



Chapter 1

Revisiting the Basic Elements of Problem-Oriented Policing

In this chapter, I will revisit the core elements of Goldstein's problem-oriented approach to policing. In doing so, I will present some of my own insights into each element's meaning, and comment on observable trends in each element's application in the current practice of problem-oriented policing.

What Is the Distinction Between Problem-Oriented Policing and Problem Solving?

The terms *problem-oriented policing* and *problem-solving* are often used interchangeably in the literature that has built up around Goldstein's concept. This masks an important distinction between the two. In its broadest sense, the term *problem-oriented policing*, as used by Goldstein, describes a comprehensive framework for improving the police's capacity to perform their mission. Problem-oriented policing impacts virtually everything the police do, operationally as well as managerially. The term *problem-solving*, which came into more prominent use by other scholars in the mid-1980s, more specifically describes the mental process that is at the core of problem-oriented policing. Problem-solving models such as SARA⁵⁰ were created to express this mental process. Thus, "problem-solving" is a more limited notion than "problem-oriented policing." Goldstein himself has been especially careful to avoid using the term *problem-solving* too freely, precisely because, as he argues, many, if not most, of the problems the police confront are too complex for anything approaching a final solution. Reducing harm, alleviating suffering and/or providing some measure of relief from problems are ambitious enough aims for the police.

Other scholars, such as Ron Clarke, have also distinguished between problem-oriented policing and problem-solving, but have done so by drawing distinctions based on the scope of the initiative. In Clarke's view, the more routine activities of beat-level police officers to address recurring problems involving a single location or person constitute "problem-solving."⁵¹ Clarke contrasts this with more ambitious initiatives by police agencies to carefully study entire classes of problems and to make more systemic improvements in the response to those problems (1997). The precise distinction between problem-oriented policing and problem-solving is less important than the fact that problem-oriented policing is considerably more ambitious and far-reaching than routine and generic forms of problem-solving.

⁵⁰SARA is an acronym for scanning, analysis, response, and assessment, developed as a problem-solving model by Police Executive Research Forum researchers during the Newport News problem-oriented policing project. Variations include CAPRA - an acronym for clients, acquire/analyze information, partnerships, response, and assessment of action taken - developed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and PROCTOR - an acronym for problem, cause, tactic (or treatment), output, and result - described in a report on problem-solving in the U.K. by Read and Tilley (2000).

⁵¹Other scholars mistakenly view this informal, beat-level problem-solving as the sum and substance of problem-oriented policing. One textbook puts it this way: "In other words, problem-oriented policing is simply an attempt to formally articulate the principles and processes that veteran police officers have long recognized as the essence of high-quality policing" (Fyfe et al. 1997:393).



⁵²Some of the labels associated with problem-solving in courts are therapeutic jurisprudence, restorative justice and community justice (Rottman and Casey 1999).

⁵³Some references of this type make no claims to being related to problem-oriented policing (e.g., an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention article, "Preventing Violence the Problem-Solving Way," refers to developing interpersonal cognitive problem-solving skills in children). Others explicitly seek to connect this sort of problem-solving to the concept of problem-oriented policing (e.g., in "Reducing Fear in the Schools: Managing Conflict With Student Problem-Solving" (Kenney and Watson 1998), published in *Problem-Oriented Policing: Crime-Specific Problems, Critical Issues and Making POP Work* (O'Connor, Shelley and Grant 1998), the authors described a program in which police officers taught problem-solving skills to high school students).

Widespread use of the term *problem-solving* has created another kind of confusion. Many people not familiar with the problem-oriented policing literature understand the entire notion of police problem-solving differently than do those familiar with problem-oriented policing. Two examples typify the confusion. In the first, I was a guest on a Canadian radio talk show, the subject of which was problem-oriented policing. The host pressed me to explain to his audience why the police should seek to solve the personal problems of criminals rather than arrest criminals. In the second, during a recent meeting of community policing experts and domestic violence prevention experts, the domestic violence experts questioned why the police would seek to problem-solve domestic disputes rather than arrest batterers (Ohlhausen Research Inc. 1999). Both inquiries reveal how some people, recently exposed to the concept and terminology of problem-oriented policing, understand problem-solving to be a form of mediation in which police give at least as much attention to offenders' personal interests as they do to victims'. It is little wonder that someone with this understanding of problem-solving would find it unappealing.

What Does "Problem" Mean in Problem-Oriented Policing?

The dictionary defines problem as "any question or matter involving doubt, uncertainty or difficulty", or a "question to be considered, solved or answered." Given this broad definition of the term, it is easy to see how its use in the context of problem-oriented policing can get distorted. The current literature on policing finds the term "problem" popping up everywhere. It describes difficult employees, administrative concerns, complicated crimes or incidents—in short, any matter involving difficulty. There are references to problem-solving courts⁵² and problem-solving in correctional facilities. Teaching young children and students methods of resolving conflicts is often referred to as *problem-solving*.⁵³ This is not to suggest that the phrase is always being used inappropriately, only that Goldstein's use of the term in the context of problem-oriented policing is highly specific. He used the term to convey the notion that one can classify, package and understand police work in a new way, as an aggregation of incidents that share certain common features.

The policing language when Goldstein first proposed his problem-oriented approach lacked any other term to capture what he was trying to describe. Police work was understood primarily in terms of crimes, incidents, events, and calls for service, and occasionally, as a series of various classes of these things. Because, as Goldstein observed, police agencies were designed primarily to respond to isolated events, they



lacked the terminology to communicate about aggregated events. Goldstein might have chosen other nouns to convey his notion of a problem, such as "cluster," "aggregate" or "class," or adjectives like "chronic," "recurrent" or "habitual." Such terms might have better captured the essence of his idea, that much of what the police do is connected, not isolated—connected to past events, to similar events, to seemingly unrelated social phenomena—and that these events will continue to occur without more profound interventions.

Goldstein wrestled with the question of giving his concept a label at all, for a variety of reasons, one of which was the risk of oversimplification and distortion of the basic meaning of the concept. Some of his concerns have proven well-founded. Many uses of the term “problem” in policing today seem to be artificial attempts to graft the concern onto the framework of problem-oriented policing, or merely to capitalize on the growing popularity of the terminology.⁵⁴ One gets the sense that nearly everything published in recent years remotely related to policing invokes the terminology of problem-solving, no matter how loosely connected it is to Goldstein's concept of problem-oriented policing. Some people have proposed the use of the term *solution-oriented policing* instead of *problem-oriented policing*, presumably to put a more positive spin on the concept. Whatever purpose this might serve in terms of marketing the concept, it draws attention away from the most central feature of Goldstein's concept, the idea of aggregated incidents that constitute part of police business. The term *problem-oriented policing* has survived in the literature for over 20 years now, long enough for a reasonably common understanding of it to have emerged, and so there is little to be gained at this stage by altering the terminology. The precise understanding of the term “problem”, however, remains much in need of reinforcement.

In some training courses in problem-oriented policing, and in the corresponding materials developed over the past decade, a precise definition of the term “*problem*” has been put forth. With slight variations, this definition has been something like the following: *A problem is two or more incidents, similar in nature, that [are] of concern to the police and to the public.*⁵⁵ In a general sense, this definition is consistent with Goldstein's model. It is misleading, however, in that it suggests a mathematical precision to defining problems, never intended by Goldstein. There is nothing magical about the number two.⁵⁶ Even a single incident might prompt a broader investigation into an underlying problem if the incident is of sufficient consequence to the community and there is a high likelihood of future similar incidents.⁵⁷ Nor does the mere occurrence of multiple similar incidents automatically constitute a problem. The number of incidents must be

⁵⁴A recent compilation of articles drawn from the various periodicals published by the Community Policing Consortium was titled *Problem-Solving*. The collection does include a section on specific police projects addressing community problems, but it also contains articles on such matters as jail management, grant writing and court security.

⁵⁵The training curriculum in community problem-solving distributed by the Community Policing Consortium uses this definition.

⁵⁶The notion of “two or more incidents” in the definition of a problem may derive from a misreading of the definition of a problem proposed by Eck and Spelman in *Problem-Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News*. There, a problem is defined as “a group of incidents occurring in a community, that are similar in one or more ways [emphasis added], and that are of concern to the police and the public” (p. 42).

⁵⁷In some police agencies where managers pressure officers to solve lots of problems, officers sometimes classify merely interesting or complex incidents as problems. To be sure, the quality of the police service delivered matters more than how it is classified or labeled, but defining every clever, creative or preventive response to an incident drains from the intended meaning of “problem.”



both substantial and significant to warrant defining the pattern as a problem; that is, the number of incidents should exceed some norm or expected occurrence rate. The common feature among the incidents, moreover, must bear some significance. Exploring the pattern of burglaries committed by males, for example, is not likely to be productive, given that there is nothing remarkable about burglars being male.

“There has been a tendency to simplify and reduce the problem-solving concept, and to focus on particular innovations rather than the systems and managerial behaviors that produced them. This tendency is by no means unique to the police.”

– Malcolm Sparrow

How Should Problems Be Defined and Described?

How one defines a problem greatly influences how one will address it. One can define or describe problems in a variety of ways. One can describe them in terms of what the offensive behavior is (e.g., playing loud music), who the people involved are (e.g., vehicle owners playing loud music from high-powered car stereos), when the problem occurs (e.g., late at night), or where the problem occurs (e.g., in a park in a residential area). These various descriptors obviously are not mutually exclusive. The descriptor is merely a shorthand way of describing the entire problem.

However one describes a problem in shorthand, one must address the offensive behavior. This is important for several reasons. Without a clear focus on specific forms of offensive behavior, the police run the risk of adopting broad, ineffective responses. While it is sometimes convenient to describe problems in terms of a class of people or even one individual, it is dangerous morally, ethically and legally for the police to treat a person or people as the problem itself. A common example is the police response to a variety of problems surrounding transients (also referred to as "street people" or "the homeless"). The police often speak in shorthand about the "transient problem," because the underlying behavioral problems are common, yet too numerous to articulate briefly. If this shorthand, however, leads the police to view the mere presence of transients as the problem and, consequently, to address the problem by removing the transients, they risk committing serious violations to the transients' rights and to their own professional obligations. The shorthand description, "transients in a public park," is made more explicit by labeling it "transients sleeping and panhandling in a public park." This simple change draws one's attention to the behavior and not merely the status of the persons involved.

Shorthand labels can also mask important distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate behavior. Describing problems as the "drug problem" or even the "narcotics problem" is so broad as to be nearly useless. Any shorthand label for a problem should be followed by a more complete and exacting description of the specific offensive behavior. I have sometimes reminded myself and others of this rule



of problem-oriented policing in grammatical terms, by saying, "If you don't have a verb, you don't have a problem." Forcing oneself to include a verb in the description of the problem helps maintain the appropriate focus on problematic behavior.

