



CITY OF RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA

Police Department Executive Leadership Review

MBD 
INNOVATIONS

Boston, MA

September 2018



Context and Scope

MBD Innovations was contacted by City Manager Bill Lindsay in reference to conducting a leadership review of the Richmond Police Department (RPD). It was agreed that this review would examine the executive leadership efficacy of the RPD based on the stated goals and intended outcomes of the organization. It is important to note, that this review is delimited to the prescribed area of focus and was not intended to investigate specific cases of misconduct or examine polices. With that said, the findings contained herein are meant to assist leadership in creating the conditions that minimize the likelihood for future gross misconduct that could jeopardize the standing of the RPD with the community and optimize the police function for the City of Richmond.

Review Methodology

MBD Innovations is a leadership consulting consortium focused on the public safety efforts within municipalities. Based on the scope of this project, it was decided that a site visit to Richmond was warranted along with the utilization of a survey instrument. In all, twenty individual people were interviewed with another sixty-seven members of the RPD responding to the customized survey. Along with the information gathered directly from individuals we conducted a robust document review of both materials provided by city officials and the website for the City of Richmond.

Dimensions of High Efficacy Organizational Leadership

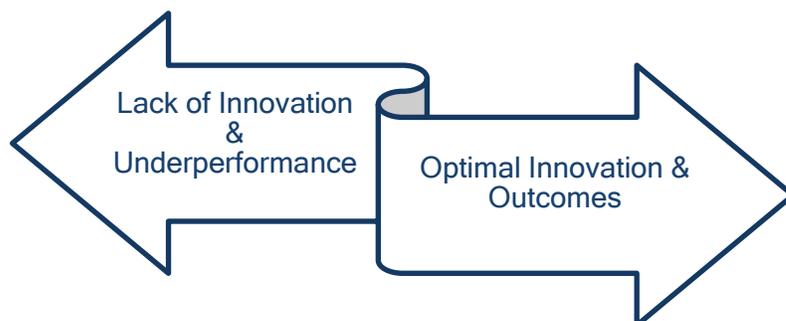
For an assessment of this type to have any utility, it is required that the standard of leadership outcomes be articulated in a cogent manner taking into account the context in which the RPD operates. Police departments of the size of the RPD are in essence complex, adaptive systems that are a collective of interoperable and interdependent functions. Policing in general requires the effective leveraging of human capital that operates in the realm of high discretion and autonomy. The community that is served sets the level of complexity that the police department must operate at. The dynamic of local jurisdictional control of the police is a defining characteristic of the predominant law enforcement function in the United States. In this respect, it is vital to ensure the maximal connectivity between the community and this critical governmental responsibility.

Based on this context, the philosophy, competence and approach of the top executives of a police department determine the effectiveness of the entire function. It is not found in the field of policing that the rank and file can operationally transcend suboptimal executive leadership and attain optimization. With the nature of this work being the dealing with the complexities of human behavior on the individual- and communal-level, the margin of error for police executives to get it right is slim.

Paragon of Internal Dimensions

The most effective police executives mobilize the talent within the organization in a manner that causes staff to self-actualize towards a challenging and commonly understood goal framework. A cogent understanding of the meaning of this statement is necessary to recognize the standard by which the current executive team of RPD is being compared against for the purpose of this review. At the core of this premise is the philosophical belief that the way to attain optimal organizational performance is to fully leverage the strengths and talents of all members of the department. This leadership approach requires that all members of the department are viewed as having equal intrinsic value to the organization and thus being essential to its mission. The notion of self-actualization (in the organizational context) is the continual development of the individual that recognizes that the dedication of one's self to the collective whole as paramount. It

is the manifestation of one's talents towards a collectively sought-after noble cause, which is the point. The goal framework is the culture of what is valued and means by which work is organized. This paragon of police executive leadership is best understood on a continuum more so than absolute success or failure. On one end, there is optimal organizational innovation and outcomes. On the other is chaos, underperformance and little to no innovation. It is essential to understand that the measure of success here cannot be self-reported by the executive but testified to by the membership of the organization and manifest in formulation and execution of new ideas.



