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ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Their hot spots interventions would still require community engagement, but engagement that focuses on mobilizing community efforts to deal with hot spots.
- ⁱⁱ Taken to an extreme, hot spot policing could result in the elimination of beats as a way for organizing patrol. At least two departments (Overland Park, Kansas, and Redlands, California) have adopted that approach, assigning officers to hot spot problem-solving tasks rather than patrolling beats.

TAKING IMPLEMENTATION SERIOUSLY: A RESPONSE TO MASTROFSKI, WEISBURD, AND BRAGA

EDWARD R. MAGUIRE

Mastrofski, Weisburd, and Braga (hereafter "the authors") propose an ambitious plan for the adoption and evaluation of hot spots policing in American police agencies. Their proposal is logical, rooted firmly in scientific evidence, and well-argued. I agree for the most part with its fundamental premise. At the same time I share some of the concerns raised about hot-spots policing in a recent critique by Dennis Rosenbaum (2006). Given page limits, I don't present a comprehensive critique, nor do I repeat most of the concerns already raised by Rosenbaum. Instead I focus on just one issue: the capacity of police agencies to implement and sustain the proposed reforms with the intended fidelity and dosage. Paying more serious attention to implementation issues will strengthen an otherwise sound proposal.

The study of innovation in organizations provides some useful insights for evaluating the authors' proposal. Innovation theorists have found it necessary to draw a distinction between different classes or categories of innovations. For example, more than three decades ago, Downs and Mohr (1976:701), in seeking to explain a pattern of disparate findings in innovation research, concluded that: "the most straightforward way of accounting for this empirical instability and theoretical confusion is to reject the notion that a unitary theory of innovation exists and postulate the existence of distinct types of innovations whose adoption can best be explained by a number of correspondingly distinct theories." Consistent with innovation research more generally, research on police innovation has drawn distinctions between different categories of innovations. For instance, Moore, Sparrow and Spelman (1997), drawing on Damanpour (1991), classified innovations in policing into four categories: strategic, administrative, technological, and programmatic. King (2000) used a similar scheme containing five categories: radical, management technical, line technical, administrative, and programmatic.ⁱ

Regardless of the specific typology used, thinking of different categories of innovation is vital for at least two reasons. First, some innovations are easier to adopt than others. Those that can be purchased or implemented in a canned way are more "adoptable" than those that lack specificity or require significant adaptation or tailoring to local circumstances. For example, getting agencies to purchase a new type of firearm or software is likely to be easier than implementing a strategic or radical innovation like hot spots policing whose adoption would "fundamentally restructure urban policing" (to use the authors' words).ⁱⁱ Second, understanding the

differences between types of innovation focuses us more sharply on the explanatory variables most likely to influence the adoption of those innovations. The authors have clearly proposed a "radical" (King, 2000) or "strategic" (Moore, Sparrow, and Spelman, 1997) innovation – one that would significantly alter the way police work is carried out, managed, and structured. Given the ambitious and far reaching nature of the proposal, there are reasons to question whether the proposed innovation can (or will) be adopted with the prescribed levels of fidelity and dosage. It would be useful to test hypotheses about which social forces or explanatory variables regulate the nature and extent with which strategic innovations get adopted. The proposal pays short shrift to adoptability concerns.

We don't need to look back very far into the history of policing to find another radical or strategic reform movement – problem-oriented policing – with far reaching implications for how police work is done. In fact, the authors of this proposal have all contributed key insights to the literature on problem-oriented policing (POP). Several recent studies have cast doubt on the extent to which problem-oriented policing has been implemented in ways consistent with Goldstein's (1990) early reform prescriptions. For instance, Cordner and Biebel's (2005:155) research in the San Diego Police Department, an agency widely acclaimed as a worldwide leader in the implementation of problem-oriented policing, found that non-specialist officers only "tended to engage in small-scale problem-solving with little formal analysis or assessment." Cordner and Biebel (2005) concluded that it is time to draw a distinction between the everyday "problem-solving" carried out by officers, and the more intensive forms of "problem-oriented policing" envisioned by reformers. Bichler and Gaines (2005) examined the extent to which officers are effective in identifying the problems in their assigned geographic areas. They found "little consistency between focus groups of officers working in the same district" in a medium-sized southern police department (Bichler and Gaines, 2005:68). Taken together, this recent wave of research paints a glum picture of a reform movement in which the reality of what is practiced on the streets looks very different from what the original architects of the reform envisioned. While problem-oriented policing is practiced with fidelity by some officers and some specialized units some of the time, to our knowledge it is not practiced routinely by generalist police officers in any agency.

