The CompStat Process: Four Principles for Managing Crime Reduction
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The Police Chief Magazine – Jan 2013

R epresentatives of many law enforcement agencies in the United States and around the world have now had the opportunity to attend training sessions and/or workshops on the principles, practices, policies, and procedures of implementing and sustaining a viable and successful CompStat process. However, attendees at many of these events have asked such questions as "Where do we buy the CompStat computer software application?" and "Where is the CompStat computer that will allow us to have the success in crime reduction that the LAPD has achieved for the last six years?" From these questions, it is clear that many have a specific misunderstanding about the CompStat process and its application to crime-fighting efforts. The reality is that the CompStat process is not a single state-of-the-art computer equipped with a special software program. In general terms, the CompStat process is a method of management accountability and a philosophy of crime control. It is less about procuring state-of-the-art equipment than about adopting a state of mind that police really do count in reducing crime. CompStat is not a quick-fix answer to crime but rather a process of organized problem solving that, when coupled with commitment and consistency, inexorably leads to the positive outcome of recurring incremental reductions in crime.

This article explains how the CompStat process can be applied to any large or small agency and even to any civilian organization. There is one caveat: whether chief executives or command or staff officers of any police or sheriff's department or other law enforcement agency, those who are interested in adopting the process must be willing to enter a new paradigm and search for best practices in crime reduction based on the information provided about CompStat. The good news is that for many agencies, the CompStat process will combine and realign existing capabilities to coincide with basic CompStat principles.

Value of Police in Preventing Crime

Leading, managing, and directing a law enforcement agency toward its stated mission is a demanding responsibility for the agency's chief executive, regardless of the agency's size. An important part of this responsibility is propagating the message that, in the words of one commanding officer, "the police *do matter* when it comes to preventing crime" (emphasis in the original).[1]

This value has been shared publicly on many occasions by the pioneer of the CompStat process, former New York City Police Department (NYPD) commissioner and current chief of the LAPD, William J. Bratton. Building on the successes of the CompStat revolution in the NYPD in reducing New York crime beginning in 1994, Bratton introduced the process in Los Angeles in 2002, his inaugural year leading the department.

Management System for Police Operations

CompStat, short for "Computer Comparison Statistics," is a multifaceted system for managing police operations. Used in many different law enforcement agencies across the United States and around the world, it is an innovative business management process, system, and strategic methodology that assists an organization in achieving its mission and goals. The methods are

transferable, compatible, and replicable in any organization or environment. In a police organization, CompStat functions as a crime control process manifested in recurring meetings, usually weekly, during which the agency's performance indicators are reviewed critically for opportunities for improvement. This organizational management philosophy, concept, and tool combines a classic problem-solving model with accountability at all levels of an organization.

At the core of the process is an examination and review of an organization's status as revealed by quantifiable statistical indicators. In a police environment, this means analyzing numbers and locations of crimes and arrests as well as suspects, victims, days and times of criminal activity, and so forth, to identify crime patterns, clusters, suspects, and hot spots. Strategies are then formulated to counter increasing incidences of crime. The CompStat process encourages creativity in creating strategies, allocating resources, and deploying police personnel while holding managers and employees accountable for confronting the problems of crime proactively.

The CompStat process can be described as a two-pronged examination of police operations. The first prong looks outwardly at crime and its effects in the community, while the second examines the organization internally to identify best practices in managing such police personnel and risk management issues as sick time, use of force, pursuits, complaints, and accompanying municipal liability. The examination of crime and internal police department processes allows for the reengineering of those processes in response to crime, an action that can produce significant public safety gains not only in terms of reducing crime but also in increasing effectiveness in various other essential police performance measures.

The CompStat process can best be summarized by the following text, which the LAPD uses in its CompStat materials: "Collect, analyze, map, and review crime data and other police performance measures on a regular basis; create best-practice strategies to address identified issues and implement these strategies in real time; hold police managers and employees accountable for their performance as measured by these data; and consistently review and repeat the process."

This process seeks to instill a new organizational culture that keeps personnel focused on the mission of the organization and creates a management mandate to adapt continuously to the ever-changing crime environment.

