Chapter Eleven

The Changing Landscape Of American Police Organizations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> "Taco Bell was the only restaurant to survive the Franchise Wars. Now all restaurants are Taco Bell."
> -*Demolition Man*, 1993

The movie *Demolition Man* depicts a questionable future in which Taco Bell is the only restaurant chain to have survived the "franchise wars." We live in an era of corporate mergers and acquisitions, where, with increasing regularity, our local banks, hospitals, hardware stores, and other firms are either put out of business or are acquired by large global, multidivisional corporations. As a result, the landscape of American business has changed substantially. It is becoming more and more difficult to do business with "mom and pop" stores because they are being replaced by less personal franchises and corporate divisions. Moreover, our affinity for these small, local, personalized businesses seems less powerful than the social forces driving them out of existence. Despite George Bailey's protests in the popular 1946 movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, generations of small businesses like Bailey's Building and Loan are now little more than fond memories. One observer has termed this trend toward increasing corporatization the "McDonaldization of Society" (Ritzer 2000).

Although nobody seriously disputes the idea that the face of American business is changing, few observers see the seeds of such dramatic "landscape" changes in the policing industry. Yet, there is a small but growing body of research evidence to suggest

that similar changes may be afoot in policing. In this chapter, we argue that the landscape of American policing is slowly beginning to experience three fundamental and related changes: the overall number of police agencies is shrinking, and the remaining agencies are becoming both larger and more structurally complex. These changes in the landscape of police organizations are likely to produce significant differences in how communities are policed. The era of the small-town police department epitomized by Sheriff Andy Taylor and Deputy Barney Fife is giving way to a future of larger, more complex organizations that are likely to be less personalized, more bureaucratic, and more technocratic.

The changes we foretell in policing are consistent with a general perspective on modernization outlined more than a century ago by the eminent German sociologist Max Weber. Weber argued that while rationality (especially in the form of bureaucracy) is an important mechanism for achieving coordination, control, productivity, and efficiency, when taken to excess it can trap people in an "iron cage of rationality." The iron cage is oppressive, legalistic, impersonal, mechanized, and in general, poorly suited to deal with anything but the most routine transactions (Weber 1958). The iron cage might be especially poorly suited for human service organizations who process people rather than things (Hasenfeld 1972).

We begin by providing a mosaic of evidence for the three fundamental changes that we have outlined. We then draw insights from organization theory to explain the social forces that may or may not be encouraging such changes. In particular, we explore how three organizational theories –contingency theory, institutional theory, and population ecology theory– can help us understand the future of the American policing industry.

THREE CHANGES IN THE LANDSCAPE OF AMERICAN POLICING

We have argued that three fundamental changes are occurring in American police organizations: the overall number of agencies is shrinking, and the remaining agencies are becoming larger and more complex.[1] We now examine the evidence for these assertions.

1. A Reduction in the Number of Police Organizations

Police agencies are publicly funded agencies with a near monopoly over the delivery of police services.[2] We tend not to think of them as going in and out of business like organizations in the private sector. As two leading U. S. Justice Department officials during the Clinton administration, Jeremy Travis and Joseph Brann, declared: "police departments do not go out of business; good or bad, they survive" (Travis and Brann 1997, 1). Police departments have been likened by some observers (Crank and Langworthy 1992; Leicht 1996) to "permanently failing organizations," a phrase used to describe organizations that survive in spite of evidence that they are ineffective (Meyer and Zucker 1989).

A small body of research suggests, however, that police agencies are not immortal; they disband with sufficient regularity that observers interested in the future of policing ought to pay close attention. In this paper we adopt a liberal definition of the term "disbanding" that includes two types: when an agency closes down permanently and its employees are not subsumed within another agency that takes over policing within that jurisdiction; and when an agency is taken over or *absorbed* by another agency. In both instances, one agency ceases to exist as a separate, autonomous entity

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[1] We use the term "policing" to refer to all local level general purpose law enforcement agencies including sheriffs' offices.

[2] Some researchers contend that government-funded police agencies are losing market share to the private security industry and other nongovernmental forms of social control (Bayley and Shearing 1996; Johnston and Shearing 2003).

and has thus disbanded. Disbanding refers to the end of an organization's structure and operations, although the organization's employees and equipment may later end up in another police organization. Very rarely do police agencies truly *merge* in the sense that the resulting organization represents a substantial blend of the component organizations. Far more often, one agency disbands when its structure (e.g., chain of command, rules and procedures) is eliminated and the agency ceases to operate. Some of these old employees may be hired by another agency, such as the county sheriff. These old employees typically don a new uniform, adhere to a different set of rules and procedures, and are paid by a different governmental entity (e.g., the county instead of a town). In most instances, however, the disbanding does not take the form of a true merger.