Many problem-oriented policing initiatives are defined too broadly (Clarke 1998). Characterizing problems with broad labels like "drugs," "violence," "disorder," "neighborhood decline," or "juveniles," without specifying the behavior at issue, often results in a simplistic analysis of the problem and, consequently, to hopelessly inadequate responses. Overly broad definitions of problems also create the risk that the police will be drawn into trying to address aspects of a large problem that are well beyond their capacity or mandate. For example, the police are unlikely to have the organizational expertise or capacity to stimulate economic redevelopment of a neighborhood in decline, though they can make substantial contributions in a larger partnership effort. There is evidence that when social issues are defined too broadly, the psychological capacity of those attempting to address the issues is diminished (Weick 1984). When problem-solvers consciously seek to redefine or reclassify the problem on the basis of preliminary analysis, this process often leads to conceptually clearer and more manageable initiatives. Asking whether the problem looks any different upon closer analysis remains a vital step in the problem-solving process, but it is too often overlooked.

"Problem-oriented policing is a larger concept than mere problem-solving. It has tremendous ramifications for the structure of police organizations."

– Rana Sampson

What Should the Police Be Concerned About in Problem-Oriented Policing?

The principle of problem-oriented policing that asserts that its focus should be on community problems has led to some confusion in practice. This principle actually incorporates several distinct ideas. The first is that the police should primarily be focused on community problems, as distinct from organizational, administrative and managerial problems of police and other agencies. The second is that the problem-solving inquiry should seek the best response to the substantive problem at hand, and not merely seek to perfect existing systems and processes for addressing that problem. The third is that the community problems the police should focus on are those that fall within their mandate. I will discuss each idea in turn.

Focusing on Community Concerns vs. Internal Concerns

Goldstein's starting point for articulating the problem-oriented approach was that police managers should focus on how their agencies address community problems and not merely on how their agencies are administered and organized.



⁵⁷Other fields such as medicine and education have a substantially larger body of research regarding the substance of the work than do the police, so even if one could get the police to talk more about substantive community problems, there would be less research to inform those discussions than is the case in other fields.

Getting police to refocus on community concerns is in itself a significant challenge. When one asks police practitioners to list problems confronting their agencies, without specifying whether those problems should be substantive community problems or internal problems, they prioritize the internal problems. Those problems are the most immediately apparent to the practitioners, and affect them in a most personal way. They affect their physical safety, career opportunities, financial status, and general occupational contentment. The police are no different in this regard from practitioners in other fields. Ask most medical practitioners today to list their problems, and one can expect to find managed care higher on the list than emphysema or heart disease. Teachers talk more about classroom discipline than how to teach algebra more effectively.⁵⁷ Typically, however, a simple reminder to police practitioners to focus on substantive community problems will readily get them engaged in discussions of the problems of crime and disorder. Getting this to occur routinely is far more difficult.

Existing case studies in problem-oriented policing demonstrate that the police are capable of using problem-solving methods on substantive community problems. But, if the police continue to focus exclusively or primarily on internal organizational problems, even if they apply some problem-solving methods toward their resolution, then problem-oriented policing will have failed on its face.

Ironically, the development of the concept of problem-oriented policing has suffered somewhat from the means-over-ends syndrome Goldstein described regarding the management of police agencies. One can more readily find literature on how to implement problem-oriented policing within a police agency than find literature on how police have applied problem-oriented methods to specific community problems. For years, the planners of the annual Problem-Oriented Policing Conference held in San Diego debated how much to emphasize workshops and presentations on the implementation of problem-oriented policing vs. workshops and presentations on police responses to substantive community problems. In the early years of the conference, the implementation workshops drew greater interest from conference attendees, and conference planners tried to balance those expressed interests with a desire to get attendees interested in substantive problems. Despite efforts over the years to balance substance and process, the issue continues to arise, and implementation always seems to be favored over substance. In some sense, this serves as partial confirmation of Goldstein's original premise that the police are highly susceptible to the means-over-ends syndrome.



Finding the Best Response vs. Merely Improving Current Responses and Systems

Problem-solving inquiries should seek the best response to the substantive problem at hand, and not merely seek to improve current responses and systems. This distinction is a subtle but important one. A fair number of problem-oriented policing projects, including those submitted for the Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing Award, are essentially efforts to improve a criminal justice or investigative process, devoid of a careful inquiry into whether that process is the most effective means of addressing the problem in the first place. For example, in recent years, a number of police agencies have recognized value in establishing more collaborative working relationships with probation and parole agencies. Accordingly, a number of problem-oriented policing projects have set about finding ways for the police and probation and parole agents to more effectively and efficiently supervise people under conditional release. The underlying logic, of course, is that more effective and efficient supervision will reduce the levels or seriousness of crimes committed by those people. In many instances, however, the assumption that supervision of previously convicted offenders is the best response to the problem goes unexplored and unchallenged. As a matter of general practice, improved collaboration between the police and probation and parole agents is good strategy and should be encouraged. The value of that collaboration, however, becomes stronger if it is first clearly established that improved supervision will result in substantial improvements to the specific community problem. Some police practitioners find this explanation frustrating. Having satisfied the threshold requirement to focus on a substantive community problem rather than an internal organizational problem, they don't readily see how they can become fixated on a particular process that they intuitively believe will adequately address the crime or disorder problem. Again, the efforts to improve investigative, prosecutorial, adjudicative, or correctional processes using a problem-oriented approach is commendable, but falls short of the ideal if it is not first demonstrated that these processes are best able to reduce the harm the problem causes. The best problem-oriented policing efforts are those that remain focused on the end objective—some form of harm reduction—and develop or improve processes only as a means toward that end.

Focusing on Community Problems for Which the Police Should Assume Some Responsibility

The community problems the police should focus on are those that fall within their mandate as it is defined for each agency. Here, too, is a



⁵⁸David Bayley, while commending the problem-oriented approach, expressed concern that "problem-oriented policing could transform the Anglo-Saxon notion of a restricted and specialized police role into the Continental one of an omniscient police" (1991). See, also, Vaughn (1992), who argues that the American public desires a restricted and reactive police and that a "truly proactive police structure may be impossible to implement in our current democratic system of government" (p. 352).

great source of confusion. What is, precisely, the police mandate is a hard question, to be sure. In the era of community policing, that mandate has been expanded considerably, partly by the police themselves. Police departments everywhere are initiating programs in which police officers adopt roles of counselors, teachers, coaches, and brokers of charitable works. The police adopt these unconventional roles for various purposes. The best practice is when police officers adopt these roles for a limited time, and in the specific context of addressing a specific community problem (e.g., a police officer organizes a youth activity to provide youth an alternative to delinquency, and then turns the program over to someone else). Too often, the police adopt these roles for other purposes—merely to improve their community image or deflect criticism of other, objectionable, police practices. The most common justification offered for adopting these new roles is that the police can inculcate good moral and civic habits in the community, and as a result, some unspecified measure of offending will be reduced.

The most apparent example of this expanding police mandate is the D.A.R.E. program, in which police officers become part-time teachers in the moral education of grade school students. D.A.R.E. has become an industry within an industry, and in spite of evaluations that conclude the program does not achieve its original objectives to reduce illicit drug use by young people (Rosenbaum et al. 1994, Sherman et al. 1997), it remains enormously popular with schoolchildren, parents, some educators, elected officials, and D.A.R.E. officers. However commendable these efforts may be in moral terms, they are all subject to stricter scrutiny in a problem-oriented policing context.

Goldstein has advocated that the police recognize their role in society as being broader than enforcing the criminal law. At the same time, however, he has argued that the police mandate must not be unlimited. If the police become too involved in every government and quasigovernment function, they risk eroding balances of power in local and even national government.⁵⁸ The police's moral authority, derived from their powers to arrest and to use force, can easily be misused to advance particular moral or political viewpoints. As with the military, there is a sound political rationale for keeping the police out of certain realms of social decision-making. Police agencies run the risk of overextending their expertise and resources—trying to achieve objectives about which they have little or no expertise. By expending resources on newly adopted mandates, they risk devoting too few resources to conventional mandates.

Ideally, each police agency should develop a clear and firm understanding of its mandate. This will and should vary from agency



to agency, and should be shaped by community desires. Few police agencies or communities have expressly advocated that the police assume responsibility for morally educating children, entertaining children through recreation or brokering charity. Those responsibilities are assigned elsewhere. Under a problem-oriented policing scheme, the police would recognize how functions like moral education, youth recreation and charity are integral to public safety, but would not see their role as one of providing these services directly, at least not permanently. The key for the police is first, to establish some sense of ownership or responsibility for a community problem, and if the problem falls within the police mandate, either address it themselves, broker ownership to some other entity or, in some instances, merely refuse to accept ownership. If the police assume ownership, they then must establish some clear nexus between the problem, its causes and the proposed response. In so doing, the police may well conclude that a youth recreation program, for example, is precisely what is needed to address a particular problem. But that may not be enough to justify having the police provide that service. Once the police establish the nexus between the problem, its causes and the proposed response, they must then decide whether they should take responsibility for implementing the response. Returning to the previous example, the police might determine that a youth recreation program would be a viable response to a problem of after-school residential burglaries, but that would not necessarily mean that they should organize or run that program. I will explore this question of ownership of problems further later in this chapter in the section titled "How Should the Police Develop and Implement New Responses to Problems?"

The best problem-oriented policing initiatives that call for responses outside the conventional police mandate are those that clearly identify the legitimate police interests in a particular community problem; establish a causal nexus between the crime, disorder or safety problem and the gap in services; and limit the police role in delivering the new services to that of catalysts, advisors or referring agency. A good example was provided by the Glendale, Calif., Police Department when in 1997 it helped develop a new program for day laborers that directly responded to legitimate police interests in reducing crime and disorder. The police did not assume responsibility, however, for actually running the program. Similarly, the Fontana, Calif., Police Department in 1998 helped develop a new assistance program for transients that achieved similar objectives without assuming the large responsibility of administering the program. In problem-oriented policing, it isn't the nature of the response that determines its quality; it is the link that is drawn between the response and legitimate police interests. The police may join with many divergent entities in studying a problem, but ultimately the responsibilities for various responses should be apportioned among those entities according to their resources and competencies.



It is important that the police distinguish between taking an interest in seeing a particular problem handled more effectively and taking responsibility for implementing new responses. In some instances, the one may lead naturally to the other—when, for instance, the police take an interest in improving the response to commercial robberies, and then take responsibility for implementing new responses to the problem. In other instances, the police will properly take an interest in a problem that comes to their attention, but refuse to assume responsibility for responding to that problem. For instance, the police are properly interested in the health and welfare of homeless people, and may want to see improvements in the services provided to them, but might not accept responsibility for distributing food and clothing to those in need. The demands of providing social services can easily overwhelm police officers and their agencies.

The failure to establish limits to the police mandate and to apportion responsibilities for addressing problems appropriately has led to some backlash among the police. Some police agencies that have become heavily immersed in problem-oriented policing now feel the need to remind themselves and others that their core responsibilities are to address crime, and not to do social work. While this sort of backlash runs the risk of taking the police back into an artificially narrow understanding of their role, it is understandable given some officers' and agencies' tendencies to try to expand their mandates into popular programs and tasks that have little demonstrable impact on crime, disorder and safety. The backlash may actually reflect continuing frustration on the part of some police that, having identified a community problem that does not fall squarely within their mandate, they get stuck with the responsibility to respond to the problem merely because other entities refuse to do so.