A recent reflection on the current state of problem-oriented policing by two of the proposal's authors concluded that shallow problem-solving efforts with "weak analyses, mostly traditional responses, and limited assessments" are the norm (Braga and Weisburd, 2006:149). Yet, they also concluded optimistically that even shallow implementation of problem-oriented policing still produces crime prevention benefits. They urge problem-oriented policing reformers to abandon their quest for the ideal and "embrace the reality of...ad hoc shallow problem-solving efforts" (Braga and Weisburd, 2006:149). It is not difficult to imagine researchers reaching a similar conclusion about hot spots policing a decade or two from now.

Radical or strategic reform efforts in policing, including team policing, community policing, and problem-oriented policing, all seem to have encountered a seemingly insurmountable set of constraints in their quest to alter the core technologies of policing. The current proposal pays insufficient attention to these constraints. Some of the "usual suspects" among these constraints include culture, structure, environment, history and tradition. Strategic reform efforts in policing often seem to clash with widely held beliefs among both officers and key stakeholders about how the job of policing should be done. The history of police reform is littered with well-intentioned and potentially effective reforms that paid insufficient attention to implementation constraints.

THE ROLE OF IMPLEMENTATION IN EVIDENCE-BASED CRIMINOLOGY

All three of the proposal's authors are affiliated with the Center for Evidence Based Crime Policy at George Mason University and their proposal is consistent with the emerging evidence-based criminology (EBC) movement. EBC holds significant promise for expanding the policy reach and the relevance of criminology. Evidence-based criminology tends to treat criminal justice organizations as a black-box. The implicit assumption seems to be that if there is sufficient evidence that a program or policy "works," organizations will embrace it, support it, and implement it. This viewpoint is consistent with a rational choice model of innovation adoption in organizations. However, four decades of research in the organizational sciences (including public administration) fail to find strong support for rational choice theories of organizational behavior. Since the late 1960s, organizational scholars have invested substantial effort in specifying and testing theories that seek to explain the seemingly irrational behaviors of organizations. Irrationality is a particular concern among public sector organizations, which are often able to persist in spite of compelling evidence of their ineffectiveness and inefficiency (Meyer and Zucker, 1989). The unfortunate reality is that evidence about what works is an insufficient motivator to compel people and organizations to do things differently. Implementation is currently the Achilles heel of the evidence-based criminology movement. Consider evidence-based medicine (EBM), an older and more mature evidence-based policy movement than EBC. In spite of all the progress made by EBM, many physicians continue to prescribe treatments that have been shown to harm (and sometimes kill) their patients. One study concluded that "there is sufficient evidence to suggest that most clinicians' practices do not reflect the principles of evidence-based medicine but rather are based upon tradition, their most recent experience, what they learned years ago in medical school or what they have heard from their friends. The average physician is said to read scientific journals approximately two hours a week and most are likely overwhelmed by the volume of material confronting them" (Eisenberg, 2000). Another study noted that the "lag between the discovery of more

efficacious forms of treatment and their incorporation into routine patient care is unnecessarily long, in the range of about 15 to 20 years. Even then, adherence of clinical practice to the evidence is highly uneven" (Institute of Medicine, 2001). Although evidence-based medicine has attended to implementation issues much more seriously than evidence-based criminology, the medical field continues to evidence a substantial gap between knowledge and practice.

