

IV – LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

This chapter discusses the need to improve leadership and communication within the Dallas Police Department. Issues relating to both leadership and communication are discussed in this chapter because these issues are so inextricably linked that it would not be productive to discuss them separately. As will be discussed, problems associated with ineffective leadership have been exacerbated by ineffective communication. Both issues must be addressed if the department is to substantially improve its performance.

CURRENT SITUATION

In recent years, senior leaders within the Dallas Police Department have failed to provide the direction, vision and energy needed to overcome the malaise that currently pervades the department. From an internal perspective, leaders have lost the confidence of department employees. From an external perspective, department leaders have abdicated their role in providing leadership to the Dallas community on issues relating to law enforcement and crime. These leadership short-comings have been exacerbated by an almost complete absence of internal communication relating to substantive issues.

Dallas Police Department Employees Have Lost Confidence In Their Leaders

Both interviews and the results of the employee survey conducted as part of this engagement clearly suggest a police department that has lost confidence in its leaders. Close to four out of five survey respondents (79.3 percent) disagree or strongly disagree that “the police department benefits from strong, effective leadership.” (Only 7.3 percent strongly agree with this statement.) These survey findings were repeatedly reinforced in interviews with employees from throughout the department.

A number of factors combine to create the “crisis in confidence” in the department’s leadership that currently exists. Many employees simply lack confidence in the abilities, competence and ethics of senior leaders. Leaders are perceived to be out of touch and to lack a sound understanding of the issues facing line police officers. At best, they are perceived to be micro-managers. At worst, they are perceived to be vindictive. In addition, the strong perception among many employees is that senior leaders do not work well together. These issues are considered in greater detail in the following discussion.

Abilities, competence and ethics of senior leaders. On an engagement such as this, consultants do not have the opportunity to assess the skills and competence of individual leaders. Initial impressions of many department managers and leaders, however, were quite positive. Nonetheless, interview findings and survey results suggest an overall lack of confidence in the abilities and competence of at least some key leaders. Indeed, more than four out of five survey respondents (83.4 percent) disagree or strongly disagree that “police department managers (chief level officers) have a strong understanding of the day-to-day operations of the units they are responsible for leading.” (56.1 percent of the survey respondents strongly disagree with this statement.) Perhaps even more troubling is the fact that close to three-fourths of the survey respondents (70.9 percent) disagree or strongly disagree that “high ethical standards are exhibited by police department managers and leaders.”

It is not easy to discern – from either the survey results or interview findings – whether concerns about the abilities, competence and ethics of senior leaders are focused on a few individual leaders or reflect concerns about the leadership cadre as a whole. Fairly or unfairly, some leaders who were “skip promoted¹” by the former chief of police are viewed skeptically by a large number of staff. (To some extent how these employees were promoted is of such concern to employees that objective assessments of their performance may not be possible). In addition, interview findings clearly indicate that the former chief of police was not well regarded by a great many department employees. Regardless of the number of leaders about which employees have concern, perceptions of employees relating to the abilities, competence and ethics of senior leaders are so widespread that aggressive action is needed to restore the confidence of employees in the department’s leadership.

Out of touch leadership. A common theme that was repeated in interviews with employees from throughout the police department is that department leaders are out of touch with the challenges and problems faced by line employees. As previously discussed, a very high percentage of employees (83.4 percent) believe that senior leaders lack a strong understanding of day to day operations. In addition, about two-thirds of the survey respondents (63.0 percent) do not believe their work is valued by the department’s senior leadership. There is also a strong perception among many employees that leaders surround themselves with loyalists who tell them only what they want to hear. Reportedly, these employees – known in the vernacular as “sack draggers” because they follow leaders around carrying their baggage – tend to shield leaders from the hard truths about the organization that they may wish to avoid.

These perceptions are exacerbated by the fact that senior leaders are not visible to line employees. More than four out of five respondents to the employee survey (81.7 percent) disagree or strongly disagree that chief level officers maintain a visible presence throughout the department. Moreover, in interviews the desire for senior leaders to be more visible in the department was almost palpable. Interviewees repeatedly expressed a desire for police leaders to be more “visible” when asked what could be done to improve the department.