What Does a Search For Underlying Conditions, Contributing Factors and Causes Really Mean?

Implicit in any effort to solve a problem is the effort to understand why the problem exists. Goldstein explicitly calls for "an in-depth probe of all of the characteristics of a problem and the factors that contribute to it..." (1990a:36). The search for underlying conditions, contributing factors and causes has raised a number of practical issues for the police in their efforts to employ problem-oriented policing. For each problem they explore, they must consider how deeply they should look to understand why it exists, how certain they should be in their understanding, what might be done to effectively address the problem, and who should assume responsibility for taking action. In doing so, they (and those who must authorize and support their decisions) must make critical judgments about how best to study the



problem. The direction and depth of the inquiry will shape how police and the community respond to the problems. For example, in exploring problems associated with youth gangs, one could probe deeply into the underlying sociological and psychological motivations of gang membership which might lead to interventions designed to change the underlying social conditions in which youth gangs exist. In the alternative, one could limit the probe to understanding the ways youth gangs operate which might lead to more practical interventions designed to reduce the harm to the community caused by youth gangs. Problem-oriented policing calls for judgments in these matters that are neither too ambitious and leading to inquiries into the unknown or unknowable, nor too simplistic and leading to inquiries that only scratch the surface of complex problems.

Root Causes vs. Underlying Conditions

The search for contributing factors, underlying conditions and causes is sometimes confused with efforts to address the broadest of social and psychological factors that contribute to crime and disorder, factors often referred to as the "root causes" of crime and disorder.

Criminologists have long debated the root causes of crime and disorder, some looking to individuals' psychological motivations such as greed, jealousy, anger, or mental defects; others to sociological conditions such as economic deprivation and racism. A new school of thought has expanded the notion of causation of crime and disorder to include *opportunity* as a causative factor. Scholars like Ronald Clarke and Marcus Felson (1993) argue that the ease or difficulty of committing crimes and evading detection impacts crime and disorder in a real sense. They assert that opportunity is more amenable to intervention than either individuals' psychological predispositions to commit crimes or broad sociological factors that influence crime. In this regard, the search for root causes is not necessarily or exclusively a search into the soul of the human condition, but includes a search into the more mundane ways humans arrange their physical world.

Associating problem-oriented policing with a search for "root causes" is misguided in two important respects. First, it suggests that effective responses can be found only by addressing the most fundamental factors or human conditions that give rise to problems. Second, it implies a degree of certainty about causation that is seldom achievable. However helpful a deep probe into people's social or psychological conditions might be in understanding crime and disorder, it seldom proves practical in achieving more immediate police objectives. Goldstein's problem-oriented approach is compatible with Clarke and Felson's theories of crime opportunity because it seeks both to understand and to effectively intervene. It looks for the



deepest underlying conditions that are amenable to intervention, balancing what is knowable with what is possible. If one thought of the contributing causes of crime and disorder as falling on a continuum ranging from root causes to underlying conditions to marginal contributing factors, and the capacity of the police or others to intervene and modify these factors as falling on another continuum ranging from greatest capacity to intervene to least capacity to intervene, then one could conceive of appropriate problem-oriented interventions as ones that optimized the capacity for intervention in significant contributing factors.

⁶⁰Research and practice in the United Kingdom have demonstrated that reducing the use of certain types of breakable glassware in pubs can significantly reduce the severity of injuries to victims of barroom assaults (Sherman 1990).

⁶¹An editorial in the Savannah Morning News (1999) on gun control legislation highlights the debate on the causes of violence. The editorial read in part: "The real question isn't how kids kill. It's why kids kill. Until Congress is willing to look at what's inside a kid's mind, as opposed to the pistol or shotgun in his hands, the problem is far from resolved." Whatever truth this holds from a philosophical perspective, from a practical police perspective, probing the minds of violent youth is less likely to reduce violence than controlling the instruments they use to commit it.

Generally speaking, it is easier to intervene in factors that contribute least to crime and disorder, and most difficult to intervene in factors that contribute most to crime and disorder. For example, hate is a root cause of some types of assault, yet the police and others have little capacity to intervene to modify the hatred that fuels the violence. Weapon availability is a less strong contributing factor to the assault than is the underlying hatred, but the police and others have a greater capacity to intervene to modify weapon availability.⁶⁰ A number of other factors, like threat of punishment, likelihood of detection, presence of people to interrupt an assault, intoxication, agitating events, etc., contribute in varying degrees to the assault. Each factor also varies in the degree to which the police and others can intervene to modify it. Problem-oriented policing calls for finding that combination of capacity for intervention and strength of causation that offers the most promise for reducing the likelihood, frequency or severity of the assault in the present. Thus, the search for causation in problem-oriented policing is practical rather than theoretical. The primary goal is to reduce future harm, and not so much to establish blame or redress past harm.⁶¹

Causation vs. Blameworthiness

Causation and blameworthiness are complex questions in any context. When the police respond to isolated incidents of crime and disorder, they may or may not be concerned with establishing the causes of these incidents. In many instances, the police are either not at all concerned with causality, limiting their objectives to restoring peace and order, or their interest in causality is limited. If the police define the incident as a crime, then of course they will set about establishing causality and blameworthiness in a legal sense (*X* assaulted *Y* and should be punished); but they may not be interested in establishing causality in the broader sense, in which they seek to understand the conditions and dynamics that gave rise to the incident (*X* assaulted *Y* partly as a consequence of crowded conditions in the bar). Problem-oriented policing implies a concern with causation in the broader sense.



Causation and blameworthiness are not synonymous, however. To say that *X* caused *Y* does not automatically mean that *X* is blameworthy.⁶¹ In problem-oriented policing, the search for causation is also broad because the primary interest is in preventing recurrences of the harm and equitably distributing the responsibility for preventing the harm. This broad notion of causation in a problem-oriented policing approach can make the approach controversial. The entity most capable of bringing about an improvement to the problem may not be the entity generally deemed most blameworthy for that problem. Applying the notion of blameworthiness inherent in criminal law typically implicates those people who actually commit crimes or are nuisances. Problem-oriented responses affix responsibility on those entities most capable of effecting lasting improvements to the conditions that give rise to the crime and disorder. The notions of assuming responsibility for prevention and assuming blame for the problem can become confused. To many police officers, steeped in the legalistic traditions of assigning blame through the enforcement of the law, the process of spreading out responsibility for responding to problems does not come naturally. Their training has taught them to look for the people or entities most responsible for causing the harm, and compelling them to account for that harm.

An example that stands out from my own experiences in problem-oriented policing training is the now well-known Gainesville, Fla., convenience store robbery problem (Clifton 1987). This case study is often used in problem-oriented policing training to demonstrate how a problem-oriented approach can prove more effective at preventing serious crime than can a strictly criminal-law approach. The essence of the Gainesville response was to assign some increased responsibility to convenience store owners to add staff as a robbery prevention measure. This increased the owners' short-term costs. The presentation of this response in police training sessions around the United States evoked strong but mixed responses. Some officers endorsed the response as reasonable and effective. Others objected to the very idea that convenience store owners, who clearly were not the ones actually robbing their own stores, should bear any additional responsibility for others' criminal conduct, regardless of how effective the measure might prove.

Effective problem-solving requires that the police, and all parties with a stake in the problem, place a higher priority on improving the overall response to the problem than on assigning blame for the problem. This is much easier said than done, of course. The two ideas of causation and blameworthiness get intertwined easily, and people then equate accepting responsibility for changing their practices with accepting the blame for causing the problem. This is why it is so critical that the police develop effective working relationships with

⁶¹The search for causation in the context of problem-oriented policing carries with it similar dilemmas as does the search for causation in the context of criminal law. It raises questions about the distinction between causes in fact and proximate causes. Establishing a cause in fact requires a showing that the harm would not have been suffered but for the act in question. If the harm would have occurred anyway due to other acts or factors, then the act in question is not considered the cause in fact. Establishing proximate causes requires a judgment that the act in question is sufficiently closely connected to the harm to be deemed blameworthy. Criminal law is more demanding than civil law on the question of causation; that is, it is concerned primarily with establishing blame and consequently administering punishment to those people most responsible for causing harm. Civil law is more concerned with restoring the victims of harm to wholeness, and thus allows for somewhat more expansive notions of causation and responsibility. Criminal law resolves these questions through case law and statutes that slowly evolve around socially acceptable notions of culpability. In the problem-oriented policing context, these questions are resolved on an ad hoc basis, depending heavily on the judgment of those leading the problem-solving initiative, and the judgment of the affected parties as expressed through a variety of political and administrative processes.



those affected by a problem, relationships built in a spirit of mutual trust, to overcome the natural defensiveness that accompanies discussions of causation, blame and responsibility.

What Standards of Proof Should Apply in Analyzing Problems?

The search for causation also raises issues regarding the standard of proof to be applied.⁶³ Policing is both a social and a legal enterprise, but neither the strict standards of social science research nor the standards of the law are entirely suited for settling questions of causation and responsibility in the context of problem-oriented policing.

⁶³The rules of evidence govern the search for causation in criminal and civil law, and the standards of proof are well-established (proof "beyond a reasonable doubt" in criminal law, and a "preponderance of the evidence" in civil law).

⁶⁴Goldstein and Susmilch offered an important caution regarding these flexible research standards when they wrote: "These adjustments will frequently require relaxing social science standards of proof... Relaxing such standards of proof is both complex and hazardous. There is a very thin line between the eclectic research we propose here and shabby or bad research" (1981:95).

Some police scholars, like Lawrence Sherman (1998), advocate setting high standards of social scientific proof in problem-oriented policing, standards that can best be met by rigorous application of experimental testing conditions. Other scholars, like Ron Clarke, have advocated a more flexible standard of proof, a standard Clarke has occasionally referred to as "good-enough proof." By "good-enough proof," Clarke means that the standard of proof sufficient to support a particular new response to a problem should take into account the severity of the problem, the costs of being wrong, the research skills of the problem-solvers, the practicality of various research methods, the body of existing knowledge about the particular type of problem, and so forth. Goldstein and Susmilch (1981) also advocated more flexible and adaptive standards of proof, standards that ideally will be raised as the problem-oriented methodology becomes more advanced and the body of research on what causes various problems, and what works in controlling those problems, grows.⁶⁴ Professor Nick Tilley (a police scholar at Nottingham Trent University in England who is emerging as Herman Goldstein's counterpart in British policing), and Pawson have argued that quasiexperimental methods are poorly suited for establishing causality in such a complex enterprise as policing. They, too, favor a form of evaluation they call "scientific realist," an approach that takes into careful account the specific context in which the policing is occurring and the precise mechanisms the police use to effect change, and that builds knowledge on the basis of a series of effective and ineffective responses (Pawson and Tilley 1994; see, also, Tilley 1993).

As a practical matter, the standard of proof that ultimately will prevail varies from problem to problem and place to place. Unlike criminal and civil law, problem-oriented policing is not primarily governed by tribunals that apply uniform rules and laws. (Occasionally, however, the courts do serve as arbiters of problem-oriented decisions, as occurred in the Gainesville situation, in which a federal court ruled in favor of the proposed problem-oriented response.) Within the broad



limits of the law, what stands as an acceptable response to any particular problem depends on what is acceptable to the local community, at least those members who are paying attention to the problem and can exercise influence on the particular policymakers.

