CHAPTER 4
FOUNDATIONS OF POLICE ORGANIZATION

Chapter Overview

Police departments are typically organized according to classical organizational principles. Some departments have incorporated innovative or contemporary features such as participative management or community policing into their organizational philosophy, but most departments, especially larger ones, use classical organization to a degree.

This chapter is devoted to the discussion of these principles in relation to policing. As noted in Chapter 1, classical organization theory is the oldest management philosophy in existence today and thereby provides the foundation for any study of organizations.

Due to the length of time classical organizations have existed and the depth of study to which they have been exposed, there is a great deal more information on classical organizations than on new organizational forms.

Classical organization theory is characterized by a highly ordered or organized structure, and police departments generally adhere to this philosophy of order and structure.

The sections that follow outline the tenets of the classical organization theory and how they are applied in traditional police management. Human relations and contingency theories that came after classical theory are described in Chapter 5.

By examining the various theories, the police manager is provided with a variety of ways to manage the police organization. It is the responsibility of the police executive to select internally consistent structural and management philosophies that enable the department to most effectively and efficiently serve the needs of the community.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the roots of classical organizational theory and its relation to bureaucracy.
2. Know how scientific management is applied to organizations today.
3. Determine how the principle of hierarchy or chain of command is used in the police setting.
4. Understand the importance of authority in the police department.
5. Explain how and why specialized units are created in the police organization.
6. Know the deficiencies or criticisms of classical organizational theory.

7. Critique the criticisms or defend classical organizational theory.

**Chapter Outline/Lecture Notes**

I. Introduction

Police departments are typically organized according to classical organizational principles.

Some departments have incorporated innovative or contemporary features such as participative management or community policing into their organizational philosophy, but most departments, especially larger ones, use classical organization to a degree.

Classical organization theory is characterized by a highly ordered or organized structure, and police departments generally adhere to this philosophy of order and structure.

By examining the various theories, the police manager is provided with a variety of ways to manage the police organization.

It is the responsibility of the police executive to select internally consistent structural and management philosophies that enable the department to most effectively and efficiently serve the needs of the community.

II. Traditional Police Organization

The **traditional or classical police organization** is a quasi-military model. It is termed quasi-military because early police departments adopted structures or organizations similar to those used in the military.

In 1829 Sir Robert Peel used the quasi-military model and established the following principles of policing which are engrained in American policing today.

- The police must be stable, efficient, and organized along military lines.
- The police must be under government control.
- The absence of crime will best prove the efficiency of police.
- The distribution of crime news is essential.
- The deployment of police strength both by time and area is essential.
• No quality is more indispensable to a policeman than a perfect command of temper; a quiet, determined manner has more effect than violent action.

• Good appearance commands respect.

• The securing and training of proper persons is at the root of efficiency.

• Public security demands that every police officer be given a number.

• Police headquarters should be centrally located and easily accessible to the people.

• Policemen should be hired on a probationary basis.

• Police records are necessary to the best distribution of police strength.

The quasi-military model has long standing in the police community and was advocated for by O.W. Wilson in the 1950s. This model gave way to the professional model of police administration, which is highly structured and emphasized control. This is the model that is in use today.

III. Classical Organizational Theory

A. Scientific Management

1. **Scientific management** is the study of work and how it is performed to increase worker productivity. This resulted in the belief that scientific principles were applied to work; workers would exert the least amount of effort in accomplishing the greatest amount of work.

2. Taylor believed work would improve if management analyzed tasks and assumed more responsibility. These responsibilities included:

   a. Develop a science for each element of a man’s work, which replaces the old rule-of-thumb method.

   b. Scientifically select and train, teach, and develop the workman, whereas in the past he chose his own work and trained himself as best he could.

   c. Heartily cooperate with the men so as to insure all of the work being done is in accordance with the principles of the science that has been developed.
d. There is an almost equal division of the work and the responsibility between the management and workmen.

3. Taylor also provided the concept of functional supervision, which is practiced by supervisors who are specialized and provide supervision for only those areas of the job in which they have expertise.

4. The rational man theory dictated that people work for rewards (money) and, when properly rewarded, are productive.

5. Henri Fayol, the other principal contributor to scientific management, concentrated on management of the organization. He developed five principles he felt were imperative if an organization was to be successful:

   a. A program of action prepared by means of annual and 10-year forecasts.

   b. An organization chart to guarantee order and assure each man a definite place; careful recruiting and technical, intellectual, moral, administrative training of the personnel in all ranks in order to find the right man for each place.

   c. Observation of the necessary principles in the execution of command (i.e., direction).

   d. Meetings of the department heads of every division; conferences of the division heads presided over by the managing director to insure coordination.

   e. Universal control, based on clear accounting data rapidly made available.

