

## Toward a profession of police leadership

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This special edition of the Public Safety Leadership Research Focus is reproduced in part from the 'New Perspectives in Policing' paper - *Toward a profession of police leadership*. This report is one in a series of papers that have arisen out of the Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety (2008-2014), jointly run by Harvard Kennedy School and the National Institute of Justice. Links to the full report can be found at the end of this issue.

*"No profession is more dependent on the quality of its leadership than policing. But unless careful thought is given to its development, dispersal, context, and practical application, individual leadership skill training will not translate into organizational success."*

Edward Flynn, Chief of Police, Milwaukee Police Department

### INTRODUCTION

Policing has changed in recent years and continues to evolve. Police agencies must contend with new threats, new technologies, new crimes and new communities, all of which create new challenges and opportunities for policing.

The public's expectations have changed, and the public safety arena now includes more stakeholders with whom police must work to tackle some of the endemic and complex issues facing communities. As a result, leading police organizations has changed, too.

Police leaders are increasingly expected to run efficient businesses that effectively prevent as well as investigate crime. Thus, the skill sets required of police leaders in shaping their organizations today differ greatly from those required 20 years ago.

Although pockets of good practice in police leader development are seen across the nation, the ability of the policing profession to translate these isolated successes into more effective leadership in general is debatable. Most departments continue to view leadership as a "property" of the individual rather than the organization and, therefore, attempts to develop better functioning organizations rest heavily on "improving" individuals. Little attention is given to the system in which the leader operates or to how individuals can create and distribute a climate of leadership throughout a police organization.

This — we argue in this paper — limits the innovation that is possible in a police organization, as it reinforces the role of the leader as the individual with all the answers. There are missed opportunities in this, given the complexity of the policing environment as it has evolved, and only by addressing these opportunities can law enforcement organizations hope to meet the challenges they face. Articulating what we hope to achieve through leadership, and how we might better develop and support the qualities that will allow police organizations to reach these goals, allows us to move farther toward a profession of police leadership.

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