

Surveying Police Officers

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3 In 2012, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) decided that it had to be nicer to people. A new Chief of Police had arrived on the scene from out of town and, after about a year of looking around, settled on that as one of his key problems. The problem was both external and internal. Externally, he could see that the relationship between the police department and many poor and minority communities was broken. Contention between them threatened to undermine the very legitimacy of the police—and perhaps the rest of government. Internally, he sensed a parallel collapse of authority. The leaders he found in place upon arrival were unimpressive. Plum job assignments and promotions were distributed in response to politics, cronyism, and nepotism and not in recognition of hard and effective work. The procedures in place to monitor and discipline officers, especially for serious misconduct, were in shambles.

23 So, he set out to fix these problems. While he made important moves on the community front, he sensed that he had to address the department's internal problems first. The organization needed modern leadership and management; a personnel system that identified, nurtured, and promoted qualified people; and a functioning disciplinary process. Only when they got their own house in order could the CPD hope to develop a sustainably

32 better relationship with the community. As one senior manager put it to me, describing motivating change among his employees, "We can't kick their asses until they are nice to people."

36 As one small contribution to understanding the success or failure of this effort (and perhaps encouraging its success), I conducted a survey of Chicago police officers. The project was paid for by a local foundation, and the field work was carried out by a professional, university-based survey research organization. As a descriptive tool, the survey was designed to help quantify the real depth and breadth of some of the concerns that the new chief sensed among his troops in the field. The CPD is a huge organization. In a world awash with rumor and blogging, dogged by leaks to reporters from jealous insiders, and operating in a political environment of legendary dysfunctionality, it would be hard for anyone to gauge the morale of more than 12,000 employees just by walking around. As a research tool, the survey was designed to test a theory of organizational effectiveness called "procedural justice." In a nutshell, procedural justice theory identifies key aspects of authority relations—be it between police officers and their bosses or between officers and the public. The theory promised to be useful for understanding the department's internal and external problems. In addition, the Chief bought into the theory, and he started talking about it during public and private appearances around town. This is the first time I have worked with a police chief who had a theory!

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65 **Developing the Survey**

66 When it came to leadership and supervision
 67 within the department—internal procedural justice—
 68 I began on solid ground. There is a very large
 69 literature on procedural justice in the workplace,
 70 including a number of solid studies of police offi-
 71 cers and members of related occupations, such as
 72 FBI agents and army officers. This work is quite
 73 well known, and modern managers (still only a
 74 subset in these occupations, unfortunately) are
 75 well versed in the lessons of procedural justice
 76 research. As a result, I could stand on the shoul-
 77 ders of the research giants and reuse their sur-
 78 vey questions. I started with a list of procedural
 79 justice concepts—for example, “voice,” or giving
 80 officers an opportunity to describe their situa-
 81 tion and express their opinions about a problem
 82 when their supervisors are deciding on a course
 83 of action. There were about a dozen of these cat-
 84 egories, but my list was quickly filled in with the
 85 four or so questions that I wanted to measure. I
 86 was on my own when it came to asking about
 87 specific local initiatives, such as gauging sup-
 88 port for the new Chief’s hard-nosed “CompStat”
 89 management style. I also had to develop ques-
 90 tions testing support for the city’s homegrown
 91 community policing program and for discerning
 92 what officers think about their union (answer: it’s
 93 complicated).

94 By contrast, external procedural justice, mea-
 95 sured by officers’ views of how they should be
 96 treating members of the public, was unexplored
 97 territory. Many surveys of police include ques-
 98 tions about the community. On repeated occa-
 99 sions I have asked Chicago officers if they think
 100 the public likes and supports them or fears and
 101 hates them. But there have been precious few
 102 studies that have used the elaborate conceptual
 103 framework provided by procedural justice theory
 104 to frame a survey asking officers about their rela-
 105 tions with the *public*, rather than their own bosses.
 106 The opposite, surveys of the public asking how
 107 they are being treated by the *police*, are common
 108 beyond belief, but there have been few studies of
 109 the view of encounters from the police side.