The described organizational focus not only has been shown to produce the best ideas the department can muster but also systems and processes that perform optimally as well. An environment of individual value will also engender a collective sense of the whole and higher level of individual dedication to overall organizational success. More pride and ownership in the ideas that evolve the organization, leads to a greater investment in the outcomes of the function. All this creates the conditions whereby behavior, that will attenuate the trust of the community, will be collectively frowned upon and thus less likely to occur. Police officers want to be proud of their organization and community. This approach to leadership gives cause to this inclination and engenders a culture to maximize organizational impact by internally embodying the desired external behavior.

Paragon of External Dimensions

The City of Richmond places high demands on the police department compared to other U.S. cities of similar size. This dynamic intensifies the need for the police department to have a symbiotic relationship with the City Manager and City Council. If the police department is viewed as the sole entity responsible for crime reduction and operates commensurate with this external depiction, then the outcomes will be predictably suboptimal.

Crime has historically been a challenge for the City of Richmond and, according to the residents, still the primary concern. Over the past decade there is evidence that the RPD has become a more capable police department which undoubtedly has made an impact on the crime rate and, in particular, the rate of homicidal violence. The most effective police departments lead the comprehensive effort to challenge the conditions that contribute to crime and disorder. This takes the form of a collective response over time (in years, not months) to activate. This then leads to leveraging assets both in the areas and with the people that would provide the greatest impact to these sub-optimal conditions. Tangibly, what is produced is a series of initiatives that follow the thread of comprehensive strategy focused on activating community assets and enhancing collective efficacy. The police department takes on the form of this strategy in purpose and structure. This goes well beyond just working with the community but engendering the community to do what only the community can to produce a future distinct from the past.

In this ideal, the notion of creating a high-trust relationship with the community is based on the quality of the everyday interactions between the community members and police personnel along with the community trusting in a collective end game. This is a mutually created strategy that clearly delineates areas of responsibility. It is in this work, that the intended future with the community is forged.

Findings | External Dimensions

The connectivity between the police executive team and the office of the City Manager is sub-optimal. There is evidence to believe that the Police Chief and the City Manager did not operate from the same philosophical framework on issues related to personnel, the fiscal management of the police department and the handling of high-profile allegations of misconduct.

This lack of mutual understanding, as to the threshold of provable misconduct that could result in significant discipline, is a dynamic that is completely under the control of the leaders involved in the process. The consequence of not being on the same philosophical wave length is that the door is open for scrutiny as to the legitimacy of the entire process of police accountability. In Richmond, the media attention drawn to the termination of a police captain could have been mitigated if the Police Chief and City Manager had a common operational understanding as to

what evidence would support termination. The most salient example of the disconnect is in a high-profile misconduct case involving several members of the RPD. It was expressed by the City Manager to the City Council via a memo in response external criticism of the handling of case that, *“The initial disciplinary actions against the officers involved in the Jasmine Abuslin incident were far too lenient.”* This statement shines a spotlight on the how philosophically incongruous the City Manager and Police Chief are on issues of discipline and critical incident management. In addition, the decision to facilitate the transport of Jamine Abuslin is not the type of decision best made in a vacuum and discussed after the fact. Decisions that could significantly impact the perception of competence of any facet of city government is the responsibility of the City Manager regardless of which city department is primarily involved. Moreover, in the handling of all the facets of a crisis there needs to be a collective approach led by the City Manager. This is the proven method of mitigating reputational damage, as the City Manager is ultimately responsible for the performance of the entire organization. While the police department can be the mired in crisis one day, it could be the fire department the next. Perspective matters when navigating these episodes, so department heads should not be left on their own to figure it out. While it is understood that some department heads may want absolute autonomy, there is no evidence to believe that this is most prudent means to handle a crisis. A collective decision-making approach is tantamount to a ‘situation room’ methodology which, if effectively executed, will ensure not only the best decision the group can muster but a consistency of action which bodes well for the abilities of the City Manager to handle the complexities of the community.

