

Law enforcement for a post-2020 world

Growing challenges require a change in policing perspectives

About the authors

John Adams | johnadams2@deloitte.com

John Adams is a managing director in Deloitte Consulting LLP's Public Sector practice, focused on serving the needs of law enforcement clients. Before joining Deloitte, Adams was a special agent of the FBI for 22 years ultimately serving as executive assistant director. Prior to his FBI career, Adams was a special agent/forensic scientist of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation for three years. Drawing on his law enforcement experience, Adams works with federal, state, and local law enforcement organizations to solve some of their most significant challenges. Adams's Deloitte experience includes a variety of project types, such as data integration, data analytics, threat assessments, workforce utilization, workforce culture, and change management.

Mike Gelles | mgelles@deloitte.com

Michael Gelles is a managing director with Deloitte Consulting LLP's Federal practice, consulting in the areas of law enforcement, intelligence, and security. Gelles is a thought leader and widely published author on critical national security issues including insider threat, security processing, secure workforce, asset loss, exploitation, sabotage, and workplace violence. Previously, he serves as a naval officer and the chief psychologist for the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

Ken Croke | kcroke@deloitte.com

Ken Croke is a specialist leader in Deloitte Consulting LLP's Human Capital practice and has a history of leading large transformation projects in the public sector. He has 29 years' experience as a special agent/SES in federal law enforcement, serving in roles ranging from assistant director/chief human capital officer (CHCO) of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms & Explosives (ATF) to US operational oversight to include advanced undercover operations for ATF.

Joe Mariani | jmariani@deloitte.com

Joe Mariani is a research manager with Deloitte's Center for Government Insights. His research focuses on innovation and technology adoption for both national security organizations and commercial businesses. His previous work includes experience as a consultant to the defense and intelligence industries, high school science teacher, and Marine Corps intelligence officer.

Adam Routh | adrouth@deloitte.com

Adam Routh is a research manager with Deloitte's Center for Government Insights and a PhD student in the Defence Studies Department at King's College London. His research areas include emerging technologies, defense, and security, with a focus on space policy. Routh previously worked for the Defense Program at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS). Prior to CNAS, he worked in the private sector, where he facilitated training for Department of Defense components. He also served as a team leader with the US Army's 75th Ranger Regiment.