How Should the Police Analyze Problems, and How Well Are They Doing So Now?

By most accounts from those who observe problem-oriented policing carefully, problem analysis remains the aspect of the concept most in need of improvement.⁶⁵ Goldstein's ideal model of problem-oriented policing calls for analysis that is systematic, thorough, insightful, discriminating, and honest; that is, the analysis should provide the most comprehensive understanding of the problem possible. This ideal is rarely achieved in the practice of problem-oriented policing for several reasons. Practitioners and even some researchers do not always fully appreciate the value of analysis in responding to problems or understand precisely what information should be analyzed; the resources available for analysis, including appropriate research expertise, are often inadequate; and good analytic systems are often lacking.

The Value and Limits of Analysis

In order for the police to commit adequate resources to analyzing problems, they must first fully appreciate how analysis can improve their responses to problems. In order for researchers to help the police with analysis, they must appreciate the practical concerns of and demands upon the police with respect to community problems. (These issues are discussed more fully in chapter 4.)

A thorough problem analysis, at a minimum, means fully describing the problem, describing the multiple and often conflicting interests at stake in the problem, calculating the nature and costs of the harm arising from the problem, and taking inventory of and critiquing the current responses to the problem. In the problem-oriented policing model, problem-solvers, whether they be police practitioners or researchers, should be open to doubt about things they thought they knew about the problem and insist upon proving or disproving matters with objective evidence. They must balance the desire to be certain and precise with the practical difficulties in being so. They must recognize what data can and cannot tell them. They should be interested in learning how similar problems have been analyzed and addressed elsewhere while at the same time recognizing how their local situation might be different. They must ask the right questions and not waste effort finding answers to questions of no practical

⁶⁵See Capowich and Roehl (1994) and Police Executive Research Forum (2000). Michigan State University Professor Tim Bynum is preparing a written problem-analysis guide for police. He has noted from his review of many problem-solving projects that this stage of the process is typically weak. The forthcoming analysis guide was funded by the COPS Office and is due to be published and disseminated sometime in 2001.



significance. They must balance the need to reflect on problems with the need to act upon them. These are no small challenges and they require that both police practitioners and researchers adjust and adapt the conventional ways in which they analyze problems and decide how to respond to them.

Inadequate Analysis Resources

Problem analysis can fall short of ideal without adequate time to complete the analysis and the research expertise necessary to do so properly. In Goldstein's original conceptualization of problem-oriented policing, a typical inquiry into a problem would either be headed up by or have substantial involvement of trained researchers. While he recognized the value of more modest problem-solving initiatives undertaken by street police officers, his ideal has always been for more substantial inquiries of larger-scale problems. In practice, far more street-level problem-solving of localized problems has occurred than have higher-level inquiries into communitywide problems. In most such instances, street police officers have had little in the way of research support for their analysis beyond being provided with requested tallies of data from crime analysts or information managers. Missing is expert guidance on setting up an appropriate methodology for conducting the inquiry, assistance in ensuring the data are complete and reliable, and assistance in applying statistical data analyses from which valid conclusions can be drawn.⁶⁶ Spending more time and resources on problem analysis would improve most problem-oriented policing initiatives. Good police-researcher collaborations are important in this regard.

Problem Analysis Guides

In place of the sort of expert guidance in research that would be ideal are some rudimentary guides for problem-solving and analysis. Many departments engaged in problem-oriented policing have developed local customized guides and forms intended to facilitate and promote problem analysis. Most police agencies engaged in problem-oriented policing teach and offer written guides in problem-solving processes, most commonly the SARA model and variations thereof. Some problem-solving and analysis guides have gone a long way toward providing street officers with some basic understanding of problem-solving methodologies, but they are not substitutes for the expertise trained and experienced researchers provide.

A few police agencies have developed, or are developing, more advanced computerized programs that allow officers to search for relevant information and make sense of it. The Leicestershire Police Force in England has developed a visually attractive and easy-to-use

⁶⁶For a good discussion of common deficiencies in problem analysis and how police agencies can improve their analytical capabilities, see Clarke (1998).



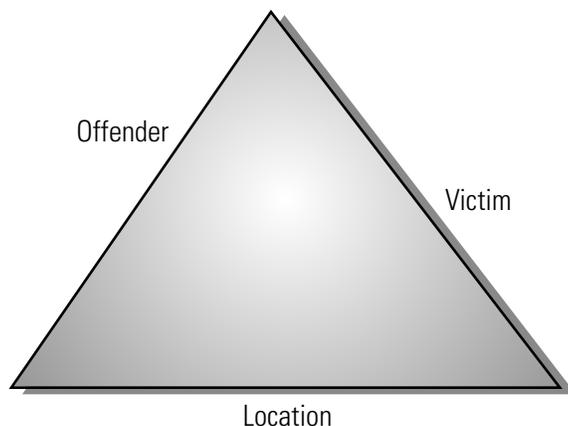
computer program that identifies incident patterns for officers that they might address in a problem-oriented way. The Chicago Police Department, supported by funding from the COPS Office, modified and enhanced a problem identification and analysis system, known as Information Collection for Automated Mapping (ICAM).⁶⁷ Also funded by the COPS Office, a consortium of Massachusetts police agencies is working with University of Cincinnati Professor Lorraine Green Mazerolle and a computer company to develop and implement a computer program called the "Problem-Solver" that will similarly facilitate the search for useful data to analyze problems (Green Mazerolle and Haas n.d.).⁶⁸ The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department is undertaking a large project to develop a comprehensive and integrated computer system that will support and facilitate problem-solving, as well. Similarly, University of Cincinnati Professor John Eck is developing a generic problem-solving manual that incorporates routine activity theory and situational crime prevention. Eck's manual, as yet unpublished, is unique in that he is designing it to permit users to either work forward from problem analysis to responses or backward from desired responses to problem analysis. In either direction, it leads users into a detailed problem analysis.

⁶⁷The ICAM2 system was designed with considerable input from line police officers, so that it would reflect both their information needs and their technical expertise. The system allows officers to search and query the department's records system and other community data systems in a variety of ways, and provides the data in graphics, statistics or maps. Details about the ICAM programs can be found in Buslik and Maltz (1998) and in a variety of internally produced Chicago Police Department documents.

⁶⁸The Police Foundation is conducting an experiment to measure the impact a computerized mapping feature of this information system has on problem-solving activities.

Eck's manual uses the conceptual framework of what is now commonly referred to as the "crime triangle" or "problem analysis triangle." The crime triangle is derived from routine activity theory and posits that all crimes (and, by extension, all problems) require victims, offenders and locations (Felson and Clarke 1998).

Figure 1
Crime Triangle





Eck then adds to his model the notions of "handlers" to describe people capable of controlling victims, offenders and locations; and "tools" to describe various instruments used to commit, prevent or facilitate problem behavior. Finally, he incorporates the notions of "streets" and "routes" to encourage analysis of the movement patterns that correlate with problem behavior.

In some training in which the crime triangle is introduced, trainees are taught that to effectively impact a problem, at least two sides of the triangle must be addressed.⁶⁹ As with the "two or more incidents" definition of a problem, there is no theoretical foundation for this rule. It is merely a means of getting new problem-solvers to think beyond simplistic responses.

As is true with all guides, they can serve to either expand thinking or limit it. For a user short on conceptual skills or lacking in innovation, a guide can greatly expand the scope of his or her analysis. For both the newcomer and a more expert user, a guide might actually inhibit the scope of analysis by suggesting artificial limits.

Both processes of identifying problems and analyzing them require some analytical methods and, accordingly, are often confused in practice. Many of the computer programs designed to help the police spot patterns of incidents that might constitute problems, like mapping and database programs, are more limited in the extent to which they can help the police fully understand the nature and causes of problems. They are most useful for alerting the police to the existence of potential problems, but they do not suffice for a complete analysis. For example, a computer mapping program might help the police detect an emerging pattern of commercial burglaries. It might even go so far as to pinpoint the more specific problem of burglaries of self-storage facilities. But knowing the spatial and temporal patterns of this problem alone is insufficient to guide the police in developing a new response to the problem. That will require another level of inquiry, one that will require looking at the facilities' physical layout, understanding the various management practices of the companies that operate the facilities, interviewing known offenders, finding out what kinds of property are stolen, etc. The data systems and research methods useful for identifying problems and for analyzing them in greater depth may overlap, but they are often quite different.

The Action Research Model

The sort of research model that Goldstein envisioned, and that he adopted in the early application of problem-oriented policing in Madison, is known as action research. In action research, the

⁶⁹The community problem-solving curriculum distributed by the Community Policing Consortium makes this assertion.



researcher is an integral part of a team of people working toward some particular result. The researcher not only collects and analyzes data and draws conclusions, but also proposes interventions along with others trying to intervene in the problem. This research model seeks to balance an outside researcher's independence and objectivity with a pragmatic interest in achieving certain results. In the beat-level practice of problem-oriented policing, the principal researcher is usually the police officer trying to intervene in the problem; that is, police officers become their own researchers. There have been only a few more ambitious collaborative initiatives of the sort Goldstein piloted, but they have been notable.⁷⁰ Perhaps the best recent example is the collaborative work of the Boston Youth Gang Task Force and Harvard University researchers. Their work, recognized as the best submission for the 1998 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing, blended sophisticated research capabilities with intimate knowledge of the particular crime problem. The effort resulted in significant reductions in homicides of young people in Boston. More recently, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department has invited Herman Goldstein and Ron Clarke to serve as external advisors on several large-scale problem-oriented policing initiatives the agency is undertaking. In addition to advising on the particular problems, Goldstein and Clarke are helping the department enhance its internal research and analysis capabilities to better support problem-oriented policing.

A couple of federally funded initiatives are seeking to advance this type of action research on substantive community problems. The COPS Office's Problem-Solving Partnership Program provided funding to over 400 jurisdictions to apply problem-oriented action research techniques to selected crime and disorder problems. Each grantee was required to spend some funding on external research assistance, both to aid in problem analysis and to evaluate intervention outcomes. The results are mixed, with some good research collaborations and some nominal ones.⁷¹ The quality of the final reports will reveal more about the potential for action research in U.S. police agencies.

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has recently funded a program called Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiatives (SACSI) in five cities.⁷² In those cities, the local U.S. attorney is to convene a group of relevant experts to identify a pressing public safety problem and, along with a researcher, develop a new response strategy. These initiatives are intended to be of a scope and sophistication comparable to the Boston effort described above and are also intended to train researchers in problem-oriented policing research methods. It remains to be seen to what degree these efforts are consistent with a problem-oriented policing approach, but at least, as designed, they incorporate the basic principles of the approach.

⁷⁰The collaboration between the University of Missouri-St. Louis and the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department to reduce levels of youth firearm violence (Rosenfeld and Decker 1998) is an outstanding example of an ambitious and sophisticated problem-oriented initiative. Although the project was not completely evaluated due to failures in police implementation, the published findings reflect a solid demonstration of many principles of problem-oriented policing. See, also, Homel (1998) for police-research collaborations on alcohol-related problems in Australia.

