

Reform era is a result of the intimacy between politicians and law enforcement organizations in political era. In the political era, police organizations were controlled and used by politicians for political purposes and the police had been subject to abuses such as corruption and partisanship (Kelling and Moore, 1999). This was so because police organizations just like all other governmental agencies was under the command of politicians (see Knot and Miller (1987) for a discussion of political influence on governmental organizations in the 19th century). Since police executives as well as civilians are not pleased with the situation reform initiatives had been taken to make policing free from politics and have autonomy to enforce the law with the early twentieth century (Kelling and Moore, 1999).

Police organizations basically had two assumptions: police officers are inherently uninterested with the work, and economic incentives are crucial to make the work done. Police reformers believed that division of labor and unity of command is critical for successful and corruption-free police organizations. The assumption was that if police officers were divided according to their specializations under different department, they might carry police work more effectively (Kelling and Moore, 1999). It was also thought that some special cases require specialized forces to handle the situation. Special teams were formed to overcome these situations. In addition to that, competence, efficiency, technological improvement, ethical considerations were among reformers priorities as well as putting governmental concern at the top (Stretcher, 1999).

If a pyramid of control had been adopted, the control of officers would be ensured effectively, according to reformers. Therefore, a pyramid of control was structured. This pyramid of control was also influential in information flow downward and upward. In this case, middle managerial positions were structured to structure an effective control system between the top and the bottom (Kelling and Moore, 1999).

Reform era, in Walker's (1977) words, is the era of professionalization because police organizations became autonomous and impersonal to citizens. Police should be neutral in their job. Police introduced new techniques with new mission. Catching criminals was not enough for reformers; police also should prevent crime and rehabilitate offenders. That is the reason police in reform era began to seek preventing crime by car patrols, by watching crime-prone segments of society, and, in short, by making distance between the organization and the rest of society.

Due to these structural elements in today's police organizational culture was shaped in reform era. For example, police organization tried to be autonomous from the rest of the society and developed a we-versus-them attitude among police officers. Isolation indicates the emotional and physical situation in which the police separate themselves from the rest of the society, which makes relationships between the police and citizens problematic. Isolation can be considered a result of the interaction of the police worldview and their ethos of confidentiality (Kappeler et al., 1998). According to the police worldview, the rest of the society poses a potential threat to police authority and autonomy, and police officers stay away from community members. The police, because of this organization-wide perception of threat, isolate themselves from the society. One of the dominant cultural themes of policing, isolation, was shaped because of these perceptions.

Similarly, police organizations' seeking to prevent crime made police officers suspicious about rest of the society because 'others' are believed to inherently pose threat to police officers. In this way, it can be said that

solidarity, an informal commitment among police officers, which is based on “sameness of roles, perceptions, and self-image of the members of” police organizational culture, among members of police organizations developed. Since officers job perceptions and targets were same, a sense of solidarity was developed (Kappeler et al., 1998, p.102). it is obvious that solidarity is still one of the emergent cultural themes of contemporary policing.

According to Kappeler et al. (1998), police solidarity was enforced from perceived threat and negative responses by citizens. In this sense, danger became an element of police organizational culture by drastically affecting police perception. Danger is important in police organizational culture because danger influences perspectives, practices, and themes of police organizational culture (Kappeler et al., 1998; Crank, 2004). Police officers tend to exaggerate the dangerousness of police work whereas various studies show that the real danger of officers’ being victims of police work is comparatively low (Skolnick, 1966; Kappeler et al., 1998; Crank, 2004). Therefore, the police give substantial attention to police-citizen encounters to accentuate the danger of police work.

Due to the fact that the police perceive much more danger than actual danger, police officers become suspicious about citizens with whom they interact. As a result, suspicion (Crank, 2004; Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001; Manning, 1997) becomes a key theme of police organizational culture.

According to Crank (2004), suspicion is a “root metaphor” that supplies the base for a considerable amount of police work (p. 226). Crank, moreover, believes that suspicion is constructed and maintained by stories in the long term. Suspicion has such an importance in police organizational culture that it radically affects police common sense and practices.

Indeed, the theme of suspicion should be considered along with other themes of police organizational culture because suspicion is intertwined with police isolation and police perception of danger. Police officers are isolated and alienated from the public, who influences police suspicion by exaggerating actual danger of the occupation. Crank (2004), for example, states that new officers become suspicious about the rest of society within a few years after starting to work as a cop.

Suspicion is a part of police organizational culture but not a personal characteristic of police officers (Crank, 2004). Rather, suspicion is determined by everyday activities within the occupational environment of police. Since police organizations became more suspicious and perceived greater danger, they became authoritarian. Especially against the minorities, police took an authoritarian stance (Williams and Murphy, 1999).

Police organizations are granted the use of force and violence in the name of state by the law because they are expected to prevent crime, to catch criminals, and to enforce the law, which requires authority. Likewise, police

frequently apply their authority because of the occupation's constant pressure (Skolnick, 1966). In addition, police authority, in the large scale, is influential on police isolation and police solidarity. For example, Whitaker notes that any decline in police authority enhances the police solidarity (in Skolnick, 1966).

The concept of professionalization made police organization a bureaucratic organization. Its members developed a sense of professionalization and stressed depersonalization of relationship with citizens in reform era and resorted to categorization as Merton (2005) stated. Today, the personality of the members of police organizations can still be characterized by this type of impersonality.

Conclusion

It can be consequently argued that organizational structure has impact on organizational culture. As we see in the police organization case, structural components affect perceptions of members of organizations, as well as common beliefs. It has been shown that the police generated their own worldview, which is filled with postulates, cultural themes, and ethos in reform era. Police created their own world through police organizational culture. They believe that they are different from rest of the society. The rest of the society is "they," who are against "us," according to common beliefs formed in police organizational culture. This way of thinking shaped today's police organizational culture and continually has been enhancing police solidarity; isolating police from the public; and making police suspicious since, according to police organizational culture, the society is considered as a potential danger and enemy to the physical well-being and authority of the police. Police acted in the light of these cultural themes which are still fundamentally determining how police organization act and work in the community policing era.

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