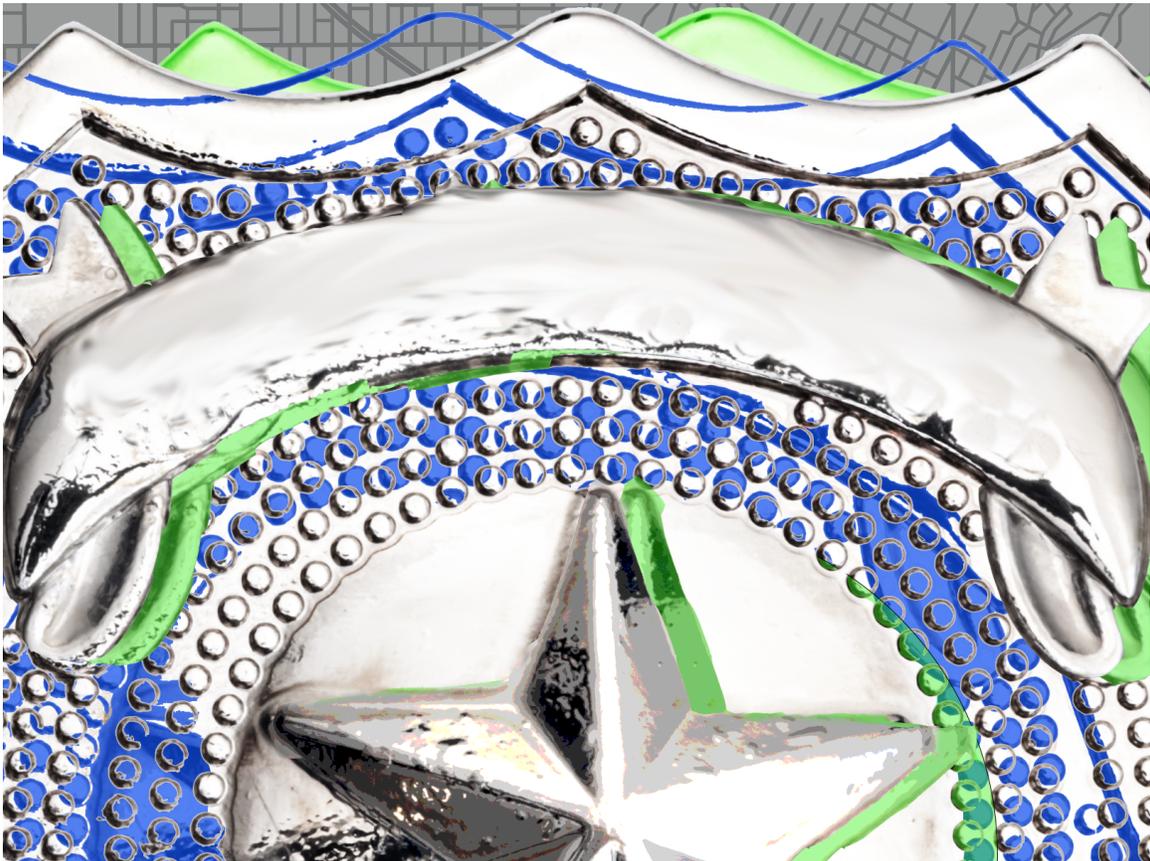
Contents

The imperative for change	2
Even the best need to change	3
Toward new policing models	5
Adopting new policing models: It's all about culture	8
Getting to the future	10
Endnotes	13

The imperative for change

THE FIRST HALF of 2020 exposed the strengths and weaknesses of law enforcement perhaps as never before; it laid bare the full extent of the tension between increasingly overstretched law enforcement and communities that feel disadvantaged by current models of policing. Existing drivers of change such as emerging technologies and social change have only been accelerated by COVID-19 and the renewed focus on racial equities. The result was a compounding effect that stressed existing models of policing to the breaking point.¹

For law enforcement to move forward and continue to meet the evolving needs of communities, it should consider new, more agile models of policing better suited to the 21st century. With a new focus on change at the federal and many state levels, now may be the perfect moment for these new models of policing.² Yet, new models of policing represent significant innovations, and thus their successful adoption depends on a culture in law enforcement that is willing to adapt. While creating this culture can seem a monumental task, by focusing on a few key areas such as training, leadership, and organizational structure, law enforcement can reshape itself to be more equitable and effective.