Along with the apparent lack of connection on issues related to discipline and crisis management we did not find compelling evidence that there exists a sufficient level of connectivity on issues related to labor management, high-level community concerns nor budget management. This dynamic is problematic from an operational perspective and leads to a host of tangential issues, which limits the possibilities of the RPD to optimize. The opportunity cost here is substantial in that this erodes the presentation of joint credibility which makes it more difficult to capture external support for the city council or the community at large.

We cannot underscore enough the importance to the City Manager and the Police Chief being in absolute lock step in all phases of operation. We are not advocating

for behavior that could be reasonably considered micro-management, but a relational dynamic that creates a collective strategy that is anticipatory and intentional in how the city manages issues related to the police department.

A comprehensive strategy does not exist to challenge the conditions that contribute to crime and disorder in Richmond. It is clear, that over the last several years the RPD has become a more capable organization and thus been effective in playing its part in reducing crime in Richmond. In addition, there have been a number of desperate measures that have been aimed at crime deterrence. What is absent is a collective effort strategically focused on the people and places that are most affected by crime. This type of collective work could be in the form of robust partnerships that manifest into continual and strategic action with clear objectives and measurable results. An example would be a relationship with the school district/s whereby both the police and school officials would be focused on engaging the youth who are in the network of retaliatory violence with efforts that are aimed to assist these youth in the process of self-actualization. Thus, thereby reaffirming their value to society and their individual ability to contribute. An ancillary but significant benefit of this type of collective effort is that both the police and school staff would be developing a working trust with these members of the youth community, which could be indispensable in preventing acts of violence in the moment. The possibilities here are endless but there are a few essential elements of these types of collective approaches.

- ***They are multidisciplinary.*** It's not about the police, it's about the partnership with a function that has primacy over a condition related to crime.
- ***They are strategically driven and focused on the areas and people that need it the most.*** For example, having after-school programming available to all is important but if the children that are closest to the violence are not in the program than the effort is not optimal. The City of Richmond currently has access to a wealth of information related to the causal factors of crime which if analyzed in the proper philosophical framework can serve as way-finding signage to the creation of meaningful collaborative efforts.
- ***They have robust, yet succinct measurements of success.*** What is also missing is the coalescence of city services to support an effort to challenge

the conditions that contribute to crime and disorder. By all accounts, crime in Richmond is considered primarily a “police” or policing problem. The more optimal approach would take the form of a strategic plan that would first identify the conditions most pernicious and collectively address them on an ongoing and measured basis. Equally as effective is the approach of appreciative inquiry where the goal would be to replicate conditions that exist in areas of the community that have much less crime and disorder. The best results typically are derived from a binary approach that comes up with the best percentage focus for both philosophies. These conditions exist both in the structures of social order and in the physical conditions of subcomponents of neighborhoods that illustrate disorder. In the realm of social order, we are referring the level of collective efficacy that exists in the micro-segments of the community. Collective efficacy in this context has three essential behavioral elements where the more prevalent, the higher the level of social capital.

1. The first element is how many people know one another in the neighborhood or micro-section of the neighborhood.
2. The second is through the knowledge of people in a place, working trust amongst those people is established.
3. The third and final stage in the establishment of collective efficacy is the existence of shared expectations of behavior in a place.

So, what we know is that the higher the level of collective efficacy, the lower the probability of crime. For the City of Richmond, we know through ample evidence that there is an opportunity here. In the *National Citizen Survey - Trends over Time*¹ document, there are several indices that point to low levels of community connectivity. The most telling variable identifies that only 3 out of 10 residents expressed a positive response with regard to there being a sense of community in Richmond. To be fair, this question like numerous others in survey instruments of this type could be interpreted in different ways, but the connection between the elements of collective efficacy and feeling of a sense of community is reasonable.

¹ National Research Center, Inc. (2017). *The NCS National Citizen Survey for Richmond, CA: Trends over time (Draft)*. Available at <http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/3500/2017-Community-Survey>

As mentioned there are other factors beyond social capital that are causal conditions to crime, such as the appearance and condition or physical spaces to include homes and other structures as well as the amount of home ownership within certain neighborhoods. While communities can be built within a construct of mostly rental property, there does exist more of an inclination of community for members to take ownership over their community because the own property in that community.