Decision-making. Decision-making in the police department is anything but crisp. Indeed, 86.8 percent of the respondents to the employee survey disagree or strongly disagree that “decisions are made on a timely basis.” The length of time required to make decisions stems in large part because most decisions made by first-line supervisors and mid-level managers must be reviewed by senior leaders. Even an issue as mundane as citing an officer for an on-view policy violation must be approved by managers and leaders up to the chief of police. Likewise, decisions relating to assignments within specialized units must be approved at the command staff level before being finalized and background investigation reports for every potential hire are reviewed at each level in the reporting structure up to and including the chief. These requirements not only increase the time required to make decisions but contribute to a perception that senior leaders are micro-managers and that first-line supervisors and mid-level managers are powerless.

¹ “Skip promotion” refers to managers who were promoted to deputy chief positions directly from sergeant positions without first serving as lieutenants.

Vindictive management. Department leaders are considered by many staff to be vindictive and to focus on achieving retribution for perceived slights. Transfers to undesirable assignments, in particular, are commonly perceived as being used as punishment.

These perspectives relating to vindictive management are by no means isolated. Almost two-thirds of the employees surveyed (64.7 percent) disagree or strongly disagree that “police department employees are not inappropriately punished for making mistakes.” Moreover, roughly nine out of ten survey respondents (87.9 percent) disagree or strongly disagree that “employees can voice criticism about police department management without fear of retribution.” Not surprisingly given these perceptions, roughly three-fourths of the survey respondents (73.1 percent) do not believe that the work environment in the Dallas Police Department is supportive.

Working relationships among senior managers. The common perception among department employees is that leaders at the command staff level do not work well together. Rather than working together to address common problems, the perception among many employees is that senior managers focus on protecting their own turf. Indeed, almost nine out of ten survey respondents (88.8 percent) do not believe that senior department leaders work well together. Even in the Office of the Chief, where many of the senior department leaders are assigned, more than three-fourths of the survey respondents (77.0 percent) do not believe that senior managers work effectively together.

To A Significant Extent, Department Leaders Have Abdicated Their Responsibilities In Providing Leadership To The Dallas Community On Issues Relating To Law Enforcement And Crime

The Dallas Police Department does not currently set the agenda for community discussions about law enforcement and crime. Indeed, in recent years a spate of negative publicity about crime in Dallas combined with management shortcomings has knocked the department back on its heels. Rather than regaining the initiative and working aggressively to provide leadership to the Dallas community on issues relating to crime, the department allowed a leadership void to be created. The fact that the mayor, the city council and the city manager have taken the initiative to fill this void – a circumstance that is much decried within the police department – appears in large part to result from the fact that the department abdicated its leadership responsibilities.

Leadership Deficiencies Have Been Exacerbated By Ineffective Communication Within The Department

Communication on substantive issues has been almost completely lacking within the Dallas Police Department. Without effective communication, however, department employees have no ability to distinguish rumor from fact and to make an informed assessment about key departmental processes. For example, as will be discussed throughout this report, the budget, promotion and transfer processes are much maligned by department employees. While there is certainly a need to strengthen these processes, the actual situation may not be as bad as perceived by employees. However, because the department has made little to no effort to communicate the rationale for decisions relating to these processes, no facts are available that employees

can use to make an informed assessment of these processes.² As a result, rumor and perceptions – that may only partly be based in reality – strongly influence how these processes are viewed. In the same way, perceptions among many employees that department decision-making is characterized by “knee jerk” reactions to short-term problems is only exacerbated by the fact that the rationale for the decisions is rarely communicated to the affected parties.³

Ineffective Communication Processes Have The Potential To Hamper Efforts To Address Leadership Deficiencies

Not only have ineffective communications processes and practices exacerbated current leadership deficiencies, but they also have the potential to derail efforts to strengthen leadership. At present, one of the most common approaches (other than word of mouth) used to communicate information within the department are meetings. However, a “worst of all worlds scenario” has developed with regard to meetings – employees spend considerable time in meetings but substantive issues are not discussed.⁴