Even the best need to change

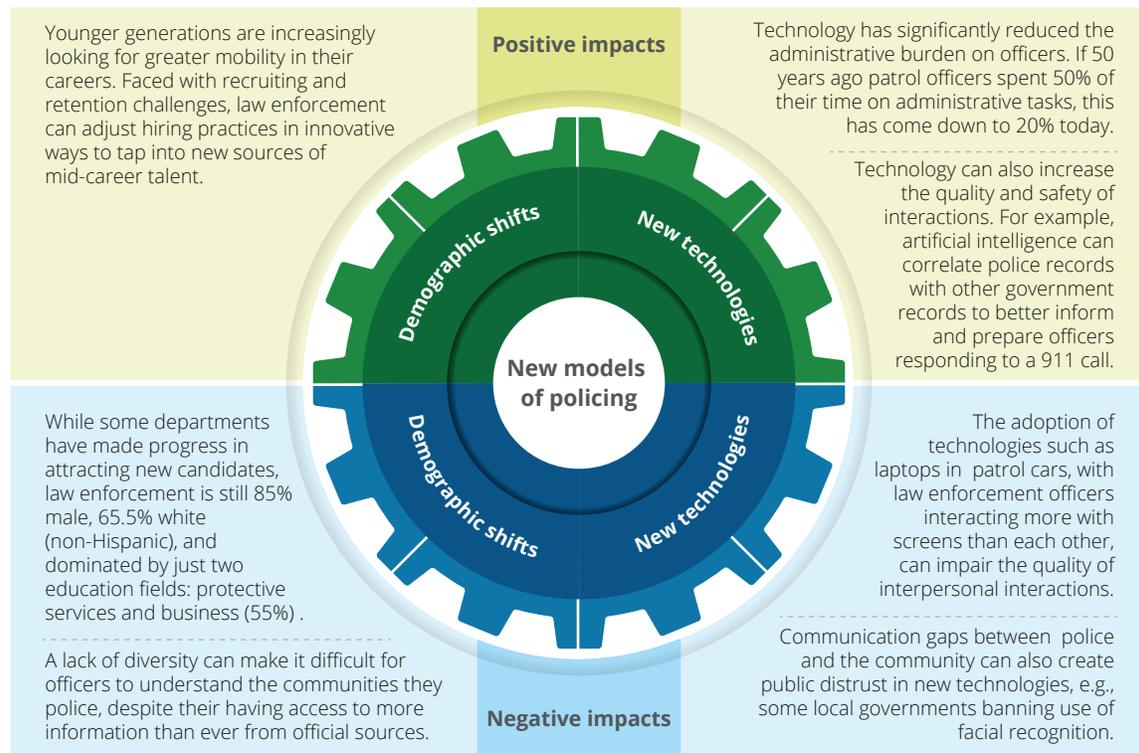
BACK IN 2019, we examined [the forces shaping the future of law enforcement](#).³ Given the challenging events of 2020, that can easily seem like a decade ago. Yet while certainly much has changed in the past year, the

underlying drivers of change for law enforcement remain consistent. The forces of both technological and social change continue to push and pull on law enforcement, changing everything from recruitment to the nature of calls for service (figure 1).

FIGURE 1

The drivers of technological and social change can both help and hinder law enforcement

■ Drivers ■ Changes



Sources: Deloitte and Datawheel, "Data USA: Police officers," accessed February 2021; Deloitte analysis.

These drivers are tectonic forces. They are neither good nor bad, but they are shifting the very ground below law enforcement. The result is that organizations need to adapt. Even organizations operating at their best, with solid community relations, should account for these drivers or risk becoming ineffective. Just as effective policing

tactics from the 1870s would not work today—imagine a sheriff today in a gun duel at high noon—today’s effective tactics may not be effective in even a few years. So while this year’s pandemic response and social unrest have strained traditional models of policing to the limit, they ultimately show that more is possible.



Toward new policing models

SO WHAT CAN a more resilient, agile, and equitable model of policing look like? First, it is unlikely to be just one model. With more than 18,000 unique police agencies across the country, there is likely no single solution that will work in each of those unique communities. The variability in policing across America is striking. Not only are departments in small towns very different from those in large cities, but even between communities of the same size, what citizens expect of their police can vary widely. Yet, despite these differences, the strains of social and technological shifts are exposing similar cracks across departments of all sizes, in different locations. Looking at those strains, a few key factors that a successful policing model would likely need to do emerge:

Be networked

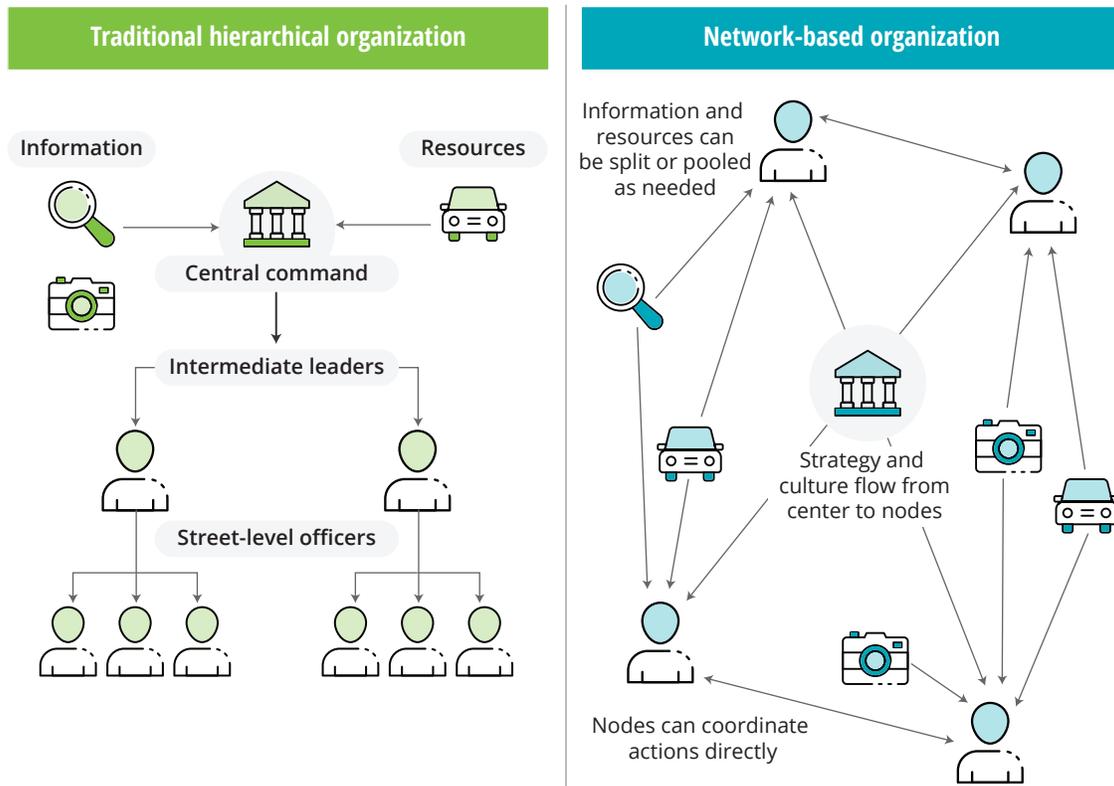
Today's uneven world can be challenging for police. One moment officers can be in the middle of a domestic dispute, the next working with school children, and the next working in large-scale demonstrations. With staffing shortages forcing cutbacks on specialized staff, often the very same officer may be asked to respond to all three of those situations. This rapid change in situations can call for very different tactics and mindsets, challenging

the traditional pyramid management structure of many departments. It can be difficult for leaders to gather information about what is happening on the street, and respond fast enough with decisions, commands, and resources.

The solution for organizations such as investment banks and military units that have faced a similar challenge has been to [abandon pyramidal organizational structures and become networks](#).⁴ For law enforcement, the patrol officer would be at the center of a network with connections to other patrol officers, resources for support, and so on (figure 2). Individual officers are empowered to make decisions and call upon resources based on the fast-changing situations they see in front of them. But this does not mean just leaving individual officers to their own devices. The job of leadership shifts as well, away from command and control and toward ensuring that each officer is [making the right decisions even in the absence of direct guidance](#).⁵ This can happen by ensuring that the values and culture of the organization are instilled in each individual, and that each individual can make the connections necessary to be successful in their role. Management tools can then shift as well, from maps and task charts to assessments of officers' decision-making, communication, and compassion.

FIGURE 2

The shift from hierarchical to networked organizations can make law enforcement faster and more nimble



Source: Deloitte analysis.

While this model can sound counterintuitive at first, the results are undeniable. Organizations ranging from elite special operations forces to airlines have adopted this model and seen significant improvement in performance.⁶ In fact, this model is already in action on a smaller scale in law enforcement responses to fast-moving crises such as active shootings. In the early 2000s, it became clear that “isolate and negotiate” tactics that had worked with hostage-takers often resulted in more deaths in active-shooter situations.⁷ As a result, departments began training officers to form small teams to respond as quickly as possible. This shift gave the first officer on the scene significant decision-making power, much as a networked model of policing would do in every situation.

