



Protect
and
serve

It's Time for a Change: Recommendations to Inspire Talent Management Reforms Within Policing

Blacks in I/O: Law Enforcement Task Force

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Introduction

Memorial Day, an American holiday honoring men and women who died in military service, carried a different meaning in 2020: one grief-stricken for the life of an American citizen. On Monday, May 25, 2020, the world watched in horror as a White American police officer knelt on the neck of an unarmed Black American man for 8 minutes and 46 seconds during an arrest, one of the most egregious acts of publicly recorded police misconduct in the United States. George Floyd's untimely death fomented the largest and most drawn-out series of protests since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, reigniting national scrutiny of law enforcement practices adversely impacting the Black community. In the U.S., African Americans make up only 13% of the population but 25% of civilian deaths at the hands of police officers (Sinyangwe et al., 2020). Additionally, growing evidence indicates Black people are disproportionately impacted by police interactions in comparison to their White counterparts, which often involve the use of excessive force (Consent Decrees Racial Bias, 2016).

Although televised offenses tend to attract nationwide attention, most police misconduct—including verbal, emotional, and psychological intimidation and/or violence intended to dehumanize an individual/group—is often not captured on video (Alang et al., 2017), which divulges deficiencies in accountability for law enforcement officers. Even more concerning, over 95% of police officers do not face criminal charges when an individual is killed during an arrest or while in custody (Sinyangwe, et al., 2020). Although a majority of law enforcement officers are dedicated to protecting the unalienable rights and overall safety of their respective communities, the lack of accountability for the small percentage not only generates social unrest but erodes trust in the institution of policing. Likewise, a June 2020 survey reported roughly two-thirds (65%) of Black Americans do not trust police officers will treat them fairly whereas over two-thirds (70%) of White respondents indicated they trust police officers to treat people fairly regardless of their race (Santhanam, 2020). Additionally, the economic impact that police misconduct has on the U.S impacts all of its citizens. Although not all settlements reach the national spotlight, these settlements can range from thousands to even millions of dollars. For example, Philando Castile's family settled for \$3 million, in addition to his girlfriend settling for \$800,000 (Corely, 2020). Unfortunately, settlements are paid through taxpayer dollars, which means the citizens are sustaining the economic impact of police misconduct. Furthermore, increasing data suggest that constant exposure to police misconduct triggers other adverse health consequences, specifically elevated stress and anxiety levels, depression, and increased rates of high blood pressure within the Black community (Alang et al., 2017). The social, economic, and psychosomatic implications reinforce the gravity of the current state of policing and the criticality of reform.

Many have attempted to rectify the injustices outlined above, but we contend industrial-organizational (I-O) psychologists are uniquely equipped to introduce evidence-based practices that support effective operations, increase community trust in law enforcement, encourage organizational value alignment, and eliminate police brutality. Therefore, the goals of this paper are twofold: (a) identify the pitfalls in law enforcement that lead to the disproportionately negative treatment of Black citizens, and (b) inspire current I-O psychologists to invest in evidence-based practices that create lasting reform, mutually benefitting both officers and the communities they serve. We present three opportunity zones that fall within the scope of industrial-organizational psychology with the intent of fueling discussion and inspiration for I-O practitioners: policing strategy, accountability and transparency, and rewards and recognition. The three opportunity zones we present will offer practitioners recommendations to improve how police departments function and interact with stakeholders in their communities.

Opportunity Zone 1: Policing Strategy (Recruitment, Selection, and Personnel Management)

Although many agree that the primary function of police officers is to “protect and serve,” research has started to expose that some police departments are taking a different approach to personnel management. Dr. John Dovidio, a researcher who studies implicit and explicit prejudice, highlighted that many police departments and officers take a paramilitary approach to policing, sometimes adopting an “us versus them” attitude toward Black communities. According to Dr. Dovidio, “There can be a lot of dehumanization that occurs in the conversations people have, and that’s explicit” (Weir, 2016). This “us versus them” mentality can physically manifest itself in destructive and violent behaviors that have a detrimental impact on the Black community. In order to restore trust in those who took an oath to protect and serve, police agencies should, before all else, reform their personnel management.