⁷¹PERF's (2000) evaluation of the Problem-Solving Partnership program concluded optimistically that the problem-solving model is viable, but noted many deficiencies in the grantee agencies' ability to follow the model and manage the problem-solving and grant process. It specifically noted common deficiencies in problem-solving training, data access and project staffing.

⁷²The program has been funded in Memphis, Tenn.; New Haven, Conn.; Indianapolis; Winston-Salem, N.C.; and Portland, Ore.



⁷³The 15 projects that are most promising from a problem-oriented research perspective are (1) Berkeley, Calif., Police Department/East Bay Public Safety Corridor Partnership, National Council on Crime and Delinquency (domestic violence); (2) Lexington, Ky., Division of Police/Eastern Kentucky University (displacement of drug dealing); (3) Boston Police Department/Harvard University, Northeastern University (unspecified problems); (4) multiple small Western police departments/LINC (violence against women and girls); (5) Bay City, Mich., Police Department/Saginaw Valley State University (nonviolent juvenile crime); (6) Hagerstown, Md., Police Department/Shippensburg University (neighborhood-based crime and fear of crime); (7) Framingham, Mass., Police Department/Social Science Research and Evaluation Inc. (domestic violence); (8) Buffalo, N.Y., Police Department/State University of New York at Buffalo (unspecified problems); (9) Oakland, Calif., Police Department/University of California at Berkeley (gun violence and problems at a local festival); (10) Forest Park, Ohio, Police Division/University of Cincinnati (unspecified problems); (11) Prince George's County, Md., Police Department/University of Maryland (homicides, carjackings, gun-related calls); (12) multiple small police departments in Alabama/University of South Alabama (unspecified problems); (13) Charlottesville, Va., Police Department, County of Albermarle Police Department, University of Virginia Police Department/University of Virginia (workplace violence); (14) Seattle Police Department/University of Washington (domestic violence); and (15) Arlington County, Va., Police Department/Urban Institute (unspecified problems).

NIJ and the COPS Office have also funded a program called Locally Initiated Research Partnerships in Policing (McEwen 1999) to promote police agency and outside research collaborations. There is no requirement that the research focus be substantive, however, and a review of summaries of the 41 projects funded (McEwen and Pandey 1998) reveals that only about 15 of the projects study the police response to specific community problems (e.g., domestic violence, homicide, carjackings, gun violence, drug dealing, and workplace violence). The other projects are focused on such concerns as the implementation of community policing, public attitudes about the police, and crime mapping technology. It is to be hoped that the 15 projects that do focus on the police response to substantive community problems will reinforce the value of this type of research.⁷³

For years, before the advent of problem-oriented policing, the British Home Office has engaged in action research projects with British police forces, producing a body of reports on various problems. These reports, published under various series titles, are top quality and usually are the product of just the sort of research collaboration Goldstein has advocated. To date, the Home Office initiatives and reports are superior to any similar undertakings in North America.

The Compstat method developed by the New York City Police Department, and now being emulated in many other agencies, extracts crime data from computers and subjects the data to scrutiny by panels of top-level police commanders and analysts, who then work with local commanders to interpret the data and develop appropriate responses. These inquiries vary in tone and style, but their primary purpose is to motivate police commanders to address crime problems, and to hold them accountable for doing so. They are not principally designed for careful problem analysis, though they promote some analysis. (I discuss the Compstat method and its relationship to problem-oriented policing more fully in chapter 3.) A different analysis method, the Problem Analysis Advisory Committee, has been pioneered by the Newport News Police Department and emulated elsewhere. It is primarily an analytical resource for those undertaking problem-solving projects. The problem-solvers query participating experts to encourage greater depth in the probing of a problem, and to guide their own analysis. The San Diego Police Department has used this method extensively.

Accessing and Analyzing Police Data

The widespread application of computers to police record-keeping has, for the most part, been a boon to the practice of problem-oriented policing. Data that just a few years ago would have been



enormously difficult to retrieve are now available at the touch of a few buttons. From a research standpoint, the samples that can readily be amassed and analyzed are much larger than was practical in a paper record system. Unfortunately, the ease of searching and analyzing large volumes of aggregate coded data too often leads problem-solvers to skip a more detailed analysis of the written narratives in individual police reports. Goldstein has long claimed that the narratives contain many of the more useful insights about problems.

Searching for Relevant Research and Good Police Practices

Goldstein envisioned that an important aspect of problem analysis would be a review of the literature on that problem. That literature might be in published books and articles, or in unpublished reports from within and outside the police agency. In practice, however, literature reviews conducted as part of problem-solving projects are rare. Police practitioners often do not have the benefit of assistance from researchers or do not have access to research libraries.⁷⁴ Recent research by Northwestern University Professor Alexander Weiss confirms that police agencies acquire and exchange information about practices more through personal contacts than by reading the literature (1997, 1998). How police agencies and officers communicate and share professional knowledge is a complex cultural matter.

In chapter 5, I discuss further the police-research communication gap and propose some ways to close it.

Searching for Published Research

Unfortunately, even if police had more access to research libraries, or if trained researchers were conducting a literature review, it is not at all clear that their search would be that productive with respect to many types of problems. While there is more relevant research on some community problems than many police officers realize, it is far less than one might expect given how common many problems are and how many public resources are spent trying to address them. There simply isn't enough quality research conducted to reliably inform the police about what does and does not work with respect to most crime and disorder problems. Outside of a few specialized areas that have received substantial research interest, the body of applied research on crime and disorder problems is not large. Again, compared to the body of literature in most other professions, the amount of published research about common community problems seems miniscule.

The recent series of publications titled *Crime Prevention Studies*, and two volumes titled *Situational Crime Prevention: Successful Case Studies* that developed out of the situational crime prevention model, come the

⁷⁴Where libraries exist at all in police agencies, they have typically been developed and designed primarily for occasional use by police recruits writing papers, attorneys doing legal research, or officers preparing for promotional exams. Tellingly, in some departments the library is located closer to the police academy than to the research and planning section.



⁷⁵Since POPNet's inception in November 1996, through February 2000, 84 police agencies have submitted a total of 107 cases in 41 problem-type categories. The most frequent problem types are drugs (12), juveniles (nine), gangs (eight), and community decline (seven). Frequent contributors have been the San Diego Police Department (13) and the Edmonton Police Service (eight). Many of the entries are summaries from the Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing program. The brief narratives make it difficult to get a good understanding of the projects. Some of the problem-type categories are not substantive—e.g., "lack of communication" and "community dissatisfaction." A few are redundant—"burglary" and "breaking and entering," and "traffic" and "traffic safety." A few have no entries, including "theft" and "graffiti," both common problems. Some are overly broad (e.g., "calls for service," "juveniles," "disturbance," and "public safety").

⁷⁶Most often, however, these databases are not linked to the department's main computer network, and typically, one person maintains both the databases and the project reports, so they are not widely accessible. The Edmonton Police Service and the Savannah Police Department maintained their POP project files in database programs that proved difficult to use, and thus became neglected. I found 74 POP projects in the centralized database of the Edmonton, Alberta, Police Service; 180 in one division of the Lancashire, England, Constabulary; 135 in the Savannah, Ga., Police Department; 158 in the Reno Police Department; and 74 for 1999 in one patrol sector of the Sacramento, Calif., Police Department. Different agencies have different policies about documenting POP projects, and place varying levels of priority on entering information into centralized databases. Thus, computerized POP project files are a crude way of gauging the amount of problem-solving occurring in an agency.

closest to building a body of literature that is relevant to and useful for practicing problem-oriented policing. At present, there are twelve volumes in the *Crime Prevention Studies* series, each composed of 15 or so articles (Clarke 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; Eck and Weisburd 1995; Homel 1996, 1997; Weisburd and McEwen 1998; Green Mazerolle and Roehl 1998; Painter and Tilley 1999; Natarajan and Hough 2000; Farrell and Pease 2001), and two editions of the *Situational Crime Prevention* volume (Clarke 1992, 1997b).

Searching for Good Practices in Other Police Agencies

Other sources of relevant information, like written reports of problem-solving initiatives, are less accessible. Some of the annual submissions for the Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing are in a computer database called POPNet, operated by the Police Executive Research Forum and accessible through the Internet. These are summaries only, however, and do not convey the complete understanding of the projects that might come from reading a full narrative report. Moreover, the entries are not subjected to much quality control, so their value is further limited.⁷⁵ Jane's Information Group, the British company best known for publishing information about military hardware, is developing a counterpart to POPNet. Known as COPcase, this web-based system (copcase.janes.com) provides detailed reports on effective police problem-solving initiatives. While this system is still in its infancy, it shows considerable promise. The Police Executive Research Forum published reports on the award-winning projects from 1998 (Solé Brito and Allan 1999) and, with support from NIJ and the COPS Office, have published reports on the award-winning projects from 1999 (National Institute of Justice 2000).

Searching for Good Practices Within a Police Agency

The police can also improve their responses to community problems by studying their own and other agency's past efforts to address similar problems. Reports about problem-solving initiatives are a valuable source of knowledge from which to draw, even if those initiatives did not apply rigorous research methods. Unfortunately, most police agencies do not routinely prepare detailed reports on most of their problem-solving initiatives. Some police managers are reluctant to impose what might be perceived as excessive reporting requirements on officers whom they do not want to discourage from engaging in problem-solving. While this is understandable as managers try to coax officers into policing in a different way, a lot of knowledge about how various problems have been handled has been lost.

Some police agencies have created internal computerized databases to store information about problem-solving projects.⁷⁶ Some agencies



also maintain paper files for each project and have an official numbering system to keep track of those files. To ensure at least minimal documentation, some agencies require officers to complete problem-solving project forms. Most forms capture basic data about the problem's nature, the analysis and responses, and some impact measures. A few agencies have chronicled problem-solving projects through in-house newsletters.⁷⁷ These computer records, project reports, forms and newsletters have great potential to help officers search for solutions to common problems and to teach officers problem-solving skills through real examples. The best of these efforts are commendable, but still quite modest and limited. Somehow, more police-led problem-solving efforts must be documented in writing and police managers must then make these resources accessible and encourage that they be reviewed as a standard step in future problem analysis.⁷⁸

Certainly, compared with the enormous investment and commitment to documenting and storing data on police calls for service, incident reports and criminal investigations, the state of record-keeping for problem-oriented activities is primitive. (In the main, police records are used to either establish the elements of crimes for possible prosecution or account for police officers' time and actions; they are not typically designed or used as a source of information for addressing problems.) In my visits to some agencies, it was not uncommon to find that if a record system for problem-oriented policing projects existed, few people had the knowledge or capacity to access it. Some departments' files had fallen into disuse after a few years, and consequently contained little current data. In no agencies did I find that the department's central records unit, responsible for maintaining most other official records, had any responsibility for maintaining problem-oriented policing project files. Ultimately, police agencies must assign the same degree of importance to the official records related to problem-oriented initiatives as they do other official records.

What Does It Mean To Develop an Understanding of the Multiple and Competing Interests at Stake in Problems?