Be measured differently

For officers to operate differently, they will need to be evaluated differently—not just on the number of arrests or citations issued, for example. Instead, in a networked model where officers are making on-the-spot decisions, they could be evaluated on the positive outcomes of those decisions. If the desired positive outcome is safer, happier communities, agencies should find a way to measure that, not simply measure what is easy to, such as arrests or contact cards.

Tom Cowper, retired police executive and former member of Police Futurists International, sees this need for new metrics as a significant departure for many departments: “Most departments have programs to interview members of public on their

satisfaction, but when you shift the focus of policing to the community, you put more responsibility on the community for guidance and direction, so the measure needs to shift to capture satisfaction of the whole community.”⁸

New metrics of success would also force a shift in performance management for law enforcement. The incentives for officers’ pay and promotions should be aligned to the new metrics to help ensure that officers do not slide back to old ways of doing business just to “check the box” and lose the benefit of new structures. These behavior-based performance evaluations for officers can also lead to better retention. Research has found that [90% of commercial companies](#) that redesigned performance management to show how individual actions fit into larger group goals saw increases in employee engagement.⁹ Yet, many police departments are likely not collecting the types of data needed to assess officer performance, utilization, or community engagement.¹⁰ The old adage “you get what you measure” may be somewhat cliched, but progress on new policing models will be difficult without collecting new forms of data.

Be “community-defined,” not just “community-oriented”

In a network-based organization, every single node needs to know what the whole organization is trying to accomplish if it is to make decisions about how to respond to different situations. The challenge is that there is no single right definition or measure of success for law enforcement. It can only be defined by the people of a community, not by law enforcement leaders in a vacuum. As Rick Myers, who has led departments in five different states, puts it, “People in communities are not just consumers of police services but should be partners with law enforcement in setting priorities, goals, and maybe even who works in their neighborhood.”¹¹

The shift to networked policing works best if the community helps to define what needs to be measured. Communities in big cities may be concerned about crime, making violent crime rates a key measure of success, while smaller communities with little crime to start with may be more worried about response times or other aspects of police service. Involving the community in decision-making has the added benefit of increasing transparency and trust in law enforcement.¹²

Admittedly, that could be a significant shift for many police and community leaders who are used to making decisions of how to measure success or allocate resources. Myers calls it “a fundamental shift in mindset that cops don’t come to work as law enforcement officers, but as an agent in helping communities solve their problems.”¹³ For example, officers called to a fight between neighbors about trash could do more than just make arrests. Coming to realize that trash pickup had not been regular in that area, allowing trash to pile up and cause the dispute, they could put in a call to 311 for the needed services.¹⁴

But becoming community-driven does not just benefit communities; it can benefit police as well. Research suggests that such shifts in policing model can help alleviate stress on officers and improve their job satisfaction.¹⁵ The shift to community-defined policing can also make community members important sources of information and resources to police. Perhaps most importantly in an era where law enforcement faces tough budgetary challenges, a community-driven approach can help police with challenges such as budget and staffing shortfalls.¹⁶ Trade-offs between budget size and officer coverage on the streets, or between police performing social services versus funding other agencies to fill the gap are all ultimately political decisions about what a community wants.¹⁷ Police cannot solve these trade-offs on their own; the community has to be involved in the decision-making.

Adopting new policing models: It's all about culture

DEAS FOR NEW models of policing are not new, but existing mindsets and culture have typically stood in the way.¹⁸ This can come in the familiar form of “that’s not how we do things,” but culture can also have a subtler impact on change. If officers are always on their guard and uncomfortable, they are less likely to step out and try new things.¹⁹ So if departments want to either foster positive innovation or avoid negative behaviors, they should pay attention to organizational culture. Research from Chicago and other cities have shown that culture is a key element in transmitting excessive use of force and other undesirable behaviors from outliers to others within departments.²⁰ In fact, the effect of culture can be so strong that it can overwhelm even the positive effect of training specifically designed to reduce those bad behaviors.²¹

Culture is intangible. You can’t buy more of it, and that often leads to culture being thought of as difficult to change. But the good news is that, with the right approach, culture can be changed. This change starts at the very beginning with the environment in academies and initial training. Hazing and negative tactics can set the tone for future behavior. On the other hand, a positive environment in both initial training and the workplace can reinforce the positive behaviors a department wants to see and slowly remove unhealthy ones.