Four Principles of CompStat

One of the most important roles of a police chief is to set organizational goals and objectives, a responsibility that can send a powerful message throughout a police department about the importance and direction of employees' efforts. Once the CompStat process is communicated to the organization as a foundational objective to be achieved, its principles can be used to support, enhance, and streamline other processes and procedures that define the multitude of functions inherent in the competent performance of patrol and detective operations in an organized approach to crime reduction.

As a problem-solving model, the CompStat process directs employees to identify problems, formulate and carry out solutions, and analyze results for effectiveness. Created around this model, the process's business management model consists of four principles, which together define the strategy for driving down crime as well as creating internal procedural economies and efficiencies. The principles are equally applicable to addressing community crime problems, quality-of-life issues, and internal risk management incidents and policies. During weekly recurring meetings and inspections, led by the chief of police or other assigned high-ranking command or staff officers, the application of these principles to specific agency commands is reviewed, examined, and discussed.

The four CompStat principles are as follows:

- **Accurate and timely intelligence:** Know what is happening.

- **Effective tactics:** Have a plan.

- **Rapid deployment:** Do it quickly.

- **Relentless follow-up and assessment:** If it works, do more. If not, do something else.

Accurate and Timely Intelligence: The CompStat process encompasses best practices from various past and present policing methodologies. It includes successful leadership ideas and concepts as well as practices from the community policing, problem-oriented policing, and "broken windows" philosophies. It is inclusive of the definitions of reviewing, inspecting, auditing, analyzing, and information sharing.

At the core of each activity is the use of computer-generated and other statistical data that are gathered in as close to real time as possible and subsequently presented in various formats in hard copy and electronically at CompStat meetings; formats include charts, graphs, maps, command profiles, and crime snapshot reports. The analysis of this information by command and staff officers then triggers action on identified problems.

The CompStat process is driven by information and data; as such, it is necessary for all information to be as timely and accurate as possible. Without accurate and timely data sources, management decisions could be rendered ineffectual. Furthermore, management might question the credibility of the process. Employees expect to be able to act on the data, as do other stakeholders, such as community groups, the mayor's office, and other law enforcement entities, who routinely use the information. The basic information necessary to make informed decisions about crime reduction strategies and action plans comes from many sources.

At the basic level, information is gathered from an agency's statistical archives on crimes and arrests required to be reported to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting program—that is, criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny/theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. In addition, intelligence data are obtained from archived calls for service, field interview cards, incident reports, and any other sources of information that are normally maintained by agencies' information technology sections. Any other pertinent data subsets can be reviewed as well, such as parole and probation issues, gun arrests, sex offender residences, and so forth, for analysis and/or inclusion in single purpose or relational geographic information system automated "pin" mapping.

In addition to crime and arrest statistics, agencies must analyze risk management issues related to their internal administrative and personnel operations. With data related to these concerns, trends can be identified and negative issues quickly addressed and resolved, ensuring that personnel are available to implement crime reduction strategies and action plans.

Well-running internal police department mechanisms support external efforts to address crime and its effects. Risk managers must think critically, analyze relevant issues, and use problem-solving skills to ensure that internal department operations are not creating procedural impediments to successful crime reduction efforts. One of the basic problems in the early stages of the implementation of a new CompStat process in a law enforcement agency is that the agency may be unable to use its existing computer technology systems to produce appropriate data. Without the ability to extract this type of information, the CompStat process cannot address emerging crime and risk management issues in a timely manner, which is critical to a successful process. Information systems will need to be audited, monitored, and tested for both accuracy and timeliness, and existing capabilities may need to be enhanced to accomplish

these types of tasks. The information used absolutely needs to reflect what actually happened; accurate and timely data are the lifeblood of the decision-making process. Accuracy can be authenticated through audits and supervisory review.