Many problem-oriented policing initiatives fail to take complete account of all the interests at stake with respect to the problem. This matter of accounting for the various interests is often simplified into a mere inventory of stakeholders. By interests in a problem, Goldstein meant the various reasons why the police or the community either is, or is not, concerned about a particular problem. Thus, any one stakeholder is not limited to having a single interest in the problem. Indeed, most stakeholders have multiple and competing interests in a problem.⁷⁹

⁷⁷The St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department; St. Petersburg, Fla., Police Department; Fresno, Calif., Police Department; Reno Police Department; and Stockholm, Sweden, Police Department at one time or another have produced regular newsletters exclusively dedicated to chronicling in-house problem-solving efforts.

⁷⁸Herman Goldstein recounted an experience while working with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., Police Department that illustrates the difficulty in sharing knowledge within the police field. No fewer than five different Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officers were addressing problems related to motels at the same time. They learned of one another's efforts only through Goldstein. Moreover, they were unaware that the department's Crime Prevention Unit maintained a file on the prevention of similar problems, and unaware that the Portland, Ore., Police Bureau had produced a comprehensive manual on police responses to motel problems, a manual that had been published for national distribution. One enterprising officer eventually researched the topic via computer access to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service.

⁷⁹There is a distinction between the collective interests that all members of society presumably share, and the more narrow interests of particular individuals or groups in advancing a particular agenda. For example, society and government have broad collective moral, health, commercial, and public safety interests in controlling prostitution. Within the context of a specific prostitution problem, the interests might be narrower—a motel has an interest in the revenue prostitution generates, but a competing concern about becoming a haven for crime, while a neighboring church has an interest in keeping prostitutes away.



The way Goldstein envisions the question of interests' being explored derives from other legal writings about government interests.⁸⁰ One begins by asking what the *social* interests are in the problem (both the interests in curtailing the behavior and the interests in permitting the behavior), and then asking what the *government* interests are in the problem. Not all social interests should be government interests. Once one identifies the government interests, one can turn to asking what police interests are at stake. Referring to the police's fundamental objectives is a useful way to approach this question (see chapter 2 for further discussion of fundamental police objectives). If the police conclude they have no interest at stake in the problem, there is little justification for their continued involvement regarding it. There are many social problems in which the police are well-advised not to become embroiled.

⁸⁰See Remington (1952, 1954).

In exploring the various nonpolice interests at stake in a problem, it is important to go beyond the most visible and obvious interests. There are often hidden commercial interests involved in many problems, as well as latent social prejudices and biases. These interests should at least be brought out in the open, where they can be considered. The careful probing of these interests is among the most enlightening parts of the problem-solving process. Police officers who engage in this probing of interests begin to appreciate just how many different perspectives there may be regarding the same problem. The multiple and competing interests of the police themselves are often not well-considered. For example, some conventional responses to chronic problems, however ineffective, promote some police interests. In some jurisdictions, police officers rely heavily on either overtime or outside security employment for their incomes. Sometimes an alternative response to a problem has the potential to eliminate the need for the overtime or off-duty assignments, obviously presenting ethical challenges to the police.

What Does It Mean To Take Inventory of and Critique the Current Responses to Problems?

Another aspect of analysis commonly omitted that Goldstein considers crucial is an inventory and assessment of the current responses to the problem being studied. Many project reports allude only briefly to the inadequacy of current responses, mainly by making the obvious assertion that a new response is needed. Current responses are often described briefly and generally, and casually discredited as being ineffective. One often reads in problem-solving project reports cursory assessments of current practices such as "the traditional response of handling calls, taking reports and making arrests was not working". But brief and general descriptions like these



are not illuminating and, often, not entirely accurate. Individual police officers frequently develop their own innovative responses to problems, responses that are not fully and accurately encompassed in their agency's standard operating procedures. Other agencies and groups may be responding to problems in ways that the police are unaware. Some responses, however traditional, may prove more effective upon closer analysis than they might initially appear. For example, many problem-solving initiatives indicate that conventional strategies of arresting offenders have failed. Yet few such initiatives support such assertions by addressing how criminal arrests are actually processed, and what ultimately happens to offenders. These sorts of court-tracking studies that follow criminal arrests through the criminal justice process to assess the outcomes can be illuminating.⁸¹ As a routine matter, police agencies typically receive little or no information from the courts about case disposition. Admittedly, court-tracking studies can be somewhat difficult to do (the data are often unreliable and difficult for police to access), and some police agencies don't consider anything that happens after police processing to be of their concern. When the police limit their inquiry to their own arrest actions, they miss a full understanding of the systemic responses to a problem. It takes some effort to discern precisely how problems are being handled and to what extent current practice is effective.

The flip side of dismissing the value of current conventional responses, when faced with a problem that is not getting adequate attention, is simply increasing the effort put into conventional responses, without carefully considering their strategic value. Many reports on problem-solving projects leap quickly to judgments that greater police presence, more arrests, more certain prosecution, or stiffer penalties are the best response to a problem. Such judgments are often made without examining the effectiveness of existing levels of these interventions.

How Should the Police Develop and Implement New Responses to Problems?

Expanding the Range of Response Alternatives

Goldstein urges the police to greatly expand their range of alternative responses to problems, responses beyond the conventional increased police presence and criminal arrests. This is perhaps the aspect of problem-oriented policing that thus far the police have most successfully applied.⁸² A wide range of responses is emerging from reports of problem-oriented policing projects. It may be that the police have long tried many of these responses, but have informally and seldom acknowledged so openly. That doesn't diminish their

⁸¹The early Goldstein and Susmilch (1982a) problem-oriented study of the drinking driver in Madison concluded that, contrary to most police officers' belief, a driver's refusal to take a breath test almost ensured a conviction for the primary charge of drunken driving. This was so because of plea-bargaining practices. Police officers had become conditioned to believe that plea bargaining was contrary to their interests, when under those circumstances, the bargaining practices were entirely consistent with them.

⁸²Deputy Chief Pat McElderry of the Colorado Springs Police Department aptly summarized the police tendency to emphasize responses to problems over the identification, analysis or assessment of problems when he wrote, "[O]ur acculturation in traditional policing still makes it difficult to see 'SARA' as anything other than 'saRa'" (1999).



“When a police department takes a problem-oriented policing approach, it turns police work upside down by asking whether the current response is working. It calls for a constant reexamination of what we do, including our relationship with the community.”

– Rana Sampson

significance. The concept of problem-oriented policing has successfully brought these new responses into professional and public discourse about policing.

Goldstein intended that new responses to chronic problems be well-considered, following logically from careful problem analysis; that they not be merely a few clever ideas thought up as a hasty reaction. Clever ideas have some value, but without a clear line of reasoning that articulates the basis for the new response, they do not add much to the body of professional knowledge from which other police agencies and communities can draw. Police agencies often copy other agencies' clever or innovative ideas. But, without first assessing how they might work in the local situation, these ideas might well prove ineffective.

It is also unfortunate when the police launch problem-solving initiatives with a preferred response in mind. The subsequent problem analysis serves more to justify the preferred response than to inform the decision-maker about the nature of the problem. Most training programs in problem-oriented policing incorporate some structured methods for generating ideas about possible new responses. Brainstorming is the most common. Yet the actual practice of problem-oriented policing does not apply as much structured group decision-making as the training would suggest occurs. Response strategies are more often the product of an ad hoc process involving only a single or a few key decision-makers. When this occurs, there is greater risk that the decision-makers' personal biases will dictate the response strategy. The most common response-related bias is toward using criminal arrest as the primary response. Ideally, the criminal arrest response is considered neutrally, as one possibility among many for addressing a problem.

Categorizing Response Alternatives

In the literature on problem-oriented policing, there are now several frameworks for considering response alternatives. Goldstein approached the issue by chronicling and then categorizing a wide range of response alternatives that police agencies have actually adopted. He devoted Chapter 8 of *Problem-Oriented Policing* mainly to describing these categories, their rationale and examples (1990a). His classification scheme is a descriptive one (see Table 3 on the next page).



Table 3
Goldstein's Categories of Responses in Problem-Oriented Policing

1. Concentrating Attention on Those Individuals Who Account for a Disproportionate Share of a Problem
2. Connecting With Other Government and Private Services
 - a. Making Referrals to Other Agencies
 - b. Coordinating Police Responses With Other Agencies
 - c. Correcting Inadequacies in Municipal Services, and Pressing for New Services
3. Using Mediation and Negotiation Skills
4. Conveying Information
 - a. To reduce anxiety and fear
 - b. To enable citizens to solve their own problems
 - c. To elicit conformity with laws and regulations that are not known or understood
 - d. To warn potential victims about their vulnerability, and advise them of ways to protect themselves
 - e. To demonstrate to people how they unwittingly contribute to problems
 - f. To develop support for addressing a problem
 - g. To acquaint the community with the limitations on the police, and to define realistically what they can expect of the police
5. Mobilizing the Community
6. Using Existing Forms of Social Control, in Addition to the Community
7. Altering the Physical Environment to Reduce Opportunities for Problems to Recur
8. Increasing Regulation, Through Statutes or Ordinances, of Conditions That Contribute to Problems
9. Developing New Forms of Limited Authority To Intervene and Detain
10. Using the Criminal Justice System More Discriminately
 - a. Straightforward Investigation, Arrest and Prosecution
 - b. Selective Enforcement, With Articulated Criteria
 - c. Enforcement of Criminal Laws That, by Tradition, Another Agency Enforces
 - d. Definition, With Greater Specificity, of That Behavior That Should Be Subject to Criminal Prosecution or to Control Through City Ordinances
 - e. Intervention Without Making an Arrest
 - f. Use of Arrest Without the Intention to Prosecute
 - g. Attachment of New Conditions to Probation or Parole
11. Using Civil Law to Control Public Nuisances, Offensive Behavior and Conditions Contributing to Crime

Source: H. Goldstein. 1990. *Problem-Oriented Policing*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.



Ron Clarke (1997b) has developed a different sort of framework—"the 16 techniques of situational crime prevention." He derived the categories from the theoretical bases of situational crime prevention and routine activity theory. Clarke also provides examples of each response category, which I have reproduced with minor stylistic changes in Table 4 below.