For clarity, personnel management can be thought of as an extension of general management, designed to stimulate and promote a competent workforce so that individuals within that workforce can make their utmost contributions to the organization. The goal of a personnel management system is to hire and develop employees to become valuable assets to the company. Regarding police officers, different jurisdictions can adopt differing personnel management strategies, and the required skills may vary based on assignment, community size, and work environment (Morison, 2017). The skills, behaviors, and attitudes that police departments recruit for, train, promote, and manage signal which qualities the organization values. Depending on which qualities are regarded highly by the organization, this could prove to either be deleterious or beneficial.

We believe that collaboration between I-O psychologists and police human resources (HR) departments can help standardize police personnel management systems. Collectively, I-O psychologists and police HR departments could engineer systems that attract talent through a holistic selection approach, which assesses personality, pathology, learning style, tactical skill, cognitive ability, physical ability, cultural fit, bias, and leadership potential. In addition, evaluating interactions between officers and community members through an analysis of officers’ most frequently performed tasks can provide valuable insight in identifying selection criteria, training program objectives, and types of essential workplace support. This level of evaluation can shed light on the essential competencies needed for an officer in the 21st century, transforming the training curriculum to focus on community and culture rather than use of force. Further, improvements to workplace support through the engagement of community experts such as social workers, mediators, and counselors can enhance skills that support healthy community engagement (i.e., de-escalation, mediation, mental health crisis response, emotional intelligence, active listening, etc.; COPS Office, 2015). Additionally, focused discussions to examine historical relations between law enforcement and Black Americans specifically can facilitate difficult conversations to reduce the effects of the “us versus them” dynamic (Paoline, 2003).

Moreover, we advocate for a community-oriented approach to the selection and hiring of law enforcement personnel, because police agencies should be reflective of the communities in which they serve. Past research has revealed that residents perceive police actions to be more legitimate when officers are representative of the communities served (Theobald & Haider-Markel, 2009). To be clear, representation here is not solely limited to racial representation but encompasses a variety of socioeconomic factors (e.g., income, education, class).



The skills, behaviors, and attitudes that police departments recruit, train, promote, and manage signal the organizational values

Previous research has also shown that officers who are from the communities they serve not only garner more trust from their community but have a better understanding of the problems troubling said community (Weitzer, 2000). Furthermore, establishing an organizational culture within a department that upholds diversity has been found to improve the community’s attitude, confidence, and trust in the police, which ultimately improves relations between citizens and officers (Cochran & Warren, 2012; Kahn et al., 2017). Therefore, we have compiled recommendations (see Table 1) that can be leveraged to not only address problems in recruitment but also improve officer–community relations.

Opportunity Zone 2: Accountability and Transparency

In addition to representative leadership, building trust through culture requires an adoption of transparent and accountable communication systems (COPS Office, 2015). More specifically, we need organizations (i.e., unions) that support, protect, and represent police officers to coordinate their goals with the goals of the public. Unfortunately, the relationship between unions and the public has been unstable and reinforces the “us versus them” dynamic. This relationship counters our overall goal of forming a partnership with police and police unions to promote meaningful change, such as equitable treatment for all races and fair resolutions to complex and controversial cases.

As I-O professionals, our goal is to promote reform and change in law enforcement, and therefore, it is our duty to mediate and fortify the relationships between police and the community by providing expertise and evidence-based recommendations (see Table 1). A potential start to eliminate the “us versus them” dynamic would be to launch a publicly accessible database that has statistics on police misconduct, officer arrests with arrestee demographics, as well as demographics on hiring and promotions. However, without the assistance and collaboration with police unions this would be a difficult goal to achieve; therefore, a critical recommendation is to work with unions to transform them into advocates for change. A strong relationship between the public and unions will be beneficial for a multitude of reasons. First, transparent communication between the parties will promote trust and accountability. As a result, community members will feel less inclined to immediately attack or condemn the actions of police officers. This does not mean the community will be passive in controversial situations, but they will be willing to engage in productive conversations with officers and their representatives, thereby generating answers to difficult questions, meaningful dialogue advocating for change, and safer environments for community members as well as police officers.