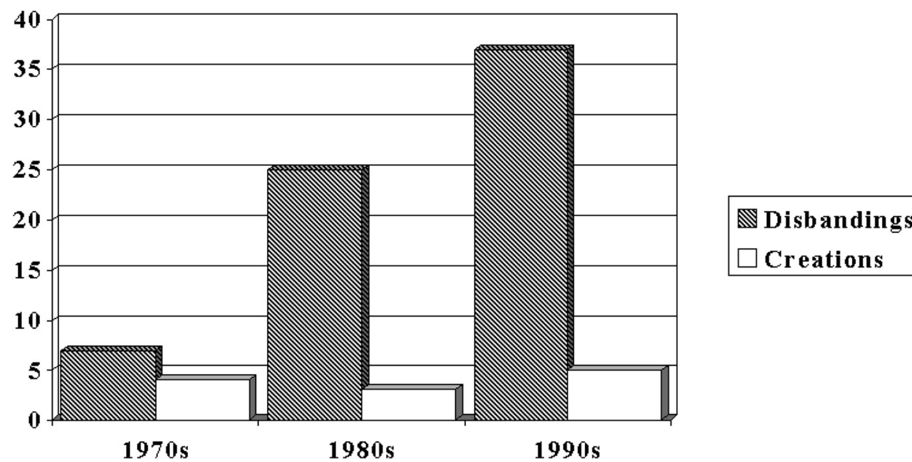
In an ongoing research project, one of us has studied the rates of police agency disbanding in three states (King 1999b; King, Langworthy and Travis 1997). Research indicates that at least in Ohio, police departments are disbanding at a far greater rate than new agencies are being created. Between 1970 and 1999, King (1999b) discovered 115 Ohio police agencies which had disbanded, and only 15 newly created agencies.[3] King's research also revealed that in the two U. S. states with the greatest population growth during the early 1990s (Arizona and Nevada) only 6 agencies disbanded and 9 new agencies were formed. One would expect a greater number of newly created agencies in states experiencing such rapid population growth.[4] It is difficult to draw

[3] One reviewer asked us to discuss the total number of police agencies in Ohio. Previous research has demonstrated significant flaws in the methods used to count police agencies in the United States (Maguire et al. 1998). The first dependable census of law enforcement agencies was conducted in 2000 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (US Dept. of Justice, 2003). That census revealed that there were 801 general purpose law enforcement agencies in Ohio in 2000. Therefore, with 115 disbandings and 15 new agencies, our rough estimate is that the total number of agencies decreased from 901 to 801, or roughly an 11% reduction. We caution readers that this is just a rough estimate.

sweeping conclusions about the entire policing industry in the U.S. from research in only three states. However, there are no reliable national data to test our hypothesis.[5] Organizational disbanding appears not to be a rare phenomenon among local police agencies. Our strong suspicion is that every year, the number of police agencies in the United States shrinks.

Our suspicion is bolstered by a perusal of media reports, which indicate that even

Figure 1.
Number of Ohio Police Departments Created and Disbanded between 1970 and 1999.



very large police agencies are not immune to disbanding. For example, in the early 1990s, three of the largest police agencies in the U.S. (New York City's transit, school,

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[4] Between 1990 and 1996, Nevada experienced a population increase of 33.4 percent, and Arizona a population increase of 20.8 percent.

[5] The 1996 Law Enforcement Directory Survey, the most comprehensive list of police agencies in the United States at the time, has been criticized for being incomplete (Maguire et al. 1998). When the Bureau of Justice Statistics carried out the 2000 Law Enforcement Directory Survey, they were responsive to the earlier criticism and made an effort to find the agencies missing from the previous wave. Thus, examining these two data sources side-by-side would lead to the erroneous conclusion that the number of agencies is actually increasing.

and housing police agencies- the 8th, 18th, and 21st largest police agencies in terms of full-time sworn employees in 1993) were folded into the New York City Police Department. Other recently disbanded agencies include the Compton Police Department in California (with 103 sworn officers, disbanded in 2000), the North Lauderdale Police Department in Florida (with 56 sworn officers, disbanded in 2001), and the Highland Park Police Department in Michigan (with 51 sworn officers, disbanded in 2003) (Cavanagh 2001; Cardenas 2005).

Overall, however, it appears that smaller police agencies are far more susceptible to disbanding than larger agencies. When a smaller police agency disbands, its locale (such as a village, town, township, or city) must either contract with another police organization to continue the provision of services, or merely let a larger agency with collective jurisdiction over the area encompassing the locale assume the responsibility. Every geographic region of the U.S., including unincorporated areas, has at least one police agency with overall jurisdiction for providing general police services (such as patrol, emergency response, investigation, etc.). In many states, this agency is the county sheriff, while in others it is the state police. Locales such as towns and cities may create their own agencies which, in effect, supplement the sheriff (or whatever agency has overall jurisdiction). But in the end, the agency with collective jurisdiction has the ultimate responsibility for policing that locale. Thus, when a local agency is disbanded, the agency with collective jurisdiction usually ends up policing the area. In Ohio, for instance, smaller police agencies are disbanding at a rate of about 8 times greater than they are being created, and county sheriffs are forced to pick up the slack. This means that agencies serving multiple communities (such as sheriffs and state police) are slowly

becoming responsible for larger geographic domains and larger populations. If this is true, they are also likely to become larger and more structurally complex.

