



A GUIDING FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC POLICING

HOW TO BALANCE TEAMWORK, TACTICS AND TECHNOLOGY





THE THREE T'S IN INNOVATION

Not long ago, a large police organization in the Northeast launched a concerted effort to overhaul its existing capacity to process ballistic evidence into investigative leads. What resulted from their efforts was nothing short of spectacular: moving from a 10-month turnaround in processing time for fired cartridge casings to a time frame that averaged 24 hours¹ These efforts not only created a timely capacity for investigative lead generation not common in this jurisdiction, but more importantly translated into the underpinnings of a robust crime gun intelligence capability shared throughout the region, which harnessed the collaborative efforts of investigators, lab technicians, and prosecutors needed to prevent and deter crime. There is no doubt that these pioneering efforts - which started with rethinking how a ballistic lab could better serve its constituents - aided significantly in dropping the violent crime rate in this area because recidivist offenders were taken off the street and retaliatory shootings were aggressively prevented via the deployment of operational resources.

Oftentimes, the examinations of successful public safety programs are bereft of the challenges faced by leaders who challenge the “way things are” in favor of creating innovative more thoughtful solutions that increase effectiveness and efficiencies. So, what was the secret sauce that enabled this organization to challenge the status quo and achieve success. More importantly, what can public safety leaders the world over leverage to create innovation within their organizations. The answer is simple: bring in a three-legged stool.

¹ NOTE: In July of 2018, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms published the Minimum Operating Standards for National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) sites. Two of the four critical steps for a successful NIBIN program include the comprehensive collection of fired or test fired cartridge casings and the rapid entry into NIBIN within two business days.





HOW IT ALL STARTED

Over the years, many experts have used the three-legged stool analogy to describe an idea or to demystify a complex notion. The history behind this analogy dates back to when most people had a farming background and the three-legged stool was a common tool in use for milking cows. Because many people find something satisfying in odd numbers, particularly when they are a few, the three-legged stool analogy was, and to this day still is, a charming way of explaining the critical parts of an idea or a concept.

Recently, one author, in his attempt to describe what it takes to advance a robust crime gun intelligence program needed to combat violent crime in a particular jurisdiction, relied on the three-legged stool analogy to paint the picture for his readers. In other words, he described successful crime suppression programs as having the right combination of people, processes, and technology, and then applying that amalgamation in the right balanced manner.² He further added that the three-legged stool of people, processes, and technology requires leadership and collaboration.

What makes advancing a crime gun intelligence program difficult for most agencies is that the disciplines involved (the police, the forensic technicians, and the prosecutors), don't all reside under the same roof and do not fall within the same chain of command. That said, the development of a crime gun intelligence program requires partnership, coordination, and collaboration. In other words, it requires a great deal of "hand-offs, and hand-shakes." Nonetheless, and hence the reason for this writing, public safety in general so too requires partnership, coordination, and collaboration among diverse and disparate entities to be successful. More specifically, innovation in public safety – similar to implementing a crime gun intelligence program - requires today's leaders to both leverage and construct a balance between their available people, processes, and technology.³

² Gagliardi, P. (2019) *The 13 Critical Tasks: An Inside-Out Approach to Solving More Gun Crime*, Ultra Electronics Forensic Technology, Canada: Quebec. ed. 3, p. 27.

³ NOTE: This concept of balancing people, processes and technology was tested by researchers at Sam Houston State University in a study that examined the impact of new personnel, processes, and technology on ballistic evidence processing productivity at the Stockton Police Department's Firearms Unit. The study was published and can be found at through the following citation: Edward R. Maguire et al., *Testing the Effects of People, Processes, and Technology on Ballistic Evidence Processing Productivity*, *Police Quarterly*, 19(2), 2015, 199-215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109861115618374>.



DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN PUBLIC SAFETY

Leveraging the Three-Legged Stool to Challenge the Status Quo

Today's public safety environment is both complex and unforgiving. The difficulty in navigating it by those in leadership positions is only heightened by the demands and expectations placed on them by the public, which has become accustomed to what they stream on TV where crises are resolved rapidly and with ease. Nonetheless, public safety leaders who chose to rely on the status quo to advance public safety programs are rolling the dice as it relates to increasing their chances of success or for that matter, failure. This practice of relying on iteration as opposed to innovation has cursed many professionals over the recent years when the 24/7 investigative news cycle has exposed relied upon trusted practices as being outdated and in many cases antiquated. Conversely, the practice of innovation in public safety while seen as idealistic is so often difficult and time consuming, which often frightens away those leaders that want to challenge the status quo and implement new practices or technologies.