110 So, I proceeded carefully. When possible I
 111 phrased these questions so they paralleled the
 112 officers-and-their-supervisors questions, for
 113 there could be some analytic elegance in compar-
 114 ing the two. A big problem is that the questions
 115 had to be pointed; they could not be sappy. Few
 116 officers are going to reply in a survey that they
 117 should be disrespectful and shout obscenities at
 118 the citizenry. And, actually, few of them believe
 119 that. Instead, the questions had to expose edges
 120 that would free officers (or some officers) to
 121 allow that life on the street can be complicated.
 122 Here are some examples; all of them were asked
 123 in a “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” for-
 124 mat and gave the officers six response categories.
 125 The various modifiers in the questions were
 126 inserted to increase diversity in the answers.
 127 People should be treated with respect regardless
 128 of their respect for the police.
 129 It is necessary to give everyone a good reason
 130 why they are being stopped, even if it is not
 131 required.
 132 People who break the law do not deserve to be
 133 treated with respect.
 134 There is little sense in officers trying to be impar-
 135 tial, because that is impossible in this job.
 136 Because this segment of the survey was
 137 unknown territory, I also tried to include *more*
 138 questions about each key component of proced-
 139 ural justice. The analysis stage of a survey
 140 study starts by developing scales, or index num-
 141 bers, that combine responses to multiple ques-
 142 tions about “the same thing” into one summary
 143 number. For example, I wanted scales reflecting
 144 the extent to which officers support offering
 145 “voice,” “neutrality,” “respect,” and “trust” to
 146 the public, including in those edgy situations.
 147 The criterion that responses to questions being
 148 considered for a scale are measuring the same
 149 underlying procedural justice dimension is met
 150 by combining questions with highly intercorre-
 151 lated responses. This criterion was easy to meet
 152 when it came to internal procedural justice, for
 153 officers have well-developed ideas about their
 154 bosses, and some bosses are bad. The external
 155 questions were somewhat more hypothetical and
 156 a proper response would actually be situationally

157 dependent, so I knew that I was probably going
158 to have to drop some because they just did not fit
159 with others that were supposed to measure “the
160 same thing.” My hope was to identify a mini-
161 mum of three strong questions (one drawing
162 numerous agreements and disagreements) for
163 each procedural justice concept.

164 Other parts of the questionnaire presented
165 “political correctness” issues. A key concept in
166 police research is police culture, so I wanted to
167 have multiple measures of its various elements.
168 Some widely recognized elements of police culture
169 lent themselves well to my Chicago study.
170 “Isolation from the community” is one example,
171 and officers split 50–50 in response to the ques-
172 tion “How would you rate the relationship
173 between the police and the people of Chicago?” I
174 was also good with the solidarity commonly dis-
175 played by officers. Chicago is a high-solidarity
176 place, and 75 % of the officers agreed that
177 “Officers need to stick together because we can’t
178 count on anyone else to protect us if we get in
179 trouble.” Cynicism was also in fashion. Ninety
180 percent agreed that “Many arrests go nowhere
181 because prosecutors and judges aren’t serious
182 about punishing criminals,” and three-quarters
183 stuck with “Most top managers know that rules
184 must be broken or bent to get the job done, but
185 won’t admit it.” They were split in terms of what
186 the police culture literature calls “glorification of
187 crime fighting.” Just under 60 % agreed that “the
188 main focus of the police should be reducing vio-
189 lent crime and not addressing lesser matters.”

190 But I would not touch other topics. Reputedly,
191 one key element of police culture is racism.
192 Others, the literature says, include homophobia,
193 sexism, and political conservatism. Elsewhere I
194 might have asked officers if they were
195 Republicans, but this is Chicago, where none
196 have been sighted for decades. I was not going
197 near any other topic on this list. I am not alone.
198 One feature of research on police culture is that it
199 is almost completely ethnographic. The ideas I
200 described above emerged from hanging out with
201 police and participating in what the British call
202 “canteen culture.” It would be tricky, to say the

203 least, to devise a short set of questions validly
204 assessing the racism of a public employee or the
205 extent of their presumed homophobia. The
206 pointed questions this would require would have
207 rocked the station houses, and my name would
208 have been in the newspapers, for sure.

209 The first pages of the survey had to cover
210 some basic, federally required issues. Academic
211 research is conducted under the watchful eye of
212 human subjects review committees, which is
213 found wherever federal funding for research is
214 found—which is everywhere. They are con-
215 cerned about risks to study participants. In this
216 case, the principal risk would be the disclosure of
217 individual’s responses to the survey questions.
218 Our respondents were all adult, sworn police offi-
219 cers, so they were not an “at risk” population that
220 might be upset when confronted with questions
221 about crime (I’ve had that issue raised in other
222 studies). Some surveys involve deception, as
223 when subsets of respondents are told different
224 sets of “facts” or offered different “quotes” from
225 supposedly the same source, but that was also not
226 the case here. My study had no difficulty being
227 approved by my local committee.