B. Weber’s Principles of Management

Weber studied organizations and attempted to determine identify what principles made them efficient. He believed these principles, if identified, could be adopted by other organizations and they too would become more efficient.

Bureaucratic management is a rational management structure to better administer work processes. Weber was the father of “bureaucracy.”

Weber’s principles of a bureaucratic structure relating specifically to police management are:
Well-defined hierarchy of authority

Specialization

Formalization

Impersonality of management

Personnel decisions based on merit

1. Hierarchy of Authority

The hierarchy of authority is also known as the chain of command and entails the superior-subordinate relationship throughout the department, wherein each individual is supervised by a superior officer.

The chain of command provides the executive a significant amount of control over the department. Officers at each level in the chain of command must be well informed about departmental activities and responsibilities for the chain of command to be effective.

There is no set method for determining how many levels of hierarchy should exist, however, as the department grows in size, more levels are added.

A natural problem associated with hierarchy is excessive layering—where there are too many levels of rank. This also is known as being “top heavy.”

This hierarchy of authority also implies that officers at various levels in the chain of command possess different skill sets.

a. Span of Control

i. Span of control refers to the number of officers or subordinates that a superior supervises without regard to the effectiveness or efficiency of that supervision.

ii. Normal span of control for a patrol sergeant is 6–10 officers.

iii. The complexity of the work assigned and the physical working conditions can also affect span of control. Simpler and less complex tasks require less supervision.
iv. The higher the rank of the individual in the chain of command, the smaller the span of control. The span of control also determines the number of levels within the chain of command.

v. Those critical of span of control advocate for larger span of control (more than 6–10 subordinates).

b. Unity of Command

i. **Unity of command** refers to placing one and only one superior in command or in control of every situation and every employee. This concept is instituted to ensure that multiple or conflicting orders are not issued by several superior officers to the same police officers.

ii. Unity of command also ensures that all police officers are aware of their immediate commander’s orders and that the immediate commander is aware of the task in which subordinates are involved.

iii. Emergency or tactical situations may develop where a superior may have to exert authority outside the pyramid of authority or chain of command.

c. Delegation of Authority

i. **Delegation of authority** is the assignment of tasks, duties, and responsibilities to subordinates while at the same time giving them the power or right to control, command, make decisions, or otherwise act in performing the delegated responsibilities.

ii. Delegation of authority follows the chain of command and is a method of task assignment where specific responsibilities are given to subordinates.

iii. Delegation of authority is accomplished by two methods:

   • **Policy formulation** refers to the development of general orders, standard operating procedures, and other written documents generated by executives within the police department.
• **Direction** refers to the orders initiated by the chief, unit commander, or supervisor to guide subordinates’ actions toward the accomplishment of some organizational objective. Direction is also used to clarify written directives.

  o Direction is frequently given at staff meetings. A **vertical staff meeting** consists of bringing together members from each level of the chain of command within a particular operating unit and soliciting their input for decision making.

  o Along with direction is accountability for accomplishing the duties and assignments.

2. **Specialization**

Police **specialization** refers to division of labor, or job differentiation.

When assigning tasks, care must be taken to ensure the groupings contribute to departmental effectiveness. Generally, tasks are grouped according to four criteria: function, geography, time, and level of authority.

a. **Function**

   i. When tasks are grouped according to function, job specialization is created. Function refers to how a particular task is performed and the purpose of performing it.

   ii. The reason for functional specialization within a police department is usually to relieve patrol of burdensome, time-consuming tasks and to allow them to concentrate on repressing crime and answering calls for service.

   iii. Major areas of functional specialization are: patrol, traffic, criminal investigation, vice, delinquency prevention, communications, records, and staff services such as planning and training.

b. **Geography**

   i. In **geographical differentiation or specialization** a department uses substations or precinct stations as opposed to having all officers work out of a central headquarters.
ii. Some of these geographical divisions are commanded by a captain or other high-ranking commander and to some extent they become a police department all their own.

c. Time

i. Police departments are responsible for law enforcement function 24 hours a day and they must allocate personnel in such a manner that they can cover all shifts or watches at all hours of the day. There are several different shift plans depending upon the needs of the department.

ii. Administratively it is most desirable to have permanent shifts and assignments so officers can learn their beats and be more effective. This tends to make officers more alert and less fatigued, more productive and less prone to accidents. Officer morale is negatively affected after time and departments therefore rotate shifts.