CONCLUSION

The authors articulate a clear argument for launching a national effort to support the adoption and evaluation of hot spots policing in American police agencies. The argument is based firmly in the evidence-based criminology tradition with its reliance on randomized trials "to assess the overall impacts of hot spots policing on crime." Although five randomized trials have already evaluated the effectiveness of hot spots policing, little (if any) scientific progress has been made in illuminating implementation issues. The current proposal would add to the existing collection of effectiveness studies but there is no indication that it would focus any systematic attention on implementation issues.

Organizations vary widely in their capacity to adopt innovation, and innovations vary widely in the extent to which they are easily adoptable by organizations. The authors propose the adoption of a particularly complex strategic innovation – one that will fundamentally alter the way police agencies do their work. While accumulating further research evidence on the effectiveness of the proposed innovation is certainly sensible, the time has come for evidence-based criminology to pay more attention to implementation issues. Evidence-based medicine researchers have discovered a lengthy "implementation gap" – the period of time between which scientific evidence becomes available and clinical practice begins to change in response to that evidence (Dopson, et al., 2003; Institute of Medicine, 2001). Evidence-based criminology has focused so intently on accumulating high-quality research evidence on the effectiveness of interventions that insufficient attention has been paid to understanding the agencies charged with implementing those interventions. As a result, little is known about the implementation gap in criminal justice.

The authors can improve the relevance and policy reach of their proposal by designing a systematic research agenda to explore the capacity of American police organizations to adopt hot spots policing. More generally, evidence-based criminology can benefit from blending insights from criminology and organizational science in an effort to understand not only whether interventions reduce crime, but whether agencies are capable of implementing and sustaining those interventions.

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- ⁱ King (2000) treated the four categories used by Moore and his colleagues as a point of departure for his own research on police innovation. King chose the term "radical" as a substitute for "strategic." He also split the "technological" category into two categories: line technical and management technical.

ⁱⁱ King (2000:310) characterizes line-technical innovations as those that would be used primarily by street officers as opposed to other people in police organizations. King argues that line-technical innovations that “are perceived by line police officers to enhance their law enforcement image will be more readily adopted” than technical innovations that do not enhance the law enforcement image.

HOT SPOTS DO NOT EXIST, AND FOUR OTHER FUNDAMENTAL CONCERNS ABOUT HOT SPOTS POLICING

RALPH B. TAYLOR

Mastrofski, Weisburd and Braga’s (2009) policy proposal (MWB hereafter), comes from three of the most respected policing researchers in the discipline. Among them they share far over half a century of policing research and policy expertise. Their research and the advice they have given police departments have done much to shape policing in the U.S. and elsewhere. They propose a national policy supporting hot spots policing (hereafter HSP).

Despite the sagacity, individually and collectively of the team, this work suggests such a proposal is premature because fundamental questions about and misunderstandings of hot spots or hot spots policing have not yet been resolved. Further, the proposed policy may create adverse side effects.

Readers should bear in mind three points. First, this author has never claimed to be a policing researcher, nor have police departments ever sought his advice. (Nor, after this piece, are they likely to in future!). Second, given space limitations the points here are delivered unadorned. This may create a more callow impression than intended. Third, the intent here is to stimulate debate, not be gratuitously critical.

MWB are to be toasted for developing their bold proposal, for opening the debate on whether we need a national policing policy and for asking would it look like. The ideas proposed deserve serious attention. What types of initiatives could serve as national policing templates is a most worthy topic for national debate.

My comments here raise the following concerns:

1. Hot spots do not exist in the real world. To believe they do is to commit the logical fallacy of reification.
2. The most important abstract quality of hot spots may **not** be that they are hot spots. To believe so is to commit the logical fallacy of misplaced concreteness.
3. There is no one set definition of the policies and procedures that constitute HSP. We know where this places police, but no consensus has emerged about what police do next. In short, there may not yet be a coherent set of policies, procedures, practices and strategies most would agree represent the core of HSP.
4. Advancing HSP as a national policing policy over and above other plausible initiatives is at best premature. Even if we disagree on the merits of the above three points, the sound scientific basis for establishing the significantly superior effectiveness and cost effectiveness of HSP *relative* to other potential national policing policies