Historically, aviation had many of the same cultural challenges faced by police. A strictly hierarchical structure at times led to poor practices going unchallenged or even adopted by junior personnel. That all changed in 1977, when two 747

jets collided on the island of Tenerife in the deadliest aviation disaster in history. After the crash, the aviation industry spent significant effort shifting the cockpit culture from one of unquestioned hierarchical authority to a more networked approach of crew resource management.²² A similar shift for police would allow junior officers to feel more empowered to speak up if they observed something wrong, slowly changing what behaviors are acceptable within an organization.

Yet there is one major difference between changing cockpit culture for pilots and changing law enforcement culture. In 1977, there were only 11 major US airlines, compared with more than 18,000 unique US law enforcement organizations today.²³ So while cockpit culture certainly varied somewhat from airline to airline, it was likely much more homogenous than the current law enforcement culture in the United States. Through his own research on policing, Dr. Andreas Olligschlaeger sees that unevenness in culture, standards, and outcomes in US law enforcement as the first barrier that any change must overcome: “Some of the issues with the problematic ‘us vs. them’ mindset in many departments is due to the lack of national standards in policing.”²⁴

Yet, this can lead to a paradox: National standards would seem to run counter to the community-defined approach that is the goal of culture change in the first place. Bud Levin, professor emeritus of psychology and retired police major in the small town of Waynesboro, VA, describes it this way: “There are going to be increasing calls for standardization of policing methods. Some of these

will come from federal government efforts, others will come from common threats like cybercrime and foreign government surveillance, but standardizing is the antithesis of community policing. The more you do of one, the less you will have of the other. Imagine a New York City cop working in Brown County, TX, and vice versa.”²⁵ The key to police cultural change then is to balance centralization and decentralization, to create common standards and expectations, but also to tailor the application of those standards to the unique circumstances of each community.

That balance can be hard to strike, and culture change in the best of circumstances can be hard. The most successful instances of culture change feature a burning platform, a crisis that forces everyone to accept that the status quo cannot continue. In aviation safety, this was the massive loss of life in the Tenerife disaster. For law enforcement, 2020 could be that burning platform. COVID-19, protests, and struggles with racial equity have shown that the status quo in law enforcement cannot continue. Yet, there are positive signs as well. In dealing with COVID-19, many departments are practicing exactly the flexibility and collaboration the future policing

models may require. In the words of Michael Buerger, professor of criminal justice at Bowling Green State University, “Adapting to the need for gloves and masks was important for officer safety, but the need to coordinate with other agencies/ government structures to properly fulfill the mission to protect and serve has been one of the most important lessons of COVID.”²⁶ In fact, many police agencies did just that in response to COVID-19 by establishing “medical liaisons,” often licensed doctors or nurses, to improve coordination with other medical professionals and draw on expertise from regional fusion centers to stay abreast of COVID-19.²⁷

The flexibility shown by law enforcement in adapting to COVID-19 may be a key factor in getting to the future, because in the end, cultural change is something that should come from law enforcement, not happen to it: Further change tends to be more effective when it’s led by the police themselves, rather than being imposed from outside and quickly cast aside once the crisis passes.