This finding really represents a lost opportunity for the City of Richmond as a collection of assets to have a real and substantive impact on crime in a manner that is more scalable and sustainable than relying primarily in the facets of police service.

The police department's community policing strategy is focused mostly on solving the problems presented to them by the community. The current community policing approach of the RPD has primarily a service-based orientation in the police department, which is reactive to community requests. While we certainly want a police department to be responsive to the will of the community in a granular and service-oriented manner, this approach is best tempered with an equal emphasis on identifying, coalescing and activating assets from within the community to do the work that the community is most suitable for. Similar to the previous finding, the focus here is on strategy that scales well and that is more sustainable than the resources of the police department, which fluctuate over time.

This community building logic model builds on the ability of the police department to respond competently to concerns generated by residents and to engender sense of collective ownership in the neighborhoods and micro-hot spots of high crime. The philosophy executed properly becomes inculcated in all the habits of the police function. Every encounter with a member of the police department becomes an opportunity on building connection to the community. This may appear ethereal but applied with intention this philosophy works on several levels within the community. This finding is another that points to an opportunity cost for the PD if not explored. There is ample evidence to deduce that the community members that make up the City or Richmond are far more capable of being leveraged than the current community policing approach mandates. Moreover, this unnecessary level of

dependence that the community has on the police department is a point of frustration for police staff, many of which see the opportunity for the RPD to pursue higher levels of communal responsibility.

There are pockets of the community that are distrustful of the police and there is no cogent strategy to address it. The statistical percentage of residents that view police service as good or excellent is low and has dropped five percentage points from 2015 to 2017. This trend is troubling especially in light of the service response community policing model adopted by the RPD. Along with this data point, there is clear consensus at all ranks of the RPD that there are segments of the population that hold higher levels of distrust of the police. Moreover, there are people representing organizations that are acutely distrustful of the police administration and perceive the administration as distant and non-transparent. In the context of what has described in the aforementioned findings as the objective of the most effective police organizations, this level of distrust is a hindrance to progression of the RPD.

In serving diverse communities, it is not uncommon for there to be segments of the community that are dubious or outright distrustful of the police as a function. All the more reason to have a succinct strategy in place to seek to reverse this sentiment. At times the reflexive reaction by police administrators is to view certain pockets of the population as unreachable and to focus on those members of the community that have less animus. While this is certainly the easier road, it is not the most optimal, as often times the segments of the population that hold the most trepidation towards police are the segments that need the most thoughtful and comprehensive police interventions. For the RPD, there is work to be done in this domain.

Findings | Internal Dimensions

There is no compelling articulated vision for the Richmond Police Department. This is a high-bar critique but warranted given the contemporary history of the RPD. The prevailing reputation of the RPD is that of a paragon of reform. Having gone from dysfunctional to functional while laudable does not mean that the RPD is now or was ever the paragon of a high-performing police department. Moreover, the designation of high-performance (or even acceptable performance) is one that the

community served has primacy over assignment and in the case of the RPD they have rendered their ruling.