Reward systems should align with police officer preferences and expectations of the community.

Opportunity Zone 3: Rewards and Recognition

Most human behavior is driven by positive and negative reinforcement. If we desire more humane practices, we must scrutinize detrimental behaviors that we currently reinforce and establish positive reinforcement patterns and rewards systems. Rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic, influence an individual’s motivation to perform his or her responsibilities. Considering the dangerous and stressful nature of policing, police officers deserve a reward system that honors them for protecting the communities they serve. For instance, Violanti et al. (2018) found that New York police officers reported an effort–reward imbalance (extrinsic) as well as feel-

Table 1
Recommendations for Law Enforcement Agencies

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>
Policing strategy (recruitment, selection, and personnel management)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rebrand policing and move away from the stigmatized job title of “police officer” toward a title that aligns with community expectations (e.g., peace keeper or peace officer). ● Focus on improving safety for Black citizens. ● Adopt a community policing model where police are active members of the communities they serve. ● Redefine the core functions of a police officer with a job analysis, leading to a clear job description with KSAs/competencies. ● Hire diverse clinical evaluators to perform pre-employment psychological assessments. ● Create a fair and rigorous selection process and realistic job previews. ● Create a national database that tracks disciplinary actions for individual officers and informs a more holistic background check. ● Align training and development programs with the core functions. Police officers should be trained and assessed so that the department can identify deviant behavior and apply corrective action with a performance management process. ● Provide cultural competency, anti-racist, and related training.
Accountability & transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partner with unions to transform them into advocates for change. ● Review current community feedback systems and advise on ways to increase transparency, collaboration, and accountability to citizens. ● Review Citizen Board selection practices and recommend strategies to recruit, select, and engage diverse board members. ● Launch a public databases of officer misconduct violations, a database record of officer arrests that provides arrestee demographic information (age, sex, race etc.), department contracts and awards to external consultants and vendors, and the procedures and results of newly hired and promoted personnel.
Rewards and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Modify the current performance appraisal and management systems to disrupt the current police culture and to create the kind of culture needed to support desired behaviors. ● Re-allocate the current police budget to ensure that they are still able to recruit, promote, and retain top talent. ● Create a rewards and recognition system that aligns performance and productivity metrics with a positive point system; desired behaviors can include the number of situations de-escalated, suicides prevented, and positive connections made with community members. ● Create a multirater evaluation for police officers; empower citizens to rate police officers—low scores trigger investigations and higher points contribute to promotion eligibility; track positive behavior, not just negative behavior. ● Launch a national certification that acknowledges officers who go above and beyond to promote safer communities for people of color.

ings of overcommitment (intrinsic), which were associated with burnout and decreased professional efficacy. Thus, the current system fails to adequately reward the honorable actions of police officers to protect the communities they serve. In addition, the current reward system does not instill confidence for police officers to effectively fulfill their responsibilities. One recommendation is to create a reward and recognition system that aligns performance and productivity metrics with a positive point system. The goal of this is to promote behaviors that are in line with the expectations of the communities, such as de-escalation techniques and making connections with community members. Additionally, community members can be impactful in the reward and recognition process by introducing a multirater evaluation that empowers the community to speak out against or in support of police officers. Overall, rewards must match the efforts and sacrifices police officers provide to keep our communities safe; therefore, the reward system must be shaped to harmonize with the rewards that police officers prefer and the expectations of community members they serve. For a full list of how I-O psychologists can support systems that properly reward police officers for their service, see Table 1.

Conclusion

We offer several recommendations to guide I-O practitioners interested and able to influence strategy, personnel management, and accountability within police departments. I-O psychologists have unique skill sets that can be leveraged to not only reduce the detrimental impact of police misconduct but also strengthen law enforcement culture through targeted initiatives that promote a healthy relationship between police officers and their communities. By implementing evidence-based practices, we believe I-O psychologists and practitioners can create streamlined solutions with measurable success rates, which will ultimately cascade into progress and reforms across the United States.

I-O psychologists have unique skill sets that can be leveraged to not only reduce the detrimental impact of police misconduct but also strengthen law enforcement culture through targeted initiatives that promote a healthy relationship between police officers and their communities.

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