2. Increases in the Size of Police Organizations

Police organizations are growing not only in the United States but also worldwide (Maguire et al. 1998; Maguire and Schulte-Murray 2001). However, due to data quality issues, no reliable national data exist for tracking changes in the size of American police organizations (Maguire and King 2004). In spite of these data problems, we present three forms of evidence to support our assertion that American police agencies are increasing in size. First, in the U.S., the median number of police officers per 1,000 population increased from 1.77 officers in 1975 to 1.98 in 1998 (Maguire and King 2004).[6]

Second, a visual analysis of yearly employment data gathered from 1937 to 2000 in police agencies serving 38 of the largest U.S. municipalities indicates that 28 agencies (73.6 percent) exhibited consistent increases in overall actual (not authorized) size.[7] Seven of these agencies had relatively flat growth trajectories between 1937 and 2000, while only three agencies declined in overall size. Data from large, municipal agencies does not provide concrete evidence about what is happening in the majority of American police agencies (most of which are small). However, the results suggest that on average,

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[6] This analysis used the FBI's Police Employees data and includes agencies serving populations of at least a thousand and employing at least fifty full-time (actual, not authorized) employees in both 1975 and 1998. This left 1,258 agencies with data for both years (Maguire and King, 2004). When we calculate ratios of police per unit population for smaller agencies, we end up with a number of erratic values. These values begin to stabilize for agencies with 50 or more employees.

[7] This sample of 38 municipal police agencies was assembled by selecting the 20 largest cities in 1930, and the 20 largest cities in 2000. The data for this year-by-year analysis come from the published version of the FBI's annual Police Employees data which were then compiled electronically by King and Heinonen (2004).

the largest police agencies in the United States are increasing in size.

Third, we selected the 390 police agencies that were surveyed by the FBI to construct its "Police Employees" database in 1937 and 1938. We then examined the Police Employees data for these same 390 agencies in 1970, 1980, and 1999. These agencies added a median number of 17 employees between 1970 and 1980, and 59 employees between 1970 and 1999. Further, 76.9 percent of them grew between 1970 and 1980, and 87.8 percent of them grew between 1970 and 1999.

Unfortunately, there are no reliable national data sources over time that would allow us to conduct a definitive test of our hypothesis that the American policing industry is growing, both in absolute terms and relative to the population. Therefore, we are forced to rely on a patchwork quilt of evidence. All of the analysis we presented in this section are original analysis that we conducted by merging separate data sources (some available only in paper documents) that have not, to our knowledge, been merged in the past. Although these analysis have some inherent limitations, the evidence we have presented here provides support for our hypotheses.

3. Increases in the Complexity of Police Organizations

Organizational scholars use terms like structural differentiation or structural complexity to refer to the various ways in which formal organizational structures become more complex. Organizations can become more complex in many different ways. There are four primary types of structural complexity: vertical, functional, spatial, and occupational (Langworthy 1986). Organizations become more vertically complex when they add layers of command or supervision; they become more functionally complex when they add new bureaus, divisions, or units; they become more occupationally

complex when they hire employees having different specialties, skills, or occupations; they become more spatially complex when they open new sites in different geographic locations. All four of these forms of complexity have been studied systematically in American police organizations. Therefore it is possible to explore the extent to which police organizations are increasing or decreasing their levels of structural complexity.

During the community policing movement, American police organizations were urged by many reformers to become less complex vertically and functionally, eliminating layers of command and empowering front-line officers to handle some of the tasks that were previously handled by special units. At the same time, police departments were under pressure to become more complex occupationally and spatially, hiring a diverse mix of employees with different skills and qualifications and opening new precinct houses and mini-stations in neighborhoods (Maguire 1997).

The evidence suggests that police organizations have heeded the advice of community policing reformers in some ways but not in others. Research has detected a significant increase in occupational complexity, with police agencies hiring civilians having a diverse mix of educational backgrounds and specialties. Spatial complexity also increased, with police agencies opening new precinct stations and mini-stations. These two changes are mostly consistent with the community policing reform movement. Vertical complexity increased in some ways but remained unchanged in others. Functional complexity either remained stable or increased; unfortunately, data problems prevent us from drawing a more definitive conclusion. These latter two changes are inconsistent with the community policing reform prescriptions (Maguire 1997; Maguire, Shin, Zhao and Hassell 2003).

Altogether, the evidence here suggests that American police organizations are

adopting more complex organizational structures. None of the four forms of complexity examined in the research literature have decreased during the 1990s. Two increased for sure, with two others showing mixed evidence of remaining stable in some ways but increasing in others.

THREE THEORIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Providing empirical evidence that changes are taking place in the American policing industry is only part of the argument necessary to conclude that such changes will last long enough to have a fundamental influence on policing. Another necessary part of the argument should be a theoretical explanation that attempts to understand and explain these changes in a conceptually meaningful way. For that we turn to organization theory, a diverse body of perspectives on organizations and the factors that influence them. In particular, we introduce three theories: contingency theory, institutional theory, and population ecology theory. All three of these theories have been tested and have found varying levels of support in organizations of many types: public and private, manufacturing and service, profit and nonprofit.