Moreover, there is a temptation by public safety professionals to implement programs and initiatives without considering the need to collaborate with other partners or stakeholders. While it may seem easier in the short term to go at it alone and not have to navigate the back and forth nature of collaboration and compromise, this mindset is counterproductive for truly creating, assessing and sustaining sound innovative practices. By failing to take into account the needs and capabilities of stakeholders, leaders can unintentionally hamper their own efforts to develop innovative practices needed to take root and thrive within and across organizations. In the end, a leader's guide should be heavily informed by what is the best way to deliver robust, timely, and sustainable value to the public that is served.

To assuage the challenges that surround innovation, public safety professionals can benefit from adopting the three-legged stool analogy mentioned above as a solid framework to guide their strategic thinking. **By incorporating and balancing the three key elements of innovation that involve a focus on people (teamwork), processes (tactics), and technology, leaders who seek to modernize programs and initiatives can be better equipped and prepared for what they will encounter when challenging the status quo.** It is important to recognize that three-legged stool metaphor is designed to depict a relationship among three equal components, so each of the following legs of the metaphorical stool must be equal in length and capability or there is a risk that the three-legged stool will not stand upright.

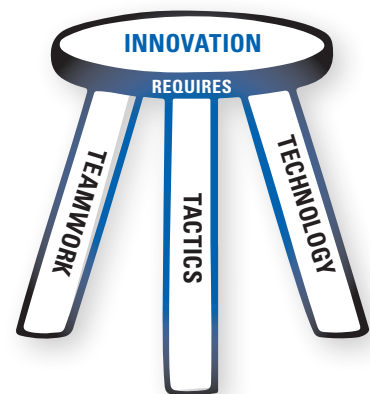


TEAMWORK

Challenging the status-quo often requires teamwork, whether that be within a single agency, across a government stratum, or cross-jurisdictional as well.

It will be teams of people with diverse skills, abilities, and roles that will have to work together to “change the way things are.” This requires leaders to get out in front and explain to these diverse entities “why” change is actually needed in the first place.

By establishing and explaining a strategic vision, setting expectations, and providing continuous feedback, leaders can leverage these core practices to develop their cross-jurisdictional people around the innovative effort being sought. Lastly, since, at the most fundamental level, leadership is about inspiring others to reach their full potential, public safety leaders have a duty to continually emphasize the larger message that reinforces “the why” the status quo needed to be challenged: we must ensure that the public receives that sustainable benefit from our public safety efforts.



TACTICS

In the public safety arena, there are many ways to complete tasks. At the same time many public safety tasks require specific methods to be followed.

For example, in law enforcement there are countless ways of conducting investigative operations; however, if the rules of evidence are not followed in each of those arrests than they can be ruled invalid and the arrested criminals can be released. In firefighting, the allocation of resources to battle a house fire will differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but if the fundamentals of fire science are not understood and practiced than the risk of property damage and increased dangers can be magnified immensely. It is a leader’s responsibility to ensure, particularly when an innovative practice is being advanced, that they develop the right policy driven tactics that can ensure every incident, every case, every problem receives the same focused attention and protocols that are aligned with best practices.