The initial target of review should be the crime or incident report, which is the primary documentation vehicle and information platform for the majority of police statistics. These reports have to be completed accurately in a timely manner by first responders, and then the information has to be transferred to the agency's records management system by data entry personnel before it can be used in the CompStat process. The records employees entering these data are critical to producing timely and accurate information for subsequent use by crime analysts. If attention is not paid to this process, the proverbial "garbage in, garbage out" dilemma will taint the analysis and decision-making processes.

Effective Tactics: In the words of Jack Maple, former NYPD deputy commissioner and a contemporary of Chief Bratton during the creation of CompStat in New York in the early 1990s, "Nobody ever got in trouble because crime numbers on their watch went up. . . . [T]rouble arose only if the commanders didn't know why the numbers were up or didn't have a plan to address the problems." [2] After command and staff officers are in possession of timely and accurate intelligence, they are accountable for the creation, development, and implementation of crime reduction strategies and action plans for the purpose of minimizing the identified crime or risk management problems. These officers' understanding of recurring problems and strategies that have been successful in the past will be communicated and delegated to specific subordinate command personnel, who may add their own creative ideas to the strategy and "think outside the box" to ensure that problems are addressed in an optimal fashion. It is not sufficient to randomly throw additional resources, such as more patrol cars, at the problem without a clear and concise plan or to conclude that not enough resources are available to improve the problem. Understaffing and insufficient resources may be an impediment to a specific operational plan, but it does not preclude the problem solver from making an effort to identify other, perhaps less conventional resources. Partnerships with the community and other government agencies should be explored for creative solutions to recurring problems, and a lack of regular police resources should not be cited during a CompStat meeting to justify or explain inaction on an identified issue, problem, or crime increase.

For tactics to be effective, commanders must direct specific resources at all aspects of a problem, including existing police resources as well as resources from available community, city, county, state, and/or federal capabilities. Some of the potential partners or resources with which agencies can work to reduce crime and improve quality of life in their communities are listed in table 1.

Table 1. Potential L...

City/Local
• Housing auth...
• Parks and recr... department
• Fire departme...
• School police
• Sanitation de...
• Neighborhood...
• Animal servic...
• Domestic viol...

For decades, police departments responded to calls for service with limited resources in a reactive manner. But with the CompStat process, agencies can be armed with vital information regarding emerging crime trends or patterns that enable the creation of effective tactics and a proactive strategic police response, during stand-alone efforts or in partnership with other community or government stakeholders.

There are many varied and unique crime reduction and problem-solving strategies that are limited only by the level of creativity, experience, and institutional knowledge of police managers and employees, who must look at crime problems from different perspectives to see different results. One of the strengths of the CompStat process is that it provides a vehicle, in the form of recurring meetings, for tweaking operational plans and reviewing implemented strategies at various stages of a tactical plan. Included in these discussions are debriefing-style after-action analyses of the results of specific plans.

In addition, CompStat builds accountability into tactical strategies. Command officers assigned to a CompStat review know in advance that their crime reduction/problem-solving activities and tactics will be reviewed in light of conventional wisdom and knowledge as well as the results of their plans. They will be asked, "Did your efforts result in any effects on the identified problem?" This way, not only are command officers accountable, but each individual involved with the plan—detectives, lieutenants, and/or other officers—may be questioned about the process during the CompStat meeting. In addition, the collective knowledge of various employee ranks will be brought to bear on the creation of effective tactics.

Rapid Deployment: Once an issue has been identified and appropriate resources have been formulated into a tactical plan, command personnel must rapidly deploy the plan to get results before their target moves. In the past, regular, recurring crime was addressed in a reactive mode, after the fact.

CompStat strives to identify emerging problems using real-time information and a real-time capability to strike at the heart of the problem rapidly. Police departments will never have the resources to post an officer on every corner. Therefore, it is imperative to deploy to where crime is happening now. Traditionally, rapid deployment has been used effectively to address ongoing crime incidents, such as hostage situations, active shooters, riot conditions, "suspect there now" calls for service, and so forth. In these cases, force sufficient to resolve the situation is gathered and deployed rapidly and directly.