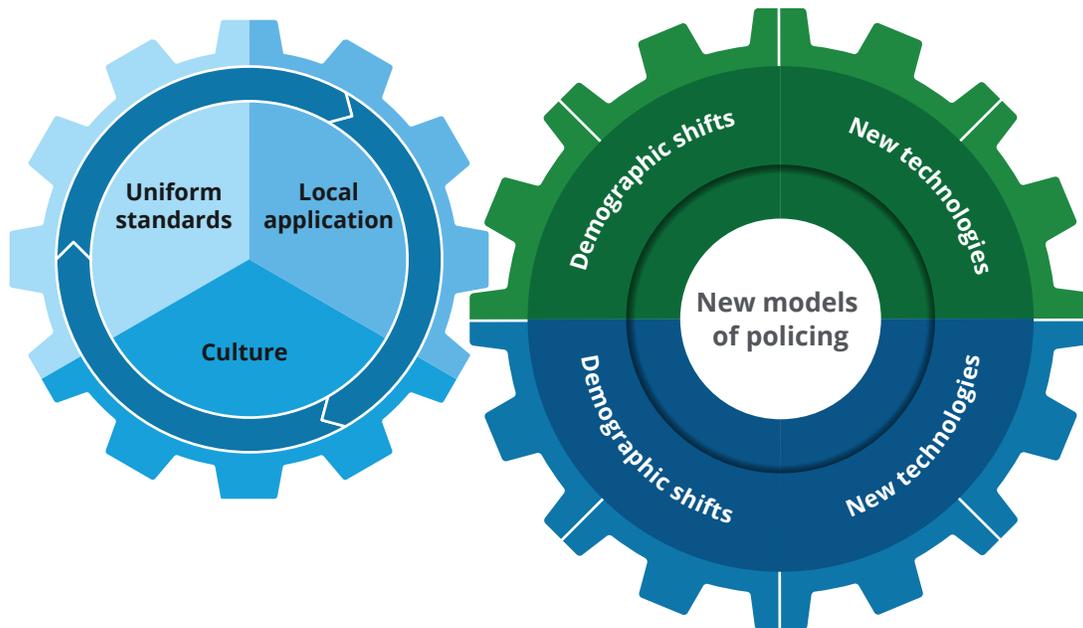
Getting to the future

LAST YEAR WAS challenging for law enforcement—but the key is using that challenge as a tool to improve. Some of the best organizations have used high-profile failures to remake themselves. For example, in the wake of high-profile mission failures in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the US military embarked upon a journey to change its core operating model to one very similar to the networked model suggested

here for police. In the military’s journey from the landmark Goldwater-Nichols legislation calling for reform to the truly networked force that took the battlefield in the first Gulf War, three key lessons for law enforcement emerge (figure 3): creating uniform standards; tailoring those standards to local circumstances; and driving culture change at every level.²⁸

FIGURE 3

The tailored, local application of standards can advance new models of policing, but ultimate success is driven by cultural change



Source: Deloitte analysis.

Create national vision and standards

The first step in almost any significant transformation is to align on a common vision. For policing, this can mean promulgating the idea of a community-defined, networked model of policing to help gain buy-in and grassroots support for the new model. It could also mean creating national programs that support the adoption of the new models of policing. For example, a national program for educational benefits could allow officers at even small departments to continue their training and education after the academy. National programs could also help even out disparities in police funding and enable smaller departments or those in poorer areas without a significant tax base to still maintain the highest standards of policing.²⁹ Similarly, national efforts could work to set standards on common areas that would apply across many different types of departments. Bipartisan recommendations have singled out the need for national accreditation bodies or the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division to help set national standards for policing.

Individual and leadership training could be two areas where national standards could provide real benefit both to departments and communities. At the individual level, standards could help police focus limited training resources where they are needed most. On average, police spend roughly 15% of their academy training time on firearms and self-defense training.³⁰ Although these are undoubtedly important skills, there is less consistency in training for other necessary skills, such as cognizance of bias or interpersonal skills that may not be in academy curriculum at all. Standardizing certain training expectations or requirements can help recruits get educated on soft skills in addition to hard skills such as marksmanship and defensive driving. Of course, officer training and education should be an ongoing, career-long activity and not something that stops after academy graduation. National

standards might also include accrediting instructors by a third party rather than the instructor's own agency, or creating mobile training teams to bring needed skills to departments. These can help smaller, less-funded departments get access to training on new tools and techniques such as the use of data analytics in investigations.