Contingency Theory

Contingency theory is the simplest and most straightforward of the three theories we explore here. It asserts that organizations adapt to changes in their environments to remain effective or to enhance their effectiveness. It is an optimistic theory in that it views organizations as constantly involved in a rational search for more effective structures and processes. Contingency theory has received a modest amount of support in research on police organizations (Langworthy 1986; Maguire 2003). At the same time,

contingency theory is viewed by many critics as insufficient or unrealistic because it fails to account for the numerous forms of irrationality and ineffectiveness in organizations.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory suggests that much of what organizations do is unrelated to their attempts to respond in a rational way to their environment, as suggested by contingency theory. Instead, organizations must respond to their institutional environment, which is composed of powerful groups and institutions (called sovereigns) like the media, politicians, public action groups, and other influential external forces. These sovereigns control important resources for organizations; resources such as money (especially for publicly funded governmental organizations, like the police), legitimacy, reputation, and prestige.

> Many of the positions, policies, programs, and procedures of modern organizations are enforced by public opinion, by the views of important constituents, by knowledge legitimated through the educational system, by social prestige, by the laws, and by the definitions of negligence and prudence used by the courts. Such elements of formal structure are manifestations of powerful institutional rules which function as highly rationalized myths that are binding on particular organizations (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 343).

According to institutional theory, organizations that are structured and act in accordance with the expectations of their sovereigns will be deemed good. Unsuccessful organizations are those that cannot or will not change in accordance with the expectations of their sovereigns. These organizations will be deemed bad, and will suffer legitimacy and image problems. Consequently, they will face difficulty in obtaining necessary

resources from their environments, such as new members, money, and access to information held by other organizations (see Guyot 1979, 274).

In some instances, unsuccessful police organizations are reformed from without by their sovereigns. Such reform is often ceremonial (Sherman 1978); sometimes a commission is convened, an investigation is launched, a consultant is hired, or an employee (usually the chief of police) is replaced (Crank and Langworthy 1992). These symbolic ceremonies are designed to restore legitimacy to the organization and heal the fractured relationship between the police agency and its environment. In certain instances, however, the lack of legitimacy is so profound that the organization is disbanded by its sovereigns. Such instances represent the nexus of institutional theory and the next theory we examine, population ecology theory.

Population Ecology Theory

Population ecology is a perspective that seeks to describe how populations of organizations are influenced by patterns of organizational creations (births) and disbandings (deaths) (Carroll 1983; Hannan and Freeman 1984, 1989). Population ecologists base their perspective on a handful of assumptions. First, they argue that organizations are created (born), and disbanded (die) quite regularly. Often our ability to see such births and deaths is clouded by the handful of long-lived, aged, or persistent organizations that surround us. Some of these older organizations are quite well known (e.g., McDonalds, Burger King). For this reason, people tend to assume that most organizations are long lived, when in reality most have short life spans. For example, the field of domestic U.S. automobile manufacturers (the big three) appears to be quite resistant to organizational death. Yet in the early years of the automobile industry, there

were numerous auto makers, such as Nash, Studebaker, Packard, DeSoto, and Willys (among many others). Many of these manufacturers either disbanded or were subsumed by other manufacturers. Data on business ventures with 100 or more employees created in the U.S. in 1985 indicates that 58 percent of these businesses did not make it to their ninth anniversary (Duncan and Handler 1994). Likewise, the late 1990s saw the emergence of numerous "dot.com" organizations, few of which lasted more than a handful of years. Organizational births and deaths are common occurrences of significant importance for population ecologists (Aldrich 1999).

A second assumption of population ecologists is that strategically speaking, organizations are resistant to change; they cannot adapt strategically (Kaufman 1985, chapter 3). They are capable of changing in small ways at a sub-strategic level, but they have difficulty instituting more profound strategic changes in mission or core operating technologies. Consider dinosaurs as an example. A brontosaurus was capable of sub-strategic changes, such as deciding where to eat, avoiding predators, etc. It could not, however, rear up on its hind legs and become a tyrannosaurus rex, nor could it sprout flippers and swim through the sea. That is, while it was capable of making small tactical or other sub-strategic changes, it could not radically alter its core strategies. Likewise, most organizations can alter their products or services in response to real or perceived changes in their markets. Police organizations can change the allocation of employees (e.g., assign more officers to patrol), their tactics (e.g., adopt tactics appropriate for "broken windows" policing), or their management style (e.g., COMPSTAT). At the strategic level, however, organizations do not readily change even when their survival depends on it. For example, businesses devoted to

horses and horse-drawn vehicles dominated the personal transportation industry (as opposed to the mass transportation industry, such as railroads) before 1900. These horse-oriented businesses such as carriage and saddle makers, and horse breeders, however, did not adapt to satisfy the new consumer demand for automobiles. Rather, automobiles were built by newly formed companies, which soon drove most horse-oriented businesses out of existence. This inability to change strategically means that most organizations (like particular dinosaurs) are created to address particular aspects of their environment, but cannot change when their environment changes radically (Stinchcombe 1965).