228 To meet federal requirements, the question-
229 naire opened with a brief description of the pur-
230 pose of the study (always claim “we want to hear
231 from officers like you”). Respondents were
232 warned that they would receive no compensation
233 for participating and that it was likely there would
234 be no direct benefits to them for agreeing to be
235 involved. We noted that a cost to them was that
236 we would take about 20 min of their time. To be
237 upbeat, we observed that “The results of this
238 study may bring about improvements in the poli-
239 cies and procedures of the CPD.” They were
240 assured that their participation was voluntary,
241 they could skip any questions they desired, and
242 they could stop any time they wanted to. They
243 were given my name and telephone number, in
244 case they wanted to contact me for more informa-
245 tion (no one called). The officers had to check off
246 that they had read and understood all of this,
247 before they could continue on to the actual ques-
248 tions. No one got this far and checked “no.”

249 **Mode of Interview**

250 A key feature of the study was that it was going
 251 to be a lengthy, sit-down interview. I needed to
 252 gather a lot of information, because the survey
 253 was essentially covering two different (if related)
 254 topics: internal and external procedural justice.
 255 Police officers are accustomed to being offered
 256 surveys and in recent years have gotten choosy
 257 about which they will participate in. If we handed
 258 them a familiar but fat-enough paper-and-pencil
 259 survey, they might not get through it. One option
 260 for making this a serious and engaging survey
 261 was to conduct it as a personal interview. Trained
 262 interviewers could read questions to the officers
 263 and record their replies. Professional sample sur-
 264 veys have been conducted in this fashion for
 265 more than 80 years, but there were problems in
 266 this context. The respondents would not be anon-
 267 ymous to the interviewers, and—police being a
 268 suspicious bunch—some were certain to fear that
 269 “calls” would be made to discuss their answers
 270 with “higher-ups.” We also would have to isolate
 271 each lengthy interview in a separate, private, and
 272 quiet space, and that is in short supply in most
 273 police stations. It would also be very expensive,
 274 because our interviewers were well paid (com-
 275 mensurately so, for their training and experi-
 276 ence), and the survey would have taken more
 277 than an hour to complete. To handle this study,
 278 we would have to station a squad of interviewers
 279 in every police station house, around the clock.

280 Rather, we chose to go for CASI, or Computer-
 281 Assisted Self-Interviewing. Instead of a team of
 282 interviewers, one survey representative could
 283 handle the job. Officers could read the questions
 284 on a laptop screen and click on their response.
 285 Our representatives came to their stations at
 286 scheduled times, set up laptops around tables in
 287 the roll call room or community room where the
 288 study was being housed, broke open donut boxes,
 289 and opened the door. Police officers are quite
 290 computer savvy; they use them every day in their
 291 work and carry a portable data terminal in their
 292 car, so that would not be a problem. This survey
 293 project was different enough in its use of CASI
 294 that they found it, perhaps only at first, a bit inter-

esting. They picked their own machine, and the 295
 laptops’ internet connections were turned off, 296
 lending a further air of anonymity to the task. 297

298 At our end, CASI meant that we did not have
 299 to enter any data; the survey software stored it for
 300 future retrieval. The laptops would have been a
 301 bit expensive, but fortunately our survey contrac-
 302 tor had just completed a large public health CASI
 303 study and their earlier client had paid for the
 304 equipment. The laptops did raise logistical and
 305 security concerns. Different representatives were
 306 shuttling in and out of multiple stations at differ-
 307 ent hours of the day and night, so carrying them
 308 around in car trunks and passing between rep-
 309 resentatives would have been a nightmare.
 310 Instead, we bought the biggest plastic tubs that
 311 Rubbermaid© makes and stored laptops in the
 312 stations while we were active there. During my
 313 initial visit to each station, I walked around
 314 with the commander to identify a suitable survey
 315 room, and we also had to find a secure place to
 316 keep the laptop tub. It had to be a place where
 317 someone would always have a key, even at 5 a.m.,
 318 yet from which the laptops would not “walk.”
 319 Literally hundreds of employees flow through the
 320 back-office spaces of district stations every day,
 321 and this was a real risk. In one older station, the
 322 district commander volunteered the floor of his
 323 office, about the only private place there.

Logistics and Sampling 324

325 I wanted to interview a representative sample of
 326 officers. This would necessarily include officers
 327 serving on all watches, not just those conven-
 328 iently (for me) working the day shift. Once
 329 selected, actually having a representative group
 330 complete their questionnaires also involved
 331 accommodating officers’ days off, court appear-
 332 ances, and other circumstances that keep them
 333 away from their station. Our initial goal (which
 334 had to be revised in practice) was to complete 50
 335 interviews in each of the 22 police districts, 40
 336 with police officers (the bottom rank in the orga-
 337 nization) and 10 with sergeants. Because there
 338 were only 16 or 17 sergeants in total serving in all
 339 but the largest districts, we did not sample them.