iii. Shift work can present problems with a person’s circadian rhythm or biological clock that regulates all body functions. When interrupted physiological stress or fatigue can result.

d. Level of Authority

i. Grouping tasks by level of authority directly ties specialization with chain of command and to a degree determines the rank structure within a given police department.

ii. An organizational arrangement that strictly follows the level of authority principle produces an excessive number of ranking officers and violates the principle of span of control.

iii. Conversely, an imbalance of rank at each hierarchical level results when a department is organized so that the fewest possible number of officers hold rank.

e. Functional Specialization: Pros and Cons

i. Advocates for specialization list the following as reasons for functional specialization: reduces the need for training; increases job control; increases job proficiency; provides career enrichment for some officers.
ii. Advocates against specialization list the following as reasons not to have functional specialization: diminishes territorial coverage; job dissatisfaction increases; administrative coordination is made more difficult

iii. The following factors should be considered when making a decision regarding specialization: quality of personnel; need; departmental goals

3. Formalization

Written rules are the heart of the traditional police organization because they provide direction and control. Written directives and rules generally follow three forms: policies or procedures, special orders, and memoranda.

A **policy or procedure** (some departments refer to their guidelines as policies, while others refer to them as procedures) generally is a comprehensive set of guidelines for a specific activity or duty.

A **special order** can take two forms:

a. It can be a directive that is temporary in nature. In this way, it is usually issued to address special or infrequent events and makes temporary assignments and delineates the task to be performed while on temporary assignment. Once the duties are completed, the special order is suspended and officers resume their assigned regular duties.

b. It can also be used to provide additional guidance or supplement or clarify a policy or procedure for individual units.

All of this specialization is supported and reinforced by **memoranda**. In the past memoranda were in written form; however, today they are more commonly found in the form of e-mail communication.

Two factors can mediate formalization: department size and degree to which work within an organization can be formalized. Simple, routine tasks are easily formalized, whereas complex nonroutine tasks are not amenable to formalization.
IV. Criticisms of Traditional Police Management

A. Authoritarianism

The managerial atmosphere surrounding the traditionally organized police department largely is authoritarian as a result of the chain of command. The traditional police organization’s structure creates decreased morale at lower ranks, and one-way communication creates a perception that the top command is sometimes arbitrary and isolated in its action.

There has been some criticism of police departments for being too bureaucratic, specifically, excessive layering or having too many levels of rank. It is believed that excessive layering leads to authoritarian leadership, a reduction in organizational innovation, and increased morale problems as officers become distanced from decision making.

V. In Defense of Classical Theory

If all the criticisms of the classical theory were taken at face value one would tend to believe the classical theory is doomed to extinction. Classical theory or traditional police administration remains a viable structural alternative that is used extensively in policing and government.

Classical theory survives because it focuses on accountability. All within the organization should be held accountable for their performance. This is particularly true given the history of corruption, politics, and problems with excessive use of force in law enforcement.

Although classical organizational theory is straightforward and easily understood by all employees exactly how closely police departments adhere to classical organizational principles is questionable.

VI. Summary

The classical organizational model has been present in law enforcement since Sir Robert Peel used the military to model the London Metropolitan Police Department in 1829. Today, it remains as the primary model by which police departments are organized. Its stamina stems from its simplicity and straightforwardness.

The principles of hierarchy, span of control, unity of command, delegation of authority, specialization, and formalization attempt to ensure that the police organization operates efficiently and effectively by constructing a structure which controls and facilitates work.
Although there are a number of criticisms of classical organizational theory, for the most part they focus on two primary classical organizational components: centralization and formalization. In terms of centralization, most argue that classical theory centralizes too much power and authority with top-level administrators. Although classical theory postulates that ultimate responsibility rests at the top, it also recognizes that authority and responsibility are delegated to unit commanders and midlevel managers. Moreover, there is a natural decentralization process as specialization occurs. Authority is naturally diffused among many middle managers.