A third assumption of population ecologists is that radical environmental changes lead to the creation of other organizations, which might be better suited to handle that particular new environmental niche. New organizations are created all the time. For example, using a relatively restrictive definition of what a business is, Duncan and Handler (1994) report that there were 249,768 new businesses created in the U.S. in 1985. These new organizations sometimes drive pre-existing organizations out of existence by changing the environment and making it inhospitable for older organizations, much as horse-drawn carriage makers were driven out of business by automobile manufacturers. Outmoded organizations die and are replaced with organizations better suited for that particular environment through selection or replacement at the population level, but <u>not</u> through adaptation by individual organizations. Change occurs as organizations replace one another, not as organizations change internally, one-by-one. According to Hannan and Freeman (1989, 19), "...the diversity of organizational structures at any time reflects... a long history of foundings and disbandings of

organizations with fairly unchanging structures." Put another way, when the jungle floods, brontosauruses do not sprout flippers and gills. They die and new fish are then created to fill the ocean.

WHY THESE THEORIES MATTER

In this section, we explore how these three theories can help us understand changes in the American policing industry. We examine the three fundamental changes we introduced earlier – a decrease in the number of agencies, an increase in agency size, and an increase in structural complexity– through the lens of each theory. The structure of our discussion is illustrated in Figure Two.

Change 1: Fewer Police Agencies

Figure 2:

Three Organizational Theories and Three Types of Change

Theory	Fewer Agencies	Larger Agencies	More Complex Agencies
Contingency Theory	1a	2a	3a
Institutional Theory	1b	2b	3b
Population Ecology Theory	1c	2c	3c

1a. Contingency Theory

Why are we seeing a slow decline in the number of police agencies in the U.S.? Contingency theorists have generally skirted the issue of organizational disbanding; however, the theory does suggest that at any given time, there are effective and ineffective organizations. Contingency theory suggests many ineffective organizations will discover or realize their ineffectiveness and implement rational changes designed to improve their effectiveness. Yet some ineffective agencies will not be successful in implementing changes, will implement the wrong changes, or will not change at all. These permanently failing organizations will perform poorly for long periods of time (Meyer and Zucker 1989). In some cases, these chronically unsuccessful organizations will be disbanded. According to contingency theory, organizations which fail to adapt to their environment will also fail to be effective. Unless there is some force or set of forces that keeps them alive in spite of their ineffectiveness, they will ultimately die.

Contingency theory suggests that one reason American police agencies are disbanded is their failure to achieve their goals effectively and their inability to implement changes to lift themselves out of their dysfunctional habits and practices. It may be that some police agencies are incapable of implementing necessary changes. For example, smaller police agencies may not have sufficient personnel to devote to drug task forces, to combating identity theft, or to serve as police officers in schools. Such personnel limitations may make some of these smaller agencies (that is, smaller agencies in areas where there is a drug problem, identity theft problem, or school crime problem) ineffective. In other instances, disbanded agencies may have ignored their goals or failed to adequately address serious problems in their communities although they may

have had the resources available to address these concerns.

1b. Institutional Theory

Institutional theory also suggests possible causes of organizational death or disbanding. The causes of death, however, are different from those suggested by contingency theory. Organizational scholars (studying a wide range of organizations besides police agencies) have isolated a handful of institutional causes of death (Hannan and Freeman 1988; Singh and Lumsden 1990). Overall, while contingency theory focuses on effectiveness and efficiency, institutional theory concentrates on legitimacy, public perceptions, and the way an organization is viewed by others in its environment. Perceptions matter more than effectiveness. Our discussion of institutional theory and police agency disbanding will focus on three correlates of disbanding: organizational age, organizational size, and legitimacy problems.

Generally, organizational scholars have found that organizations are prone to disbanding during certain periods of their lifecourse but there is some disagreement concerning the time period at which organizations are most likely to disband. Initial research found a liability of newness (Stinchcombe 1965), where the likelihood of disbanding peaked shortly after an organization was founded and decreased thereafter (Carroll 1983; Carroll and Delacroix 1982; Freeman, Carroll, and Hannan 1983). Later research found evidence that organizations suffer from a liability of adolescence, where the probability of organizational death is U-shaped and it peaks several years after an organization is founded. According to this perspective, the likelihood of disbanding is low immediately after founding, but peaks after several years, after which the likelihood of disbanding decreases again. Finally, more recent research indicates that there is

evidence for a liability of aging (or obsolescence) where the probability of disbanding increases with age (Meyer and Brown 1978; Ranger-Moore 1997). The most recent developments in this line of research indicate that increased organizational size can mitigate the likelihood of organizational disbanding (Ranger-Moore 1997), that disbanding depends upon an organization's strategy (Henderson 1999), and that turbulent times increase the likelihood of organizational disbanding (Ranger-Moore 1997).