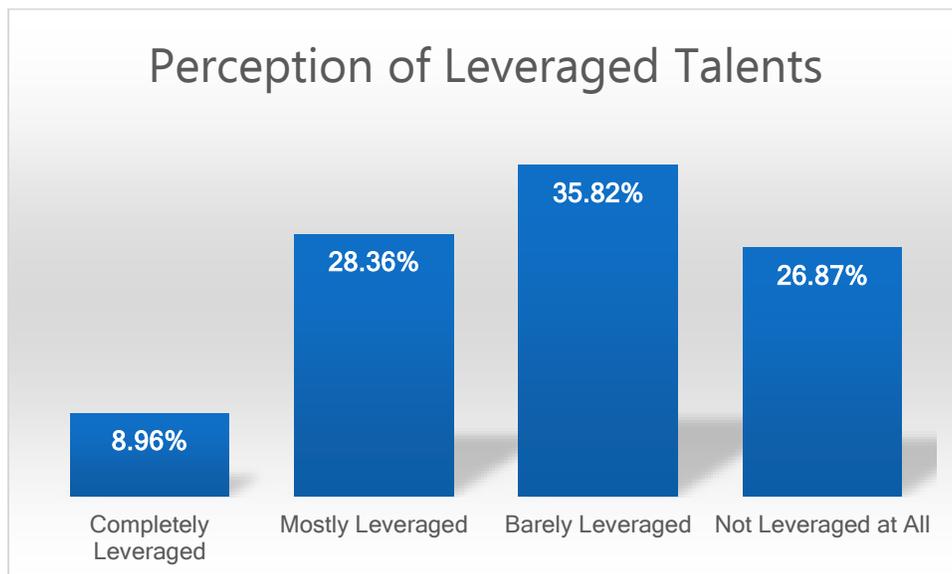
So, given the trajectory of the organization over recent years and the change in executive leadership, a firm and compelling '*who are we and who are we seeking to become*' vision is necessary to provide the organization with bearing and purpose. The benefits of this statement of intent and its instantiation cannot be underscored, as policing is a complex endeavor and the officers need robust leadership. Officers need the principles that direct how to operate and are steadfastly followed to where the residue of these tenets can be found on every decision that is made. Police officers need certainty where certainty can exist. The succinct articulation of a vision that contains relevance and a highly relatable message that leaves little to misinterpretation. This is the starting place to move an organization to optimization.

The current organizational structure fosters an operational disconnect from management (lieutenants and above) and first line staff. For functions such as police departments with 24-hour operations, the structure of management plays a substantive role on how vertically connected the organization is. In the case of the RPD, the current structure of management does not promote connectivity between the ranks of sergeant and lieutenant. In some existing staffing scenarios within the RPD, there are lieutenants who are never scheduled to work directly with sergeants whose job performance they are expected to evaluate. Moreover, after 1900 hours there is no member of the RPD above the rank of sergeant on-duty, which is a cause for concern given peak hours of police activity.

To be clear, we do understand the basic objective of a deployment strategy focused on geographic accountability, which appears to be the aim of the current management structure of the RPD. However, for this to work for a department of this size, there needs to exist robust means to ***share information, make in-the-field course corrections*** and to ***affirm great work done by line staff***. For RPD, it appears that none of these of operational elements are occurring with any meaningful effectiveness. This lack of connectivity has real consequences if a police department is looking to progress and become more effective tomorrow than they are today.

The talents of line staff within the RPD are underutilized. Policing is a complicated function of government requiring well-intended people to be fully leveraged in the context of the departments they work in for optimization of the function to be attained. Organizations are, by definition, a collection of individuals coalesced for a purpose. So, it stands to reason that we should seek to create a culture within any organization that maximizes the contribution of individual talent. It is through the effective leveraging of individual talent towards a succinctly defined mission that we begin to see collective innovation.

For the RPD there appears to be a significant amount of untapped individual talent. When surveyed upwards of 63% of the respondents expressed either feeling that their talents were *barely leveraged* or *not leveraged at all*.