Not only has the department failed to develop processes for communicating information from the “top” of the organization “down” but processes for communicating information from line employees to department managers and leaders are almost completely non-existent. On the rare occasions when feedback from line employees is solicited, line staff almost never receives feedback on what, if anything is done with their suggestions. In addition, formal mechanisms for communicating information laterally across the department have not been established.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recently hired chief of police faces a daunting challenge. Internal perceptions of department leaders have deteriorated to such an extent that rebuilding the trust and commitment of a somewhat jaded workforce will not be easy. While in the short-term staff at all levels are likely to embrace the department’s new leadership, the cynicism that will likely remain as a vestige of past administrations will be difficult to exorcise. The department has progressed beyond the point where rhetoric and good will alone will be sufficient to change employee perceptions of department leaders. On the contrary, the new chief and his command staff will be required to earn the respect of their subordinates and will need to dedicate themselves to this task each and every day.

² More than four out of five employee survey respondents disagree or strongly disagree that the rationale for budget and resource allocation decisions are effectively communicated (82.3 percent), that the rationale for decisions relating to promotion are effectively communicated (84.1 percent) and that the rationale for decisions relating to the transfer of employees is effectively communicated (84.0 percent).

³ More than two-thirds of the respondents to the employee survey (67.9 percent) disagree or strongly disagree that “the rationale for decisions directly affecting my unit are effectively communicated.”

⁴ 71.9 percent of the respondents to the employee survey disagree or strongly disagree that “meetings are used effectively to support needed communication within the police department.” In addition, almost three out of five survey respondents (59.5 percent) disagree or strongly disagree that “the time I spend in meetings is generally productive and worthwhile.”

The recommendations outlined in this report describe a management and operational context within which the new chief can lead the department. The remainder of this chapter presents suggestions the new chief might take to facilitate his leadership efforts.

The New Chief Of Police Should Clearly Establish Himself As A Forceful And Visible Leader Within The Department

While the Dallas Police Department employs a number of very capable staff at senior and mid-management levels, as a group senior leaders are not well regarded. Consequently, the new chief of police does not have the luxury of relying on a core of well regarded leaders to support his initial leadership efforts. On the contrary, in the short-term, the chief of police must position himself to be the department's primary leader. Only he is currently in the position to leverage the good will resulting from his hiring to begin to bring about needed change in the department. It will likely take some time for his leadership team to become established and to earn the respect of department employees. Until that time, the chief of police and the chief of police alone should be clearly identified with the department's leadership and improvement initiatives.

To establish himself as a forceful leader within the department, the chief should spend considerable time during his initial months in the office "leading by walking around." Despite a reservoir of cynicism that will greet any new leader, managers and staff are unquestionably thirsty for strong, effective leadership. Being visible within the department, holding formal and informal meetings with staff at all levels, and taking every opportunity to reiterate his vision for the department will enable the chief of police to fortify his standing as the dynamic leader the department needs.

The Chief Of Police Should Meet With The Mayor, Interim City Manager And City Council Members To Clarify Their Leadership Roles

The credibility of the new chief of police within the department will depend in large part on how his relationship with the mayor, the interim city manager and the city council is defined. While from the perspective of an outside observer the mayor, city manager and city council became more actively involved in the day-to-day operations of the police department to fill a leadership void, from the perspective of most police department employees the mayor, city manager and city council inappropriately usurped police department prerogatives. With a new chief of police in place, the need for external parties to play such a key role providing oversight will be unnecessary. At the same time, however, the mayor, interim city manager and city council members should continue to play appropriate leadership and oversight roles.

To address this situation, the chief of police should meet with the mayor, the interim city manager and appropriate city council members to clarify their leadership and management roles. In addition, to the extent possible, key parameters of their day-to-day working relationships should be discussed. Once these roles and relationships have been clearly defined the chief of police should clearly communicate these roles to department staff. Doing so will help to ensure that all department employees understand the appropriate role of the mayor, the interim city manager and the city council in setting policy and providing oversight for the department. In addition, by clearly articulating these roles individual department employees and managers will be better able to identify

inappropriate requests for assistance (to the extent such requests occur) and to seek guidance from the office of the chief of police on how to address such situations when and if they occur.

Proactive Steps Should Be Taken To Re-Establish The Police Department As The Community Leader On Issues Relating To Law Enforcement

A number of proactive steps should be taken to re-establish the police department's position as the dominant community leader on issues relating to law enforcement.