340 Instead they were all invited to participate. When
341 it came to POs, we accommodated differences in
342 the size of the districts by drawing somewhat
343 larger samples in the largest districts and smaller
344 ones in the smallest districts. Everywhere we
345 selected officers proportionally to the number
346 who worked on each duty shift, to ensure that
347 people who worked midnights and those who
348 came in during the day were accurately repre-
349 sented. Finally, once the data were collected, we
350 used sample weights (see below) to put everyone
351 into their correct proportions before analyzing
352 the data.

353 To make this work, I need to “sell” participa-
354 tion, at several levels. First I had to secure the
355 support of each district commander. It helped that
356 when I first contacted them by email, I also
357 attached a letter from their boss, the Chief of
358 Police, endorsing the project and encouraging
359 them to get involved. Given this support they
360 would never say “no” to my survey, but I needed
361 the active cooperation of their staff as well as
362 easy access to their facility if I was going to get
363 the project off the ground. To meet with each of
364 the 22 district commanders and “seal the deal,” I
365 put 500 miles on my car—the project was a
366 reminder of how physically big Chicago is.

367 One of my requests during our meetings was
368 that the commander identify a district contact
369 that I could rely on for information and assistance
370 and whom (I assured the busy commanders) I
371 would bother with my follow-up requests. The
372 commanders were generally well informed and
373 helpful, but the contacts they steered to me were
374 more of a mixed bag. Some were interested;
375 many were not. Many had the technical skills the
376 job needed (see below), but some did not.

377 During my initial visits, I also dealt with
378 another key issue at each station: where to park.
379 At midnight, in the dark, I wanted my representa-
380 tives to be safe, so at every station I arranged that
381 our people could park in the staff lot.

382 The technical and logistical problem I faced
383 was sampling officers from the active duty roster
384 in ways that would protect the anonymity of
385 respondents. Outsiders like me would never be
386 allowed to lay hands on (actually, stroke the keys of)
387 the department’s personnel management software,

and I had to select respondents without knowing 388
who they were. After talking about the task for 389
more than an hour with a helpful sergeant in our 390
test district, here is what we came up with. Each 391
contact person was to generate an Excel spread- 392
sheet listing every district police officer and ser- 393
geant, after sorting them by their watch number 394
(into day, evening, and overnight shifts). Then 395
they were to number the names on the list from 396
top to bottom, beginning with “1.” They would 397
save this spreadsheet, make a copy of it, and then 398
delete the officers’ names from the copy. The 399
copy was e-mailed to me, and at my end we ran- 400
domly sampled an appropriate number of officers 401
from each shift and mark those who were to be in 402
the sample. On receiving this, our local contact 403
was to match it to the original list that included 404
officers’ names, thus identifying (to them) those 405
falling in the sample. The final step was to notify 406
each sampled officer of their opportunity to partic- 407
ipate. In some stations our contact could put a 408
postcard-sized announcement in their mail slot. 409
It listed the days and times that our representa- 410
tives would be at the station and encouraged 411
them to participate. But many stations do not 412
have mail-slot facilities, so there our contact had 413
to figure out how to get invitations passed on to 414
individual officers as they came and went from 415
roll calls. 416

One downside to this procedure was that our 417
contacts knew who was in the sample. But since 418
someone had to know in order to contact prospec- 419
tive respondents, it seemed best that this knowl- 420
edge stayed in-house. Another plus was that, 421
because the sample was selected locally by a 422
station-house regular, we were able to forestall 423
suspicion that somehow “downtown” had 424
selected their favorite officers or that officers 425
were being individually spied upon. A final sub- 426
ject protection was that our contact person by and 427
large had no way of knowing which of the invited 428
officers chose to actually show up and complete 429
the survey. This was taking place across multiple 430
days and shifts and generally out of view. 431

Encouraging sampled officers to turn out was 432
our second “sell job.” They could not be required 433
to participate; this is a human subject’s ethical 434
no–no. We began the promotional campaign by 435

436 having survey “sales representatives” appear at
 437 roll calls to describe the upcoming survey and
 438 answer officer’s questions about it. Like the sur-
 439 vey itself, we had to do this across shifts and days
 440 of the week in order to reach our target popula-
 441 tion. As we approached each district’s start date,
 442 we hung large and colorful promotional posters
 443 in the lunch room and other back-office locations.
 444 The poster is reproduced here; smaller versions
 445 were also passed around as flyers.