**Key Terms**

**bureaucratic management:** rational management structure so that work process can be better administered

**delegation of authority:** assignment of tasks, duties, and responsibility to subordinates and giving them the power to control, command, and make decisions

**direction:** orders initiated by the chief, unit commander, or supervisor to guide subordinates’ actions toward the accomplishment of some organizational objective

**excessive layering:** problems associated with too many ranks or hierarchy

**functional supervision:** specialized supervision for only those areas in which the supervisor has expertise

**geographical differentiation or specialization:** use of substations or precinct stations as opposed to having all officers work out of a central headquarters

**hierarchy of authority:** chain of command; superior-subordinate relationship; each individual is supervised by a superior officer

**memoranda:** written communications or e-mails that pass through the chain of command

**policy formulation:** development of general orders, standard operating procedures, and other written documents

**policy or procedure:** written directives, guidelines, procedures, and policies that are comprehensive for any specific activity or duty

**rational man theory:** people work for rewards (money) and, when properly rewarded, are productive

**scientific management:** the study of work and how it is performed
span of control: number of officers or subordinates that a supervisor can effectively and efficiently control

specialization: division of labor, or job differentiation

special order: directive that is temporary or provides additional guidance or supplements or clarifies a policy or procedure for individual units

traditional or classical police organization: quasi-military model; adopted structures or organizations similar to those used in the military

unity of command: the second principle of hierarchy of authority; placing only one superior in command or control of every situation and employee

vertical staff meeting: bringing together members from each level of the chain of command within a particular operating unit and soliciting their input for decision making

Study Questions

Although the answers listed below are not exhaustive and will vary from student to student, the student should address at the minimum the following key points.

1. Describe the traditional police organization and how today’s police organization is different. (See page 93 in the text.)

   - The traditional or classical police organization is a quasi-military model. It is termed quasi-military because early police departments adopted structures or organizations similar to those used in the military.

   - In 1829 Sir Robert Peel used the quasi-military model and established the following principles of policing which are engrained in American policing today.

       - The police must be stable, efficient, and organized along military lines.

       - The police must be under government control.

       - The absence of crime will best prove the efficiency of police.

       - The distribution of crime news is essential.

       - The deployment of police strength both by time and area is essential.
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The securing and training of proper persons is at the root of efficiency.

Public security demands that every police officer be given a number.

Police headquarters should be centrally located and easily accessible to the people.

Policemen should be hired on a probationary basis.

Police records are necessary to the best distribution of police strength.

- The quasi-military model has long standing in the police community and was advocated for by O.W. Wilson in the 1950s. This model gave way to the professional model of police administration, which was highly structured and emphasized control. This is the model that is in use today.

2. What is scientific management? The fathers of scientific management are Weber, Taylor, and Fayol. What were their contributions? (See pages 94–118 in the text.)

- **Scientific management** is the study of work and how it is performed to increase worker productivity. This resulted in the belief that scientific principles were applied to work; workers would exert the least amount of effort in accomplishing the greatest amount of work.

- Taylor believed work would improve if management analyzed tasks and assumed more responsibility. These responsibilities included:
  
  - Develop a science for each element of a man’s work, which replaces the old rule-of-thumb method.
  
  - Scientifically select and train, teach, and develop the workman, whereas in the past he chose his own work and trained himself as best he could.
  
  - Heartily cooperate with the men so as to insure all of the work being done is in accordance with the principles of the science that has been developed.
  
  - There is an almost equal division of the work and the responsibility between the management and workmen.
Taylor also provided the concept of **functional supervision**, which is practiced by supervisors who are specialized and provide supervision for only those areas of the job in which they have expertise.

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- Universal control, based on clear accounting data rapidly made available.

Weber studied organizations and attempted to determine identify what principles made them efficient. He believed these principles, if identified, could be adopted by other organizations and they too would become more efficient.

**Bureaucratic management** is a rational management structure to better administer work processes. Weber was the father of “bureaucracy.”

Weber’s principles of a bureaucratic structure relating specifically to police management are:

- Well-defined hierarchy of authority
- Specialization
- Formalization
3. What are span of control, unity of command, and delegation of authority? How do they relate to the police organization? (See pages 99–104 in the text.)

Span of Control

- **Span of control** refers to the number of officers or subordinates that a superior supervises without regard to the effectiveness of efficiency of that supervision.

- Normal span of control for a patrol sergeant is 6–10 officers.

- The complexity of the work assigned and the physical working conditions can also affect span of control. Simpler and less complex tasks require less supervision.

- The higher the rank of the individual in the chain of command, the smaller the span of control. The span of control also determines the number of levels within the chain of command.

- Those critical of span of control advocate for larger span of control (more than the 6-10 subordinates).

Unity of Command

- **Unity of command** refers to placing one and only one superior in command or in control of every situation and every employee. This concept is instituted to ensure that multiple or conflicting orders are not issued by several superior officers to the same police officers.

- Unity of command also ensures that all police officers are aware of their immediate commander’s orders and that the immediate commander is aware of the task in which subordinates are involved.

- Emergency or tactical situations may develop where a superior may have to exert authority outside the pyramid of authority or chain of command.