Table 4
16 Opportunity-Reducing Techniques

Increasing Perceived Effort	Increasing Perceived Risks	Reducing Anticipated Rewards	Removing Excuses
<p>1. <i>Target Hardening</i></p> <p>Slug Rejector Devices Steering Locks Bandit Screens</p>	<p>5. <i>Entry/Exit Screening</i></p> <p>Automatic Ticket Gates Baggage Screening Merchandise Tags</p>	<p>9. <i>Target Removal</i></p> <p>Removable Car Radios Women's Shelters Phone Cards</p>	<p>13. <i>Rule Setting</i></p> <p>Customs Declaration Harassment Codes Hotel Registration</p>
<p>2. <i>Access Control</i></p> <p>Parking Lot Barriers Fenced Yards Entry Phones</p>	<p>6. <i>Formal Surveillance</i></p> <p>Red-Light Cameras Burglar Alarms Security Guards</p>	<p>10. <i>Property Identification</i></p> <p>Property Marking Vehicle Licensing Cattle Branding</p>	<p>14. <i>Conscience Stimulation</i></p> <p>Roadside Speedometers "Shoplifting Is Stealing" "Idiots Drink and Drive"</p>
<p>3. <i>Offender Deflection</i></p> <p>Bus Stop Placement Tavern Location Street Closure</p>	<p>7. <i>Employee Surveillance</i></p> <p>Pay Phone Locations Park Attendants CCTV Systems</p>	<p>11. <i>Temptation Reduction</i></p> <p>Gender-Neutral Listings Off-Street Parking Rapid Repair</p>	<p>15. <i>Disinhibitor Control</i></p> <p>Drinking-Age Laws Ignition Interlocks V-Chips</p>
<p>4. <i>Facilitator Control</i></p> <p>Credit Card Photo Gun Control Caller ID</p>	<p>8. <i>Natural Surveillance</i></p> <p>Defensible Space Street Lighting Cab Driver ID</p>	<p>12. <i>Benefit Denial</i></p> <p>Ink Merchandise Tags Car Radio PINs Graffiti Cleaning</p>	<p>16. <i>Compliance Facilitation</i></p> <p>Easy Library Checkout Public Lavatories Trash Bins</p>

Source: R.V. Clarke. 1997. *Situational Crime Prevention: Successful Case Studies* (2nd ed.). Albany, N.Y.: Harrow and Heston.



John Eck's problem-solving manual, a work still in progress, offers yet another framework that, like Clarke's, is built around the theories underlying situational crime prevention (see Table 5).

The "Problem-Solver" computer program codeveloped by Lorraine Green Mazerolle also includes menus of suggested response alternatives derived from the existing literature on problem-oriented policing. Whether one uses deductive frameworks like Clarke's or Eck's, in which responses are classified according to theoretical premises, or inductive frameworks like Goldstein's, in which responses are classified according to common features of tested responses, these frameworks have the potential to expand the range of responses the police and others use to address community problems. As with problem analysis guides, problem response guides should not be considered comprehensive sets of solutions to problems.

What Does It Mean for the Police to Be Proactive?

In problem-oriented policing, proactive responses are preferred over merely reactive responses. Reactive responses may be entirely appropriate as a temporary measure to stabilize a problem and to serve other legitimate police objectives. Goldstein stresses proactivity in policing in two senses. First, he asserts that responses to problems should *prevent* future harm, and not just address past harm. Second, he believes the police should see it as a legitimate part of their role in government and society to speak out about public safety problems that are not being adequately addressed. This relates to the earlier discussion about what sorts of problems the police should address as part of their mandate.

Speaking out about problems might simply require calling them to the attention of other officials or community leaders. Beyond that, it might require that the police appeal to others' moral and ethical obligations to take responsibility for problems, or invoke legal authority to compel others to do so. The questions of when and how the police should assign responsibility have not been adequately addressed. Assuming that the police have an obligation to speak out about problems they are aware of, but others may not be aware, in what forum should they speak? Should they speak out when elected officials have consciously chosen not to? What pressure should the police put on uncooperative segments of the community? Goldstein (1996c) has articulated a continuum of pressure the police might apply to get other entities to assume or share ownership for community problems. The degree of pressure the police apply should depend on the strength of the evidence they have regarding the nature of the problem and its causes. Table 6 summarizes this continuum, with each step involving more pressure.

Table 5
Eck's Categories of Response Alternatives

I.	Offender Control Tactics
	Offenders
	Offenders' Tools
	Handlers
	Handlers' Tools
II.	Target and Victim Control Tactics
	Target and Victim Protection
	Target and Victim Tools
	Guardianship
	Guardianship Tools
III.	Place Control Tactics
	Places
	Managers
	Management Tools
	Streets and Routes

Source: J. Eck, 1998. "A Problem-Solving Manual for the Police and the Public." *Unpublished draft.*

"Cities need to develop an understanding of, and an explicitness about, the responsibilities of businesses that consume a disproportionate volume of police services—like convenience stores and shopping malls—social responsibilities of companies not to create crime opportunities."

— Rana Sampson



"Herman Goldstein's original concept was more centralized. I don't think he saw police officers making direct contributions to problem-solving; he saw them more as resources to analysts and researchers. Newport News and Baltimore County showed that police officers can do problem-solving themselves. I know Herman has had mixed feelings about this."

– Darrel Stephens

Table 6
Goldstein's Continuum of Police Pressure on Others to Accept Ownership of Community Problems (from least degree of pressure to greatest)

- develop educational programs regarding responsibility for the problem
- make a straightforward informal request of some entity to assume responsibility for the problem
- make a targeted confrontational request of some entity to assume responsibility for the problem
- engage another existing organization that has the capacity to help address the problem
- press for the creation of a new organization to assume ownership of the problem
- shame the delinquent entity by calling public attention to its failure to assume responsibility for the problem
- withdraw police services relating to certain aspects of the problem
- charge fees for police services related to the problem
- press for legislation mandating that entities take measures to prevent the problem
- bring a civil action to compel entities to accept responsibility for the problem.

The notion of police proactivity has led to some confusion and abuse. It raises questions about the propriety of police involvement in certain social issues, as discussed earlier. There is also some confusion about what, precisely, constitutes proactive measures vs. reactive measures. The answer depends somewhat on one's frame of reference. For example, with respect to repeat victimization, police measures to assist a repeat victim are reactive with respect to the first victimization, but may be proactive with respect to future victimizations. The notion of proactivity has also been misunderstood and abused when it has been invoked as a code word for aggressive police tactics.

Who Should Be Involved in Problem-Oriented Policing, and How?

While Goldstein originally encouraged line officers' involvement in problem-oriented policing, he did not anticipate that they would emerge as the leaders in addressing problems. Goldstein originally imagined that command-level police officials and research collaborators would lead most problem-oriented initiatives; that they would be, in essence, research efforts like the early Madison studies of drinking drivers and repeat sex offenders. As originally conceived and



tested, problem-oriented policing focused on the police's administrative and investigative operations, more so than on routine patrol operations. Few of the systems, supports and expectations for patrol-level problem-solving that are now widely recognized as critical to problem-oriented policing were part of Goldstein's early vision. The later research done in Baltimore County, Newport News, Va., and other places better defined a role for line officers and made problem-solving part of the daily routine.

Problem-oriented policing has seen leadership on projects come from many levels in the police hierarchy. Line police officers have emerged as the leaders of many projects, even when the scope of the project has been quite large. In my analysis of submissions for the Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing for 1993 to 1999 (see Appendix A), I concluded that about half of the projects were led by one or a couple of line-level police officers.⁸³ In one respect, this provides some evidence of the talent line-level police officers have, talent that police managers do not fully appreciate or exploit. About one-third of the submissions analyzed reported active leadership on the project from a police supervisor.⁸⁴ Only 15 percent of the submissions cited command-level officers for active project leadership. The results of this analysis are consistent with my own experiences in several police agencies. While this degree of line-level leadership certainly advances Goldstein's intent that line officers be an important part of the decision-making process, it leaves open to question whether line-level officers should be expected to provide their own leadership. One possible explanation for this trend toward line-level leadership is that supervisory and command-level officers are simply not sufficiently engaged in practicing problem-oriented policing.

To some extent, the New York City Police Department's experiences during Commissioner William Bratton's tenure showed the weaknesses of exclusively line-level leadership. Bratton believed that the department's community policing and problem-solving efforts in prior administrations depended far too heavily on community police officers to identify and address community problems, without sufficient involvement of precinct commanders (Bratton 1995). The Compstat process was one means by which command-level officers were compelled to become more intimately engaged in resolving community problems. Critics of this approach argue that when commanders are held accountable for problem-solving, problems tend to get defined in their terms, and less so in the community's and the line officers' terms; the community and line officers are likely to be more familiar with the problems than the commanders. Moreover, the real leadership capacity of many line officers may be overlooked, and they may be discouraged from engaging in problem-solving's analytical aspects.

⁸³Determining precisely who led any particular project is sometimes subjective and depends on the project report author's account. Some authors discount potentially significant higher-level leadership to deflect credit to the line officers; others do the opposite. Of the 100 submissions I analyzed, 48 indicated that line-level officers led the project. Of those 48, about one-fourth concerned localized problems, one-half concerned intermediate-level problems, and one-fourth concerned communitywide problems.

⁸⁴This figure itself is generously high insofar as I attributed supervisory leadership to all projects in which an entire unit of police officers was credited for leading the project. I assumed that if an entire unit was involved, the unit's supervisor likely provided at least some leadership. From experience, I know this assumption is not always accurate.



⁸⁵My own experiences working in the administration of the New York City, Fort Pierce, Fla., and St. Louis Metropolitan police departments confirm this observation. I typically found that top-level staff meetings were almost entirely consumed by discussions of administrative matters.

What is the ideal level of police authority for providing leadership in problem-oriented policing projects? The answer, like the answer to so many questions related to problem-oriented policing, is that it depends principally on the scope of the problem being addressed. As a general proposition, supervisors should provide active leadership in localized beat problems; commanders in intermediate-level problems; and top commanders, perhaps including the chief executive, in communitywide problems. In every instance, line officers should be encouraged to be as involved as their time and abilities permit. There is always a need for higher levels of authority to become involved in a particular project, as the situation dictates (e.g., if a lower-level official cannot get cooperation).

That higher-ranking police officials seldom actively lead problem-oriented policing initiatives suggests that the problem-solving method of operations has yet to achieve a high level of importance in most police organizations. It tends still to be viewed as something that only beat police officers do. Police chiefs need to pay at least as much personal attention to substantive community problems as they do to administrative and political concerns.⁸⁵ Some command officers, to the extent they are supportive of problem-oriented policing, see their role as administrative manager, ensuring that systems are in place and resources available for line-level problem-solving. This is fine as far as it goes, but without more personal and direct command-level leadership, few large and complex community problems are likely to be taken on in a sophisticated, problem-oriented way. Line-level officers simply lack the requisite resources in most instances to conduct the sort of analysis and effect the sort of responses necessary to bring about substantial improvements in communitywide problems.

From my observations, San Diego's former police chief, Jerry Sanders, widely seen as the champion of problem-oriented policing within his agency, provided an optimal style of leadership with respect to problem-oriented policing projects. Sanders made a habit of attending the department's periodic Problem Analysis Advisory Committee meetings. His attendance demonstrated both his interest in problem-oriented policing generally, and in the line officers' projects particularly, as well as his commitment to become personally involved in a project if circumstances warranted. Through his consistent expressions of interest in community problems, and his consistent availability to intervene in projects, he allowed each problem to receive the appropriate level of leadership. The informal operating principle was that the lowest level of leadership necessary to effectively address a problem was the optimum. Accordingly, one often found at least mid-level police managers personally engaged in large problem-solving projects, and only indirectly involved in smaller, localized problems.