Much of the research noted above suggests links among an organization's institutional environment, its legitimacy, and organizational disbanding. This focus upon the institutional environment and legitimacy is very applicable to police agencies, for they have few concrete indicators of good performance. Under such conditions it is likely that appearance and reputation become more salient. Organizations that are unable to maintain a good image in the eyes of their sovereigns, or those who cannot establish requisite linkages with these sovereigns, eventually lose legitimacy and experience resource acquisition problems. For example, disreputable police agencies will have difficulty recruiting qualified, high-quality employees; securing adequate resources from local governments; winning the support of the public on the streets, on juries, and in bond referenda; receiving professional accolades such as accreditation, certification, or awards; or obtaining external grants (Hannan and Freeman 1989). If these problems cannot be overcome, a public and visible reform ceremony is one possible remedy. Another remedy is organizational disbanding.

Research conducted with a variety of organizations indicates that a range of legitimacy and institutional problems can contribute to organizational death (Edwards and Marullo 1995; Minkoff 1993; Singh and Lumsden 1990; Singh, Tucker and House

1986; Weed 1991). Organizations which fail to establish relationships (such as partnerships, collaborations, and exchange agreements) with sovereigns and other organizations in their environment suffer greater death rates. Networking and exchange relationships with important constituents and established entities (including other, similar organizations) can impart legitimacy upon an organization and hence decrease the likelihood of disbanding. It is reasonable to assume that some of these resource problems are important during an organization's early years (such as attracting and recruiting qualified, high-quality employees), while other concerns become more pressing later (such as securing continued funding). This insight may help explain why some studies find evidence of the liability of newness, while others find evidence for the liability of adolescence or the liability of aging.

Finally, it is likely that increased organizational size buffers police agencies from threats in their institutional environment. Organizational scholars have used the term *liability of smallness* to refer to the propensity for smaller organizations to disband. The public often associates larger size with greater quality, and this probably applies to police agencies as well. Consider how many television shows and movies have used the New York City Police Department as their setting, as opposed to smaller police departments. Research indicates that when police agencies want to know what the state of the art in policing is, they often contact a very large police agency to see what that agency is doing (Weiss 1992). Often, these smaller police agencies emulate the larger agencies. We contend that this process of peer emulation is driven by a desire to copy reputable agencies and that in the absence of more detailed information, size and legitimacy become intertwined. Bigger is better, and thus size shields agencies

from disbanding.

Larger organizational size also allows agencies to change their structures symbolically and to buffer themselves from outside threats. First, larger police agencies can create special units, policies, and arrangements to address institutional demands (such as a public outcry). For instance, the danger of child sexual abuse might be addressed by a larger agency when it creates a specialized unit to combat pedophiles. Smaller agencies, however, lack the manpower to create specialized units and thus may appear to be unresponsive. Second, when faced with a scandal or public outcry from sovereigns who are unhappy with a police agency, larger agencies can eliminate certain units, reshuffle or demote employees, and engage in a process of breaking-up (or hiding) the offending unit or practice. Smaller agencies afford fewer places to hide troublesome employees and less opportunity to shuffle units about.

1c. Population Ecology

Population ecology theory is concerned with explaining the expansion and contraction of the "populations" of different types of organizations. The two main predictors used by population ecologists are the overall population size (the number of organizations of a certain type, such as police departments), and the resources available to that population (called "niche width"). It is a theory steeped in the terminology of biology and biological populations, so it may help to think of police agencies as animals of different types and sizes inhabiting an island with limited resources. Smaller police agencies are like mice, and are capable of using resources sparingly and require little territory. Medium sized agencies are like dogs, while very large agencies are like elephants. In some instances all three agency types can co-exist peacefully in the same

area, for each type generally draws its resources (for example operating funds, new members, and legitimacy) from different niches (think of the different tax bases available for each of these areas). At times, agencies must share resources (such as the pool of qualified job candidates), but if resources are sufficient, no one is harmed by this resource sharing. A greater number of agencies, or a single agency undergoing expansion, however, can alter the equilibrium of this balance. For example, an increasing number of large agencies will eventually draw resources away from the medium and smaller agencies as will a large, metropolitan police agency undergoing expansion. The large metropolitan area may annex neighboring areas or it may deplete the resource pool for medium and small agencies. Such a move would likely lead some medium sized agencies to disband, while other medium sized agencies look for new pools of resources. This, in turn may deplete the resources for smaller agencies. If these resource problems become serious enough, smaller agencies would be forced to disband too.

How then can population ecology theory explain a decline in the number of police agencies? We have provided evidence that larger agencies are growing larger, and are thus consuming more resources. This leaves fewer resources for smaller police agencies, and these resource problems have become severe enough that smaller police agencies are forced out of existence. Some of these resources are likely contingency-type resources (like the ability to specialize, to get specially trained employees, and get equipment). Other resources are institutionally based (such as legitimacy, the ability to network with sovereigns, and the ability to build a reputation for good work). Regardless of their type, resource problems can drive police agencies to disband.