TECHNOLOGY

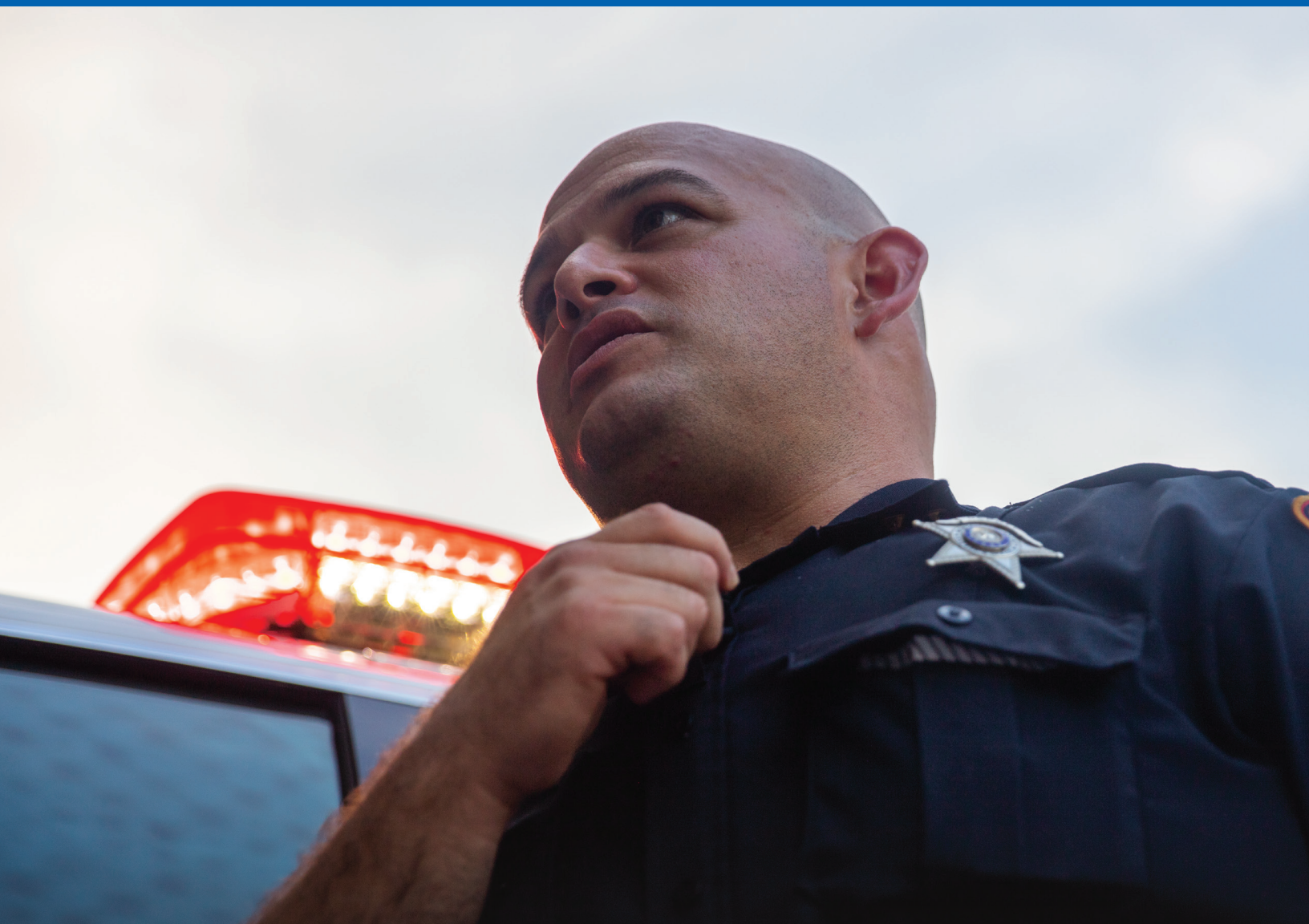
While public safety leaders have a responsibility to achieve projected outcomes when developing innovative programs, they are all also expected to do so in the most efficient and effective manner possible. This charge requires leaders to equip their personnel with the right tools and applications needed to reach their full potential.

Leaders must first understand, then aid in its implementation, and then finally see to it that technology in place is continually evaluated to ensure that what made sense yesterday still makes sense today. Of equal if not greater importance for leaders is to understand how to layer and leverage technologies in order for their agencies to implement end-to-end solutions that can minimize the financial impact on their home agencies. Moreover, it is critical that leaders recognize that no matter how comprehensive, powerful, and encompassing a particular technology is – regardless of its scope and implementation – without having the people and processes aligned to support it the technology risks failure.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Now more than ever, the nature of public safety requires savvy leaders that can introduce innovative programs and initiatives into their environments that can tackle today's challenges in the most efficient and effective way possible. Yet, challenging the status quo by implementing innovative concepts, practices, or software applications can be a difficult and daunting task for those who lack experience in introducing new programs. However, by leveraging a leadership framework that focuses on cross-jurisdictional teamwork, policy driven tactics, and layered and leveraged technology, public safety professionals can increase their odds at successfully innovating outdated capabilities, initiatives, and programs. The old barn analogy of the three-legged stool is a helpful aid today for leaders seeking to innovate obsolete programs for tomorrow.



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