CompStat seeks to apply this philosophy to regular, recurring crime patterns, clusters, series, and hot spots. This philosophy also applies to recurring internal risk management incidents. The use of rapid deployment increases the likelihood of affecting a problem before it shifts to another day, time, or area. Strategies to enhance the capabilities of rapid deployment could include changes in work schedules or realigning crime suppression units to meet the demands of problems at hand.

Note that throwing overtime at a problem is not an effective strategy in itself. Overtime can be used to enhance rapid deployment, but to be most effective, it should be part of a comprehensive plan. However, overtime used by itself to increase officer presence might enjoy short-term effectiveness, but once funds for overtime dry up and the personnel leave the area, the problem will most likely recur. To gain the upper hand in such a situation, commanders must design an overall plan including rapid deployment, set the plan into motion, monitor the plan's results, and be ready to analyze and discuss the plan's impact at the command's next scheduled CompStat information-sharing meeting.

Relentless Follow-up and Assessment: As Jack Maple aptly stated about the CompStat process, "You can only expect what you inspect."[3] An essential element in any operational plan is the need to assess critically what, if any, impact the implementation of the plan has had on targeted goals. Weekly CompStat meetings fill this need. Whether the goals of the plan included crime prevention and suppression, apprehension of offenders, or quality-of-life issues, the two

basic questions agencies should ask are whether the plan succeeded or failed to affect the identified problem or issue and to what degree it can be shown through quantitative and/or qualitative measures that the plan accomplished its stated goals. It is impractical to design and implement an action plan and trust that it will be carried out without looking at the results. Did the plan meet and accomplish the desired outcomes? If not, why not? Should the plan be changed or repeated? For example, did a crime reduction strategy actually drive down regularly recurring crime, or was the crime merely displaced to nearby territory as a result of the plan's implementation?

The essence of the CompStat process is managing for results, and success can be measured by the absence of crime. The primary method for measuring a successful outcome of a crime reduction strategy is via hard numbers, that is, crime statistics. What were the crime numbers before the plan, during the execution of the plan, and after its conclusion? Continued monitoring of a target area can demonstrate the long-term effectiveness, or lack thereof, of any crime reduction strategy.

But crime reduction is assessed not only by arrests and field enforcement measures; it is also measured through an agency's ability to manage its internal mechanisms, such as overtime; sick time; complaints; traffic collisions; and general adherence to policies, standards, rules, and procedures. These risk management issues affect the ability to staff and resource operational plans. Successful risk management efforts ultimately assist managers in making decisions about creating crime reduction strategies, allocating resources, and deploying personnel.

The bottom line with the CompStat process is that it is driven by results. Everything the process reviews, whether administrative issues or patrol and detective operations, is evaluated by the results achieved. The performance measurements of specific plans are discussed along with all other indicators routinely tracked in commanding officers' areas of responsibility. This process enables commanders to share their successes and to strategize with executive staff on potential areas of improvement. Weekly CompStat meetings are the means by which agency leaders can analyze and evaluate the overall trends in all key crime indicators and risk management issues. They provide the opportunity for ongoing follow-up and assessment and, just as important, serve to reaffirm responsibility and ownership of crime problems within a command's purview as well as those that cross jurisdictional boundaries.

Success through Leadership and Organizational Support

Chiefs are the linchpins of the CompStat process. They serve as both sponsor and champion of the philosophy. Only through chiefs' leadership does the process gain the voluntary cooperation and support of others in the organization. If an agency's chief does not believe in the process, neither will command, support, or line personnel.

Because CompStat is merely an organized approach and a path to successful problem solving, it is only part of the reason for success in any agency that embraces it. Without leadership and the cooperation of the employees who do the work, the process cannot demonstrate its value to the organization and to the community it serves. It is the people within the agency who support the process and apply their creativity to it who ultimately make the difference. ∎

Notes:

[1] Jon M. Shane, "CompStat Process," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 73, no. 4 (April 2004): 12, http://www.fbi.gov/publications/leb/2004/april04leb.pdf (accessed June 15, 2009).
[2] Jack Maple and Chris Mitchell, *The Crime Fighter: Putting the Bad Guys out of Business* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 33.
[3] Ibid., 186.

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