Change 2: Larger Agencies

2a. Contingency Theory

Contingency theory offers a rational explanation for increases in organizational size– organizations grow as the demands on them increase. In other words, increases in size occur because they need to occur. In some cases, agencies may need to increase in size to enhance their effectiveness, but the research evidence does not support the more general view that larger agencies are universally more effective than smaller agencies. After summarizing the research on the linkage between police agency size and effectiveness, for instance, Maguire and Uchida (2000, 523) conclude: "probably the most consistent finding is that larger police organizations are not necessarily more effective, and in many cases they are less effective than smaller agencies." It does make sense, however, that as population and workload increase, police organizations would increase in size. When researchers have asked police leaders what factors they think are responsible for promoting growth within their agencies, the primary influences they cite are all very rational, contingency theory-type explanations: increases in crime, calls for service, and population (Koper and Moore 2001). Yet, when we examine evidence from studies that rely on comparative data from large samples of cities or other jurisdictions, we find that less rational explanations such as the size of minority communities (controlling for crime rates) also influence police agency size (Maguire, 2001). Our interpretation of the evidence is that contingency theory, and the rationality on which it is based, offers a partial but incomplete explanation for growth in police agencies.

2b. Institutional Theory

Institutional theory suggests a less rational approach for increases in organizational size– organizations grow so they will be perceived as more legitimate. For the smallest organizations, legitimacy enhances the probability of survival. Small organizations are at significant risk for being disbanded, because they are frequently viewed as less professional and less legitimate —not real police— compared with larger police agencies. For those with doubts about this perspective, consider the words of Patrick Murphy, one of the most influential police executives of the twentieth century: "a great many American communities are policed by a farcical little collection of untrained individuals who are really nothing more than guards. These genuinely small departments (fewer than twenty-five sworn officers), to begin with, tend not to have much of a franchise by and large; with small territory and limited clientele, they do not face much of a crime problem" (Murphy and Plate 1977, 71-72).

While Murphy's characterization of police agencies serving small communities is both controversial and overstated, he expresses a sentiment that we've heard a number of times from police professionals: when it comes to police agencies, bigger is better. Police organizations may seek to grow larger so they will be taken more seriously, so they will not be viewed, to use Murphy's term, as "farcical." Smaller agencies may actively seek to expand in size so they will be taken more seriously and viewed as more legitimate, not only by the community, but also by their colleagues in other communities.

2c. Population Ecology

Police organizations have been increasing in size. We cannot determine for certain whether increasing organizational size is a cause or an effect. It may be that increasing organizational size protects agencies from the likelihood of disbanding. As we noted earlier, larger agencies appear to be better buffered from their institutional environments, although there is little credible evidence that they are necessarily more effective. On the other hand, survival may be a matter more related to random chance and luck. Herbert Kaufman (1985, 67) argues that, "...the survival of some organizations for great lengths of time is largely a matter of luck. It seems to me such longevity comes about through the workings of chance.". Perhaps those agencies lucky enough to survive grow larger as they take on the responsibilities (and resources) of their disbanded peers.

Change 3: More Complex Agencies

3a. Contingency Theory

Contingency theory suggests that structural complexity increases when less complex structures are ineffective or inefficient. In other words, police agencies add ranks (vertical complexity), units or divisions (functional complexity), stations (spatial complexity), or occupations (occupational complexity) when there is a demonstrated, rational need to do so. As the demands on a police agency become more complex, the organization adapts to these "contingencies" in its environment by modifying its structure in a rational, deliberate quest to improve performance. There is some evidence to support this assertion. For instance, the two main studies that have examined the antecedents of police organizational structure both found

that the size of the agency was the major factor influencing structural complexity (Langworthy 1986; Maguire 2003). Since we would expect larger organizations to require greater structural complexity to support an increased need for coordination and control, this is a classic contingency-theory finding. At the same time, other research findings suggest that contingency theory is an incomplete explanation for increases in complexity. For instance, some research has found that the scope of tasks an agency performs is unrelated to its levels of functional differentiation (Maguire 2003). Other research findings that we explore in the next section also suggest that contingency theory offers only a partial explanation for increases in structural complexity.

3b. Institutional Theory

If contingency theory is a glass-is-half-full explanation for increases in structural complexity, institutional theory sees the glass as half empty. According to institutional theory, organizations are responsive to concerns about what they should look like and what structures they ought to adopt, regardless of whether those structures and approaches actually improve performance. Charles Katz has demonstrated, for example, that some police departments adopt gang units in the absence of a serious gang problem (Katz 2001; Katz and Webb 2006). For instance, in one agency he found that "the gang unit was created as a consequence of pressures placed on the police department from various powerful elements within the community, and that once created, the unit's response was largely driven by their need to achieve and maintain organizational legitimacy" (Katz 2001, 37). Police

agencies with more complex structures -taller hierarchies, more specialized units, more stations, and a wider range of occupational specialties- may be viewed as more legitimate than agencies with simpler structures. According to institutional theory, police organizations will adopt more complex structures when there is strong external pressure from powerful "sovereigns" in the environment - including politicians, reformers, policy elites, funding agencies, the public, or the media- regardless of whether these structural changes produce anything other than symbolic effects.