Delegation of Authority

- **Delegation of authority** is the assignment of tasks, duties, and responsibilities to subordinates while at the same time giving them the power
or right to control, command, make decisions, or otherwise act in performing the delegated responsibilities.

- Delegation of authority follows the chain of command and is a method of task assignment where specific responsibilities are given to subordinates.

- Delegation of authority is accomplished by two methods:
  
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  - **Direction** is the orders initiated by the chief, unit commander, or supervisor to guide subordinates’ actions toward the accomplishment of some organizational objective. Direction is also used to clarify written directives.

  Direction is frequently given at staff meetings. A **vertical staff meeting** consists of bringing together members from each level of the chain of command within a particular operating unit and soliciting their input for decision making. Along with direction is accountability for accomplishing the duties and assignments.

4. List the ways in which an organization can have specialization. Give examples of each type in the police setting. (See pages 104–112 in the text.)

Police **specialization** refers to division of labor, or job differentiation.

When assigning tasks, care must be taken to ensure the groupings contribute to departmental effectiveness. The size of the organization will determine the number of specialized units, divisions, or grouping of personnel. Generally, tasks are grouped according to four criteria: function, geography, time, and level of authority.

- **Function**
  
  - When tasks are grouped according to function, job specialization is created. Function refers to how a particular task is performed and the purpose of performing it.
  
  - The reason for functional specialization within a police department is usually to relieve patrol of burdensome, time-consuming tasks and to allow them to concentrate on repressing crime and answering calls for service.
Major areas of functional specialization are: patrol, traffic, criminal investigation, vice, delinquency prevention, communications, records, and staff services such as planning and training.

- Geography
  - In geographical differentiation or specialization a department uses substations or precinct stations as opposed to having all officers work out of a central headquarters.
  - Some of these geographical divisions are commanded by a captain or other high-ranking commander and to some extent they become a police department all their own.

- Time
  - Police departments are responsible for law enforcement function 24 hours a day and they must allocate personnel in such a manner that they can cover all shifts or watches at all hours of the day. There are several different shift plans depending upon the needs of the department.
  - Administratively it is most desirable to have permanent shifts and assignments so officers can learn their beats and be more effective. This tends to make officers more alert and less fatigued, more productive, and less prone to accidents. Officer morale is negatively affected after time and departments therefore rotate shifts.
  - Shift work can present problems with a person’s circadian rhythm or biological clock that regulates all body functions. When interrupted physiological stress or fatigue can result.

Level of Authority

- Grouping tasks by level of authority directly ties specialization with chain of command and to a degree determines the rank structure within a given police department.

- An organizational arrangement that strictly follows the level of authority principle produces an excessive number of ranking officers and violates the principle of span of control.

- Conversely, an imbalance of rank at each hierarchical level results when a department is organized so that the fewest possible number of officers hold rank.
5. What are the criticisms of classical organizational theories? (See pages 118–119 in the text.)

- The managerial atmosphere surrounding the traditionally organized police department largely is authoritarian as a result of the chain of command. The traditional police organization’s structure creates decreased morale at lower ranks, and one-way communication creates a perception that the top command is sometimes arbitrary and isolated in its action.

- There has been some criticism of police departments for being too bureaucratic, specifically, excessive layering or having too many levels of rank. It is believed that excessive layering leads to authoritarian leadership, a reduction in organizational innovation, and increased morale problems as officers become distanced from decision making.

6. What are the defenses of classical organizational theories as they relate to the police organization? (See pages 119–120 in the text.)

- If all the criticisms of the classical theory were taken at face value one would tend to believe the classical theory is doomed to extinction. Classical theory or traditional police administration remains a viable structural alternative that is used extensively in policing and government.

- Classical theory survives because it focuses on accountability. All within the organization should be held accountable for their performance. This is particularly true given the history of corruption, politics, and problems with excessive use of force in law enforcement.

- Although classical organizational theory is straightforward and easily understood by all employees exactly how closely police departments adhere to classical organizational principles is questionable.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the implications of span of control in police work. What happens when span of control is too great or too little? Review the Rampart Incident (LAPD) for their findings and discuss them in relationship to your findings. Are there differences? If anything, what would you have done differently?

2. What are the benefits of chain of command? What are the drawbacks? Is it ever a “good thing” to not have a chain of command? Why or why not?

3. Why is direction important? Why would you give direction to a police organization?
Learning Activity

1. Divide your class into groups of 4–6 students. Have the group assign a group leader. Have each group study the local police department. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the department’s chain of command and what would they do to change it if they could? Students should present their findings to the class.