At a leadership level, national standards on continuing education and leadership training can help create upward mobility for top performers. Bridging the gap between managing a small team and leading a whole organization can challenge even the best leaders. Providing that type of training and professionalization was at the core of the creation of the FBI National Academy in 1935.³¹ The reputation and legacy of the National Academy, paired with opportunities for continuous learning when at home, could play a significant role in developing the next generation of law enforcement leaders.³²

Apply that national vision locally

As communities differ in needs and expectations of law enforcement, so should some aspects of law enforcement. Therefore, national standards should provide clear expectations and tools for law enforcement, but through customizable approaches based on the expectations and needs of their community.

Applying national standards locally should start with assessing the current state of relations between law enforcement and the community.³³ Standards can set the goal, while new data collection on performance, utilization, and citizen engagement can highlight where gaps to achieving that goal remain, especially hidden gaps such as bias in data collection or enforcement. Then law enforcement can engage the community to understand the best route to achieve those

goals—whether through information-sharing, consultation, or even involvement in small- or large-scale decision-making.³⁴

Finding the balance between national expectations and local needs can be challenging, but premade toolkits can help eliminate some of the guesswork. The national programs discussed earlier can develop shared templates for community boards, law enforcement metrics, outreach best practices, and transparency tools as “department-ready” resources that can be customized to department needs. All of these could be adjusted over time as a community’s needs shift.

Implementing changes with integrated culture transformation

Organizational change of any sort requires a culture accepting of change. However, it can be hard for an organization to make an honest and objective appraisal of how open its culture would be to change. Two areas of focus can help departments understand where they are and where they need to be with respect to culture:

1. **Use the data.** If part of culture is an organization’s actions, gathering data about how a department does its work can help create objectivity in assessing culture. If a department believes itself to be citizen-focused, but satisfaction survey results don’t back it up, there is likely some work to be done on culture. Data can also give leaders powerful tools to help better lead the organization. For example, the Chicago Police Department rolled out a custom-built system that leverages data to monitor officer behavior and suggest progressive interventions before trouble arises.³⁵ Today, those tools can not only spot problematic conduct but also identify officers who do the

right thing in difficult situations, making their stories important as role models in the organization. Advances in data and behavioral science also mean that tools that were once costly custom-built affairs may now be available off the shelf to departments of all sizes.

2. **Get an external perspective.** Culture audits done by external specialists can also play an important role in helping law enforcement leaders understand if their department’s culture is aligned with its policies and beliefs.³⁶ Law enforcement organizations are built on positive cultural tenets and artifacts, but the way an organization acts out those central cultural qualities can shift over time, possibly requiring adjustments to bring the organization back to its cultural center. For example, law enforcement culture is built around serving and protecting, and while that central tenet hasn’t changed, a deeper look at culture can shed light on whether the organization is living up to its stated tenets. An external perspective can be critical here to help point to collective blind spots in areas such as diversity and inclusion. Cultural audits could even be included in certification standards, much as companies must conduct financial audits to be traded on a stock market.

The year 2020 has been difficult for law enforcement, and the path to the future may seem equally difficult. As Myers observed, it can almost feel like the old joke on “the two things cops hate most: the way things are, and change” has come true.³⁷ But police have time and again shown a commitment to doing hard things for the good of their communities, and with that commitment, change will undoubtedly bring more effective, more equitable law enforcement in 2021 and beyond.

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Practice leadership

Alex Mirkow

Justice sector leader | Principal | Deloitte Consulting LLP
+1 571 814 7610 | amirkow@deloitte.com

Alex Mirkow leads Deloitte Consulting LLP's relationships with the US Department of Justice and US courts. He specializes in advising federal, international, and private sector clients in the areas of strategy and operations.

The Deloitte Center for Government Insights

Joe Mariani

Manager | Deloitte Services LP
+1 240 731 1985 | jmariani@deloitte.com

Joe Mariani coleads Deloitte's research into justice, defense, and intelligence for Deloitte's Center for Government Insights.

Adam Routh

Manager | Deloitte Services LP
+1 202 220 2633 | adrouth@deloitte.com

Adam Routh coleads Deloitte's research into justice, defense, and intelligence for Deloitte's Center for Government Insights.

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