3c. Population Ecology

Population ecology offers a very different perspective on why organizations adopt more complex structural forms. It asserts that as organizations age, they become more complex– a tendency that has been termed the "structural elaboration" hypothesis (Maguire 2003; Katz, Maguire, and Roncek, 2002). Simply, organizations add various elements to their structures over time, while simultaneously failing to shed structural elements added at earlier times. As a result, organizations become more complex over time as they age (King 1999a). For population ecologists, an increase in structural complexity is simply a normal byproduct of the organizational aging process and each surviving organization's resistance to disbanding. Evidence for the structural elaboration hypothesis is mixed. For instance two studies (King 1999b; Maguire 2003) have now found that older police organizations have taller hierarchies independent of other causal effects like size. However, research has not isolated a causal effect of organizational

age on other elements of structural complexity.

INTEGRATING THE THREE THEORIES

Taken alone, these three organizational theories represent incomplete explanations for the three changes in American policing that we have discussed in this chapter: a decline in the number of organizations, and an increase in the size and complexity of the remaining organizations. However, integrating these three theories provides a more complete explanation for these three changes. All three theories help us understand why the number of police agencies is shrinking. Those agencies unable to handle their resource problems are disbanded. These resource problems may involve contingency-type resources, like personnel and money, or they may involve institutional-type resources, like legitimacy, prestige, or reputation. Some population niches (such as small police agencies located outside of an expanding city) do not provide sufficient resources to maintain a static number of police agencies, and hence the number of police agencies decreases. Some population niches do not provide enough resources to support an organization's attempts to change and adapt. Most disbanded police agencies are smaller, which suggests that smaller agencies have trouble adapting and thus ensuring a reliable flow of resources.

Once disbanded, some of an agency's resources evaporate and cannot be taken by another surviving agency (such as the legitimacy attached to a specific agency). Other resources, however, such as organizational members, equipment, and funding, can be used by surviving agencies. Adding these "left-over" resources (both contingency and institutional-type resources) to another agency explains the increasing size and

complexity of some agencies.[8] Mainly, a pool of left-over resources makes it easier for surviving agencies to survive (e.g., they may assume the mission and/or territory of a disbanded agency and thus argue to sovereigns that their role is now more necessary). Furthermore, as we have argued above, increasing age leads to increases in structural complexity.

More generally, the lesson that we learn from this exercise is that there are multiple explanations for the changes that we have observed. While policy makers and practitioners tend to rely on rational explanations for these changes, the evidence also lends strong support to other less-than-rational explanations. Police agencies sometimes disband because they are ineffective or inefficient, but they are sometimes disbanded for other reasons. And when police agencies are disbanded, they are sometimes replaced by agencies that are less effective or less efficient.

Likewise, increases in size may be due to increases in police workload, but there are many instances of police agencies growing without any evidence of increases in workload. In fact, research has demonstrated that even when increases in workload promote growth in police strength, decreases in workload are not then followed by reductions in police strength. Police agencies grow for many reasons: to enhance legitimacy, out of simple bureaucratic inertia, or when they take over the functions or territory of disbanded agencies. Similarly, agencies may increase in complexity because such complexity enables them to perform better. But they may also increase in complexity to enhance their legitimacy, their reputation, or their prospects for

[8] We are not suggesting that the increasing size of police agencies overall is the result of adding employees of disbanded agencies. It is probably very rare that one agency grows significantly by adding ex-employees of another disbanded agency.

survival. Achieving a genuine understanding of the three changes in policing that we have discussed in this chapter requires us to combine elements of all three theories and perhaps others.

CONCLUSION

We have outlined three changes that, while still small and difficult to detect or measure with any degree of certainty, may have a major impact on the American policing industry. Due to limitations in systematic longitudinal data on American police agencies, we cannot present definitive evidence of the extent to which these changes are taking root. But we have presented a patchwork of evidence that supports our assertions. While policy makers are prone to supporting rational, contingency theory-type explanations for these and other changes in policing, we have illustrated that other more subtle explanations also deserve some attention. Institutional theory, for instance, teaches us that organizations (and entire industries) sometimes change in a quest to increase their legitimacy, often adopting changes that have little or nothing to do with (or may even be antithetical to) increasing their effectiveness or their efficiency. Similarly, population ecology attunes us to the need to view trends in the policing industry from a more detached, more macro-level perspective than most of us are used to adopting.

Policing, as an industry, seems to be moving toward a smaller number of larger, more complex agencies. Although some municipal police agencies may take on the functions of other local agencies, it is primarily county sheriffs, county police,

and state police agencies that will begin “swallowing up” the smaller disbanded agencies within their jurisdictions. If this is true, agencies responsible for policing collective jurisdictions containing multiple, independent communities, will begin taking on a larger and larger share of the American policing pie. At the same time, citizens may begin to receive standardized policing services that are not adapted to the needs of their individual communities. In other words, if the changes that we have outlined do continue to occur, we may begin to witness the very opposite of the personalized and customized styles of policing that community policing reformers have urged police agencies to adopt.

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