

The Impact of Organizational Psychology on Policing Reform

As federal policymakers consider initiatives to reform policing in the United States, **the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) urges the application of scientific theory and research to ensure data-driven methods to enhance police recruitment and selection processes, leadership, and training.** Collectively, I-O psychologists bring over a century of expertise in understanding and predicting workplace behavior. Below are some of the ways I-O psychologists can help in this space:

Challenge: Any bias among police forces, either implicit or explicit, can harm civilians.

I-O Impact: Use evidence-based techniques for acknowledging and reducing bias, including meaningful contact between groups, altering perceptions of boundaries between groups, and diversity training; effectively screen for bias; provide early socialization regarding unbiased approaches to policing; and provide regular refresher and updating training.

Challenge: In some areas, community members and police have low levels of trust and are cynical that the situation can be improved.

I-O Impact: Fully investigate and understand sources of mistrust between the police and the community; focus on established strategies for enhancing the readiness for change in police departments and community groups; incorporate strategies and tools to repair trust; and build a culture and process for regular community and police information exchange.

Challenge: Leaders may lack the skills and resources to effectively enact reforms to address poor community relations, inappropriate use of force, and other desired changes.

I-O Impact: Increase emphasis on leadership training that focuses on strategies for transforming police culture; establish practices to promote and develop top-level leaders who can think independently and create solutions to complex and rapidly changing problems; review promotional protocols and develop effective strategies to identify the most qualified (regardless of seniority), community-oriented leaders, who also show commitment to best practices that enhance employees' performance and well-being; provide additional supervision and leadership training for newly promoted officers, especially for the transition from officer to sergeant; use mentorship programs to develop leadership talent; develop programming to build the capability of police and community leaders to work together in building trust and common purpose.

Challenge: The fatigue, stress, hostility, and fear often experienced by police officers can lead to non-optimal decisions when interacting with community members, other officers, and departmental leadership.

I-O Impact: Develop interventions that reduce stress and increase coping skills and thus improve officers' decision-making; provide officers with strategies for addressing changes to their workplace; help develop wellness programs and recovery protocols after stressful interventions; train supervisors to recognize signs of discomfort and to properly support employees; instill culture changes that reduce the perception that seeking help is a sign of weakness or poor job performance; upgrade the processes used to recruit and select individuals for the demanding role of police officer.

*The **Society for Industrial & Organizational Psychology (SIOP)** is a community of more than 10,000 members worldwide with the common interest in promoting the science, practice, and teaching of I-O psychology to enhance human well-being and performance in organizational and work settings. SIOP provides a platform for scientists, academics, consultants, and practitioners to collaborate, implement, and evaluate cutting-edge approaches to workplace challenges across sectors.*

Recommendations

Provided below are some initial recommendations for inclusion in federal policing reform discussions. The following suggestions complement reforms proposed in the *Justice in Policing Act*, *JUSTICE Act*, and the *Executive Order on Safe Policing for Safe Communities* and should not be considered a comprehensive list. SIOP members are ready and willing to further discuss these recommendations and provide additional expertise and insights to decision makers considering evidence-based policing reform.

- Support multi-disciplinary research to understand police misbehavior (frequency, conditions, patterns, influences) with research teams that span fields such as criminology and organizational psychology.
- Review disciplinary procedures and formulate best practice guidelines to ensure police misbehavior is addressed.
- Develop resources specifically targeted at culture change, including assessments of readiness to change, as well as tools and development programs for engaging leadership in culture change.
- Encourage approaches to stress reduction that go beyond training officers on stress management, such as thoroughly analyzing and considering ways to redesign policing jobs to lessen stressors, providing more immediate mental health evaluations and relief for stress, evaluating stress tolerance in officer hiring, and incorporating greater supports for both workplace wellness and officer mental health.
- Create better incentive structures for recruiting individuals into law enforcement careers. A current challenge for many localities is an inability to recruit or retain officers due to a lack of defined pensions, unattractive salaries, requirements that recruits pay for their own academy training, etc.
- Provide greater supports and incentives for women and ethnic minorities to enter and stay in policing, including academy scholarship programs for degrees with a commitment to a career in policing, and mentorship programs to identify and help develop talent from within departments.
- Develop strategies for improving union-municipality leadership relationships, including the adoption of more cooperative models of labor-management councils, facilitation, and training.
- Provide greater funding for citizens' academies and other outreach efforts that provide community education, improve relationships, engender trust, and serve as recruitment vehicles.
- Provide greater investment in hiring methods that incorporate realism and judgment, such as situational judgment inventories, virtual reality simulations, and other lower fidelity simulations, as these will allow more realistic evaluation of likely interactions with community members.
- Invest in training programs and tools that use technology to provide realistic simulations of police and community member interactions of various forms; and increasing availability to smaller agencies and to a greater number of officers.
- Enhance guidance and tools for leader selection and improvement of promotional processes.
- Provide joint training of law enforcement with civilians, especially those who will be in charge of civilian review boards, where applicable.
- Make tools and programs more available, more affordable, and more adaptable to smaller policing agencies.

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