



INTELLIGENCE-LED POLICING

a new paradigm in law enforcement



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Originating in the UK, the intelligence-led policing concept has its foundations in recognizing that police were spending too much time responding to crime and too little time targeting offenders. In 1993, the Audit Commission advocated for an increased use of intelligence, surveillance and informants to target major offenders so that police could be more effective in fighting crime rather than responding to it.

Intelligence-led policing is philosophically close to several other crime fighting philosophies: Problem-Oriented Policing; CompStat; and Community Policing. It is closest to problem-oriented policing, and to some degree the accountability mechanism of CompStat, yet is distinct from both of these. Intelligence-led policing defines a strong role for analysis similar to CompStat, establishing it as the basis for decision-making that follows. However, where problem-oriented policing is a bottom-up philosophy that places street-level police officers at the forefront of problem identification and resolution, intelligence-led policing is more hierarchical and emphasizes the top-down approach to law enforcement. Criminal intelligence flows up to decision-makers at the executive level, who set priorities for enforcement and prevention, and then passes these priorities back down to lower levels of the organization for operational tasking.

Intelligence-led policing also retains differences from community policing. In its original formulation Intelligence-led policing could be considered incompatible with tenets of the community policing philosophy - community contact and empowerment. Where community policing emphasizes policing to the needs and the desires of the local community, intelligence-led policing is a process whereby strategy and priorities are determined through a more objective analysis of the criminal environment. As such, it is possible that crime reduction priorities can differ from the needs of the community as perceived by local people. For example, local community groups may indicate to community officers that they are concerned about local youths hanging out on a street corner, but may be unaware that an organized drug ring operates in the same neighborhood. Objective analysis of the criminal environment may suggest to police administrators that the organized drug ring is a more pressing priority. Community input, while often sought, is

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therefore not necessarily a key factor in Intelligence-led policing. However, community input is a dominant information source for intelligence-led policing.

In the US, debate continues about the use of the word 'intelligence' within the context of policing because of public concerns stemming from abuses of police intelligence activity in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, the term information-led policing is sometimes used by some departments and scholars. This term is however misleading. Information is simply raw data, while intelligence is analyzed information that has been synthesized to create a more holistic view of the criminal environment. Further concerns that are commonly voiced in the US are that government legislation resulting from the abuses of the 1950s and 1960s limit the right of police departments to retain information in criminal intelligence files. This sometimes results in police departments being over-cautious in their interpretation of 28 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 23 and as a result over-cautious in their handling of potentially useful criminal intelligence.

There have also been a number of concerns in regard to the adoption of a police strategy that places greater emphasis on the use of confidential informants and surveillance. While policing has a long tradition of using informants, questions have risen about their increased use both in terms of the financial benefits of using paid informants and in regard to the moral and legitimacy issues for police services. Increased use of surveillance, while not only expensive, has also been questioned because some people view this as an intrusive and excessive tactic for the government to employ against (often minor) offenders. In both these cases it can be argued that these objections stem from a misunderstanding of the difference between the tactics used to gather information and intelligence-led policing as a management strategy used to determine priorities and police activity.

It is too early to pass judgment on the crime reduction benefits of intelligence-led policing because long-term studies of police forces that have fully implemented and adopted intelligence-led policing have yet to be conducted. In the UK, some recent short term studies have identified internal implementation problems associated with intelligence-led policing in police agencies. These problems include technical, organizational and cultural factors that might inhibit an adoption of intelligence-led policing. For example, the strategy emphasizes both horizontal and vertical information and intelligence sharing among police agencies so that executive decision-makers can establish objective crime reduction policies, but this approach is being implemented into a policing environment that has traditionally rewarded individual (not shared) knowledge of the criminal world, knowledge often used to effect arrests without thought to any longer-term crime reduction strategy. Furthermore, a clear definition of what should be evaluated from a short term success rate appears elusive: police agencies like large arrest numbers. In some parts of the world the interpretation of Intelligence-led policing appears to be relatively fluid as police departments experiment with different organizational philosophies, priorities and configurations, and as they attempt to integrate community-oriented concerns into the managerial decision-making of law enforcement.