446 Once the survey began, our representatives
 447 appeared multiple times on several different days
 448 of the week, on each shift. The officers who fol-

449 lowed the schedule on their invitation card and
 450 appeared were ushered into the survey room
 451 where they could select a laptop to work on.
 452 As our promotional poster promised, coffee and
 453 donuts were on hand for all respondents. The
 454 introductory screen on their laptop offered
 455 respondents a brief primer on how to go through
 456 the pages, enter their answers, skip questions
 457 they did not want to answer, and change mis-
 458 takes. The practice question was “Do you have a
 459 dog?” The representatives continue to revisit a
 460 station until we completed interviews with a pre-
 461 established number of respondents there.

QforU
Quality in Chicago Policing

What is QforU?
 QforU is a research study of line officers working in the districts. It is a chance to speak directly to quality issues in policing, reporting how it is working where you are.

What topics does the survey cover?
 Promotions, assignments, morale, discipline, your supervisors, CompStat, public support, risks of the job...and more!

Can anyone participate?
 Officers and sergeants will be selected at random to represent each district. Only those who are sampled are eligible, so that we get a fair picture of opinion. If you are selected, you will be notified by your district liaison. You are not required to participate if you are sampled; it is your choice.

Can I be identified?
 No! Your answers will be completely anonymous and confidential! The selection of officers is being done using anonymous, random numbers. Officers will be invited to participate with an unidentified postcard that proposes an interview day when project staff are scheduled to be in your district. There is no link whatsoever between you, the random number, the postcard, or the results of the survey.

Why should I participate?
 This is an opportunity for you to give your views on topics that are important to Chicago police officers today. Coffee and donuts will be served, too!

The Results

463
464 How did the survey actually go? It was mixed.
465 We first conducted a pilot of the entire operation
466 in one police district. Based on that, we lowered
467 our expectations. We had hoped that 50 % of
468 invited officers would choose to be surveyed, but
469 the pilot figure was 40 %, and a few districts later,
470 we revised it downward again, to 30 %. This
471 meant that we were drawing larger and larger
472 samples from the duty roster, to try to hit our
473 interviewing goal.

474 But the sampling did not run smoothly, either.
475 Some of our district liaisons bought into the study
476 and worked hard on our behalf, but others could
477 care less. In addition, not all of them were com-
478 puter savvy enough to follow our detailed, step-
479 by-step description of how to draw the lists we
480 needed to sample from, nor were they engaged
481 enough to take a look at the samples we provided
482 them. Our liaisons sometimes appeared with a
483 tub of computers only to find that no invitation
484 postcards had been distributed and that our con-
485 tact person was off for several days. In a few dis-
486 tricts we had to just announce over the PA that we
487 were there and invite officers to come in for an
488 interview. We had to abandon some interviewing
489 visits entirely because the watch commanders
490 told us their “troops” were too busy due to a local
491 spike in 911 calls.

492 In the end we completed interviews with 621
493 police officers (not the 880 we had hoped for)
494 and 95 sergeants, not 220. The final response rate
495 was about 25 %, but in several shaky districts, we
496 could not calculate a firm number because our

local contact had bungled the sampling. But 497
respondents came in good numbers from each 498
district, and based on their personnel counts, I 499
calculated adjustment weights for each PO and 500
sergeant. Using them, when I run the data, the 501
respondents are distributed across rank and dis- 502
trict in the right proportions. 503

When I met with the station commanders, I 504
promised them that I would get back with some 505
relevant findings. I suspect they were skeptical. 506
Academics are usually not good at doing this and 507
find it more congenial to get to work on the schol- 508
arly article. Once I had the data straight, my first 509
task had been to get back to the Chief of Police 510
who had authorized it. I produced an 8-page 511
overview of the findings, one that included a 512
number of graphical summaries of the data and a 513
bullet-point summary of the summary on the first 514
page. Then I met with him and a few of his confi- 515
dants to discuss their implications. The officers 516
were particularly unhappy about the department’s 517
internal processes. Few (10 %, which is few) 518
thought that they could get promoted by working 519
hard, for example. He was depressed, seeing the 520
glass at best a quarter full. I was more upbeat— 521
he was new in town, while I had seen worse in the 522
past. At the conclusion of our meeting, he asked 523
me to make a presentation to the 125 “exempt 524
staff” members who run the department. I gave 525
them a 20-min talk with lots of illustrative slides. 526
My commanders were in the room, so I gave 527
them a shout-out for being supportive and 528
reminded them that this was my promised feed- 529
back. The crowd had some good questions, and 530
the effort seemed worthwhile. Then I got to work 531
on the scholarly article. 532