It makes no sense to dictate, as a matter of policy, that a certain rank police official become personally involved in problem-solving initiatives anymore than it makes sense to dictate this in the handling of incidents or the investigation of crimes. The goal is to get an entire police agency thinking in problem-oriented terms, not merely to have everyone simultaneously working on projects. This question of active leadership should be resolved pragmatically, depending on the particulars of each problem. Given the abundance of community problems in every jurisdiction of sufficiently large scope, supervisors and command-level officers have plenty of opportunities to become personally engaged in problem-oriented policing, and they need to do so for problem-oriented policing to advance and become institutionalized practice.

How Should the Effectiveness of Implemented Responses Be Evaluated?

The aspect of problem-oriented policing Goldstein has written least about is the measurement of effectiveness. The early experimental projects he conducted in Madison were not fully implemented, so there was little opportunity to evaluate the impact of the proposed response strategies. Goldstein has always asserted that measuring effectiveness is crucial to the process. Without some measurement of impact, the police can learn little about the value of different responses. Several major issues and debates have arisen with respect to this aspect of problem-oriented policing.

Process vs. Outcome Measurement

Perhaps the single greatest source of confusion relating to the evaluation of problem-oriented policing initiatives surrounds the distinction between the measurement of *processes* and the measurement of *outcomes*. The measurement of processes is the documentation of the actions taken in implementing responses, and an assessment of whether the responses were actually implemented as intended. The measurement of outcomes is the assessment of the ultimate impact the responses had on the problem, as defined (i.e., Did the problem improve, worsen or remain the same? Were the outcome objectives achieved?).

In many problem-oriented policing projects, these two different types of evaluation are confused. Most commonly, evaluators misconstrue process evaluation for outcome evaluation; that is, they limit their inquiry to determining how well and to what degree the police and others actually implemented their plan of action. While this information is vitally important, it cannot be substituted for some

“At its best, problem-oriented policing engages police officers at the front end, and gets them excited about their work. It gives them a whole new perspective on their job, such that the job can become exciting instead of routine, and that's important.”

– Gloria Laycock



“The analysis of problems by police officers in some projects is impressive, and their responses, creative. Herman Goldstein recognized how creative officers are. Problem-oriented policing allows for that creativity; it is no longer just something that is exercised when the sergeant isn't looking.”

– Rana Sampson

“Problem-solving seems to happen more naturally at both the bottom and top levels of police organizations. But it's not satisfactory that it happen at only these levels, since most problems we care about are intermediate-size problems, calling for intermediate-level responses, organized and coordinated within the middle layers of police organizations.”

– Malcolm Sparrow

inquiry about what effect the plan of action, however well-implemented, had on the problem. Trained researchers have also fallen into this conceptual trap. The evaluation design of a problem-oriented policing initiative funded by the COPS Office Problem-Solving Partnerships Program provides a common example of this confusion. The problem being addressed was auto theft. A response strategy was developed that focused on the apprehension, prosecution and punishment of juvenile offenders. The written evaluation design, prepared by an outside trained researcher, listed the following outcome measures for the project:

- Increase the number of people arrested for auto theft.
- Increase the number of juveniles arrested for auto theft.
- Focus particular attention on repeat offenders.
- Increase the number of cases filed for prosecution.
- Increase the number of juvenile cases filed for prosecution.
- Increase the conviction rate of auto theft offenders.
- Increase the conviction rate of juvenile auto theft offenders.
- Increase the punishment for convicted offenders, including sentence lengths.
- Increase the actual time of incarceration.

None of these outcome measures would reveal anything about the number of auto thefts committed after the police implemented the response strategy, an indicator that logically should be the primary outcome objective.

One possible explanation for the persistent confusion over process and outcome measurement may lie in confusion about the fundamental police objectives (discussed more fully in chapter 2). If one believes the police's primary objective is to enforce the law through apprehension and criminal prosecution, then one can logically understand measures of the sort listed above to be outcome measures. If, on the other hand, one believes that the police's primary objective is to reduce the incidence and seriousness of harm to the community, and that enforcing the law is but a means to that end, then the measures listed above are clearly only process measures, and not outcome measures. Goldstein, of course, holds the latter view, and evaluation designs that are limited to measuring arrests and other process indicators represent a serious distortion in the practice of problem-oriented policing. Ideally, a problem-oriented policing project will include measurement of both processes and outcomes.

What Standards of Proof Should Apply in Evaluating Effectiveness?

Another major issue relating to evaluation in problem-oriented policing surrounds the evaluation methodology and standards of



proof to be applied. This issue presents itself in much the same way the problem analysis issue does. The questions in evaluation are: What are legitimate methods to determine the effectiveness of responses? and, How certain must we be to legitimately claim success? On this matter, Goldstein and other academics disagree. Goldstein advocates a certain degree of flexibility. He acknowledges the many difficulties in establishing precise and certain conclusions in the complex world of human behavior where policing occurs, and accordingly, he is willing to settle for less than the most rigorous tests of effectiveness in most instances.⁸⁶ In addition, the evaluation of police interventions is not yet sophisticated, so insisting on rigorous standards, however justified theoretically, would likely stifle much experimentation with the problem-oriented concept. As with problem analysis, Goldstein concurs with Ron Clarke's belief in "good enough" measurement. How precise and certain one has to be in problem-oriented policing depends greatly on the consequences of being wrong. The main critic of this brand of eclectic, flexible evaluation has been Lawrence Sherman. Sherman, who endorses the problem-oriented approach to policing generally, has advocated that outcome evaluation entail what he considers the most reliable methodology—controlled experiments—and the most demanding standard of proof—the elimination of all rival hypotheses.⁸⁷ Sherman is less willing than Goldstein or Clarke to accept the validity of claims based on less than rigorous and controlled evaluations. Few problem-oriented policing projects reported to date have employed anywhere near the level of rigor and control that Sherman considers ideal. Thus, how much the practice of problem-oriented policing has advanced police knowledge about how to reduce crime, disorder and fear depends heavily on one's views about evaluation. Those who share Goldstein's and Clarke's views might conclude that a lot has been learned,⁸⁸ those who share Sherman's view might conclude that little has been learned (see Sherman et al. 1997).⁸⁹ Clarke shares some of Sherman's concerns about the inadequacy of evaluation in many problem-oriented policing projects, concluding that the studies conducted under the rubric of situational crime prevention have, on the whole, been more rigorous and reliable than those conducted under the rubric of problem-oriented policing. Most of the work conducted in situational crime prevention, at least the evaluation component, has been led by trained researchers. Most of the work conducted in problem-oriented policing has been led by police practitioners. That there is better evaluation in the situational crime prevention context is therefore not surprising. Yet, in the end, the knowledge gained from the work matters more than the rubric under which the work is done. Goldstein sees the situational crime prevention work as extraordinarily valuable to the police, not so much because he feels they can emulate the research methods, but because they can learn important lessons about the effectiveness of different responses to common problems.

⁸⁶There may be inherent tension in the concept of problem-oriented policing between the principles related to effective responses and those related to evaluation. Problem-oriented policing encourages the police to develop multifaceted response strategies to maximize the likelihood of success (and, in fact, most problem-oriented policing projects entail the use of multifaceted strategies). Multifaceted response strategies, however, are considerably more difficult to evaluate than single response strategies because it is difficult to isolate each response's effects (Eck 1997).

⁸⁷Sherman himself was criticized by other scholars for failing to set sufficiently high standards of replicability of results in his domestic violence experimental studies, a charge Sherman defended against, arguing that policymakers must make decisions on the best evidence available, however imperfect (Mastrofski and Uchida 1993).

⁸⁸Among the other scholars who also endorse less than the strictest evaluation methodology are Bazemore and Cole (1994). They wrote: "Police departments, as they move increasingly toward the community policing model and problem-oriented strategies, will need to assume increased initiative for monitoring and assessing initial implementation of these approaches, as well as evaluation of intermediate impacts... While these evaluations and assessments may not always meet the highest methodological standards for purposes of causal inference, viewed as case studies of strategic interventions and their intermediate impacts on crime and citizen attitudes, local community policing experiments can be expected to add significantly to practical knowledge and theory development" (p. 121).

⁸⁹See, also, Brame and Piquero (1998), who wrote: "In sum, the evidence on effectiveness of problem-solving strategies seems to have an optimistic tone. Unfortunately, much of it is anecdotal and not scientifically rigorous... Thus, a critical issue in the area of problem-solving is the need for more rigorous research designs and multiple-site studies to evaluate the effectiveness of various measures."



What Are the Specific Objectives of Problem-Solving Efforts?

Another issue related to the evaluation of problem-oriented policing concerns the articulation of problem-specific objectives. The Newport News study (Eck and Spelman 1987) first delineated a set of generic legitimate objectives in problem-solving. It grouped those objectives into five categories:

1. totally eliminate a problem;
2. substantially reduce a problem;
3. reduce the harm created by a problem;
4. deal with a problem better (e.g., treat people more humanely, reduce costs or increase effectiveness); and
5. remove the problem from police consideration.

The fifth objective, removing problems from police consideration, differs from the first four in that it does not directly address the question of whether the problem, as experienced in the community, will be improved by removing it from police consideration. Taken to the extreme, the police could claim success in problem-oriented policing merely by working to absolve themselves of responsibility for problems. Goldstein did not intend such an outcome; nor did Eck and Spelman. If shifting responsibility for addressing a problem to another entity results in more effective handling of the problem, then the objective is legitimate. If such a shift results merely in some efficiency gains for the police, then it may have some merit, but one cannot consider it an effective resolution.

When proper outcome evaluations of problem-oriented policing initiatives are conducted, some prove too limited in their scope; that is, they are limited to measuring only a few indicators of impact, most often the volume of calls for service or the numbers of reported crimes. Often neglected in evaluations are indicators of the *prevalence* of the problem, the *net harm* caused by the problem, the possible *displacement* of the problem, the possible *diffusion of response-strategy benefits*, and an accounting of the *total costs* arising out of the problem and responses to it.⁹⁰ Looking at the prevalence of a problem in addition to the incidence of the problem is interesting because it reveals how widely or narrowly the entire community experiences the harms caused by the problem. An initiative might succeed in reducing the overall incidence of a particular problem within the jurisdiction, but if the problem consequently becomes concentrated in one particular neighborhood, this result may not be desirable. A review of the submissions for the Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing indicates that police problem-solvers are increasingly recognizing the issue of problem displacement. This is largely due to more specific award submission criteria regarding

⁹⁰Tilley (1999) lists the following typical shortcomings in the evaluation of crime prevention measures: "the use of simple before/after comparisons, use of short and arbitrary before-and-after periods, neglect of benchmark statistics, failure to consider possible other (nonintervention) causes of the changes observed, failure to test for displacement or diffusion of benefits, and uncritical promotion of success stories."



displacement. Overall, the reports on problem-solving projects far from adequately address displacement, but at least it is becoming recognized as a phenomenon worthy of inquiry.⁹¹ Too few problem-oriented policing initiatives entail any real economic assessment of a problem. Economic analyses should not be seen as definitive of success or failure, but they add an important dimension to judging an effort's overall quality. The police, particularly in the United Kingdom, are increasingly being asked to account for the cost-effectiveness of policing strategies (Stockdale, Whitehead and Gresham 1999).

⁹¹For a discussion of the displacement of crime, and its opposite phenomenon, the diffusion of benefits, see Clarke (1997b:28-33).