Aggressively communicate the department's new direction and its plans for change. The recommendations presented in this report represent a new direction and vision for the police department and it is important that stakeholders throughout the Dallas community understand this direction and its implications for the services they receive. To this end, the chief of police should develop a formal and systematic plan for communicating the department's new direction to the Dallas community. Working with the manager of community affairs and employee communications, the chief of police should establish a campaign of speaking engagements, meetings with community leaders and individual citizens, and public appearances designed to communicate the department's new direction and to solicit input and support. In addition, public relations materials should be prepared and disseminated throughout the community that explain the new approach to policing that is being developed by the Dallas Police Department.

In addition to the chief of police's efforts to communicate the department's new direction and its plan for change, the deputy chiefs who oversee each patrol division should also be responsible for meeting with local community leaders to communicate this new direction and vision. Indeed, each deputy chief working closely with the manager of community affairs and employee communications should establish their own campaign of speaking engagements, meetings and public appearances to communicate the department's new direction and to solicit input and support.

Reach out to the news media to discuss how to strengthen relationships. The chief of police should also reach out to the local news media (both media that target the entire Dallas population and media that focus on local communities and individual segments of the population) to discuss ways of strengthening ongoing relationships. In particular, these discussions should focus on how the department can better serve the media when responding to breaking news stories and how the department can do a better job of sharing information on the many positive initiatives the department is undertaking to serve the Dallas community. In addition, the chief of police should use these meetings to communicate the department's new direction, focusing particular attention on the measures that will be used to evaluate performance, how information on department performance will be communicated, and the frequency with which this information will be provided.

Establish communications links with citywide and local community organizations. In addition to working proactively to strengthen working relationships with the news media, the department should also develop independent mechanisms for communicating to the citizens of Dallas about its performance. In particular, the department should establish communications links with community organizations from throughout the City that it can use to disseminate information on department performance and to share information on the initiatives that are underway to improve services. While the

Community Affairs and Employee Communications Division should provide the leadership for this initiative and help to coordinate the effort, each patrol division should also be responsible for identifying local community groups and establishing communications networks. In addition, while the Community Affairs and Employee Communications Division should be responsible for developing content to be distributed throughout the network on departmentwide issues and initiatives, each patrol division should also be responsible for developing content on issues and initiatives of local concern and disseminating this information to local stakeholders.

As part of this process, the department should re-evaluate its website and how it can be used to strengthen communications with the Dallas community. While much useful information is presented on the website the information presented is not always timely and presented in a manner that is most helpful to citizens. While the website should not be viewed as the primary tool for communicating to the Dallas community it certainly is an important tool. Indeed, ensuring that the website includes timely content that is of interest to Dallas citizens and that this information is presented in an accessible format is a necessary first step to any communications effort. In addition, structuring the website as a portal that can be used to access information of interest to local communities maintained on patrol division websites will help to ensure needed consistency in how information is presented without dictating the local content that is provided.

Establish advisory panels for each patrol division. A key element of the management vision presented in this report is that the deputy chiefs who lead patrol divisions should be given much greater authority for developing service improvement and crime reduction strategies in their divisions while being held accountable for results. To help inform these strategies – while also positioning the department as the community leader on law enforcement issues – each division should establish a community input task force consisting of ten to twelve local community leaders. These task forces should work with division commanders to better understand community law enforcement needs and to provide feedback on the strategies being developed and implemented to address those needs. In addition, on at least a quarterly basis, one to two members of each division's advisory panel should meet with the chief of police to directly share with him perspectives on local community concerns.

The Develop And Implement A Strategy And Plan For Strengthening Internal Communications

In an organization as large and complex as the Dallas Police Department successful communications requires both planning and management attention. A systematic approach to communications will be needed both to support efforts to transform the police department and to support ongoing operations. To this end, the current *ad hoc* approach to communications should be replaced by a comprehensive communications strategy and plan. This plan should incorporate strategies for disseminating information from the “top” of the organization “down,” laterally across the organization, and from the “bottom” of the organization to the “top.”

“Top-down” communication. A discussion of the key components of a “top-down” strategy and communications plan follows.