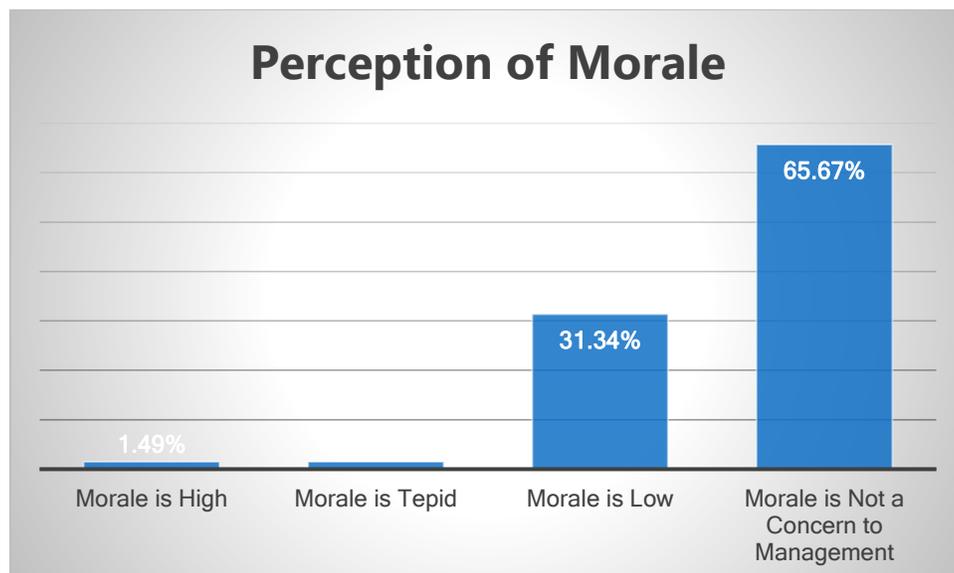


The relationship between the Richmond Police Officers Association (RPOA) and RPD administration is unnecessarily acrimonious. The onus is on police administration to take the lead in creating a harmonious relationship with the various collective labor units. The three predominant qualities that build trust in any professional relationship – *competence, reliability and sincerity* – need to act as the behavioral substrate of which a productive continuous dialogue is built. There may always be philosophical disagreements but there should not be complaints about behavior that run contrary to the *qualities of trust*.

For the RPD there is work to be done in creating a relationship where the RPOA believes they are heard and the dialogue is robust and continual, not episodic. Moreover, there is evidence to believe that, as a collective, the command staff of the RPD (captains and above) do not consistently adhere to the requirements of the labor agreement and that the process to remedy these actions is unnecessarily slow.

Having a productive relationship with the bargaining unit/s is not a luxury or a 'nice to have' but a *must have* if a police department is going to perform optimally. The success of these relationships is built on how well we collectively handle the granular issues (perhaps only impacting one member) as it is about settling a contract. Grievances are a real problem, not a nuisance, and the more grievances exist and the longer they take to get resolved, the more the reputation of the command staff erodes with the line officers. Engendering real innovation in this relational context is next to impossible.

Poor morale is the predominate issue raised by line staff. There is a lot that goes into the notion of morale but here it is in a nutshell posed in the form of a question: *What is the overarching experience that individuals have at work and do they perceive that experience as primarily positive or primarily negative?* The RPD response to the question about morale yielded irrefutable results as 97% of the respondents characterized the morale within the RPD as either poor or not the concern of the administration.



This issue of poor morale flags what is the most pressing concern held by line staff that unless addressed would be the root cause of organizational stagnation. Line staff have conveyed that there exists strong belief that the command staff is apathetic, unaccountable and not competent to lead the RPD to the next level. In particular, line staff have noted a sense of senior administration being absent and not engaged with their individual and collective work. Contributing to this dynamic we found that there is a lack of unanimous agreement amongst the captains on what constitutes commendable work and what process/s exist to both discover this work and draw commensurate attention to it.

There is much more to this issue of morale than simply acknowledging good work. The overall lack of connectivity between management and line staff leaves a gap of information exchange that allows people the space to criticize management decisions and to assign intent as to the meaning of those decisions. Moreover, this leaves officers with a sense of powerlessness where they have no say in the context of their existence, which assures that morale will be less than optimal.

Conclusion

The purpose of this review was to determine if the command staff of RPD has the organization on the track towards optimization. The findings in this report represent gaps in the competencies of strategy, approach and execution towards that end. With that said, we did not find evidence that RPD is not fundamentally sound in the delivery of police services. If progress is the focus, however, then there is work to be done to better align the organization in that direction. What is clear is that the most pressing issues for the RPD reside in the internal dimension. If the internal dynamics are not addressed, having more meaningful impact externally will be significantly less probable.

As a final point, we consider the process to produce granular recommendations and strategy distinct from the process of review and analysis. These outcomes are best performed over time and through a succinct process of strategic planning. It has been an honor to have been invited to the City of Richmond. We hope that this process of examination proves useful to the City Manager and the Police Chief.

Best regards,

Michael Davis

Lead Consultant and Founder
MBD Innovations