- **Identification of the groups to whom information needs to be communicated.** Not all information needs to be disseminated to all employees. Unless an effort is made to ensure that the information individuals receive is relevant to them they are unlikely to focus sufficient attention on the information they do receive. The first step in determining what information should be communicated is to identify the various individuals and groups within the department with whom various types of information must be shared. Some information for example, information on the overall performance of the department might be shared with all groups while other information may be of interest to only a subset of department employees.
- **Articulate the objectives of communications efforts.** There is a tendency in some organizations to take a risk averse approach to sharing information. Anything that might conceivably be of interest to employees is shared. Needless to say, this approach leads to information overload and a situation where even the most dedicated employee has trouble sifting through the information received to uncover information of interest to them. To avoid this problem, department managers should identify, for each group of employees to whom different types of information will be communicated, the ultimate objective of the communications effort.
- **Define what types of information should be communicated to various employee groups.** Once various employee subgroups have been identified and the overall objectives of communications efforts established, the department should consider what specific types of information should be communicated to each subgroup. This analysis should consider both information that should be disseminated on a scheduled basis (e.g., quarterly reports of department and division performance) and information that should be disseminated on an irregular basis depending on emerging issues.
- **Determine the format and vehicles that should be used to share information.** A variety of formats and vehicles may be used to share information. Which format or vehicle is appropriate will depend both on the type of information being disseminated and the group with which the information is being shared. For some types of information for example, sharing the rationale for an individual promotional decision – face-to-face communication with the affected party may be the best approach. Meetings, on the other hand, are often the best vehicle to share information on which feedback and discussion is needed. Memos, videos and reports, by contrast, may be the best way to communicate factual information for which a dialogue about the information being shared is not necessary.

To determine what communications format and vehicles are most appropriate for sharing various types of information the department should conduct interviews, focus groups and surveys with representatives of various stakeholder groups. Initial communications approaches should be developed based on a result of this fact-finding effort. Selection of the appropriate communications approaches should consider not only how needed information can best be communicated but should also consider the burden imposed on the information recipient by alternative communications vehicles. Meetings, for example, might be the best way to communicate some types of information but might not be selected because the time required for staff to participate in meetings outweighs the communications benefits. Once initial communications vehicles and formats have been selected these

communications approaches should be reviewed on a periodic basis. Based on the results of these assessments, modifications to the format and vehicles used to communicate various types of information should be made.

- **Establish a communications infrastructure.** Once the overall framework for communicating information has been determined the department should work to develop a communications infrastructure that supports the overall communications strategy and plan. In developing this infrastructure the department should focus special attention on determining how technology can be used to both support effective communications and to reduce communications costs. As part of this analysis, the department should identify the most cost-effective ways to ensure the reliability of the communications infrastructure being developed.
- **Develop approaches to monitor the success of communications efforts.** Consistency is the key to any effective communication system. Therefore, establishing a monitoring system to ensure that ongoing communications efforts are consistent with the proposed communications strategy and plan will be a key to its success. In addition, to the extent possible, communications related goals and objectives should be incorporated into the performance goals for all department managers and supervisors.

“Bottom-up” communication. Great care must be taken when establishing a system for “bottom-up” communication to ensure employee expectations are reasonable. Certainly, it is neither practical nor necessarily prudent to seek employee input on all issues facing the department. However, it is very important that when employee input is solicited that the department’s leaders share how that information was used to inform their decisions. (Leaders may choose not to act on employee suggestions but should provide a rationale for the decisions that are made.) As previously noted, one of the best ways to receive employee input is simply to “lead by walking around.” Informal communications between employees and department leaders provide a vehicle for employees to share their ideas and opinions but, because the discussions are informal, do not necessitate a response to each suggestion received.

Lateral communications. Unlike “top-down” communication that can be effectively controlled by department managers and leaders, communications across organizational units is difficult, if not impossible, to orchestrate. However, the department can certainly facilitate improved communication across the organization by providing the technology to support “lateral” communication. In particular, the department should host chat rooms and bulletin boards that managers and officers at all levels can use to seek information from other units, discuss common issues and problems, and share information on effective practices. As part of the department’s overall efforts to enhance its website, technologies to facilitate communication across the department should be developed. Once these technologies are in place, managers and supervisors within each organizational unit should be actively encouraged to use these tools to communicate with each other.