

CHANGING THE GUARD: Parole Agent Training and Socialization During Reentry Reform

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NSF Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant #0518713

Additional funding from University of California, Irvine's Center for Organizational Research, School of Social Sciences and Department of Sociology

The California story...

- CA voters and/or legislature approve slew of tough-on-crime sentences of the 1990s & 2000s including:
 - *Three Strikes (1994)*
 - *The Gang Violence & Juvenile Crime Prevention Act (2000)*
 - *Megan's Law (2004)*
- The Little Hoover Commission produces a report about California's Parole Division that dubbed it "a billion dollar failure" (2003)
- New Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger called for "massive reform" of CA corrections including ideological shift from an incapacitation to a rehabilitation logic

Bending Granite

- Law enforcement and resistance to change:
 - Policing “bending granite” (Goyot 1986).
 - Probation & parole loose coupling (McCorkle & Crank 1996)
 - Correctional officers (Jacobs 1977)
- Why? Inter-related factors including:
 1. the complexity of a large, public bureaucracy;
 2. vast discretionary decision making authority;
 3. extensive workplace autonomy, and
 4. a legacy of inadequate resources, staffing and training.

“This place will never change.”

Communicating change

- Change relies on communication mechanisms and processes utilized by organizational actors as they interpret the meaning of the change (Crank 1996; Ford 2003; Ford & Ford 1995; Lewis 1999; McNulty 1994; Richardson & Denton 1996).
- *“It may be possible that employees form perceptions of a change as soon as they hear about it from management or through the grapevine. If this is true, it may be important for managers or trainers to consider how they initially spread information about a change” (Papa & Papa 1990:37).*

Meaning-making

- Organizations socialize and reshape new recruits from the *outsiders* they hire into the *insiders* they employ.
- Via academy
- May be the most significant facet of employee value-shifting and meaning making for two reasons:
 - Tenure on job?
 - New = more malleable?

“Transmission of institutional knowledge”

(Crank 1996)

- “Commonsense reality” missing from formal training (Manning 1976; McNulty 1994) but it is necessary
- Street-level knowledge comes via informal tales and advice—frequently referred to in law enforcement circles as “war stories” (Ford 2003; Van Maanen 1973)
- War stories tell recruits what life is *really like* on the streets often directly contradicting approved organizational training materials (Ford 2003:86)

Embedded parole research

- Observations of parole agent academy in Galt, CA (61 hours)
- Comparative analysis of parole academy training documents and materials pre- and post-reform (145 hours)
- Follow-up interviews with 5 parole agents during first 6- to 24-months post-academy on-the-job (275 hours)

'War stories' at the academy

- War stories play a pivotal part in the value shift process and imply value of street-level experience over book-learned knowledge.
- War stories are influenced by three main factors:
 1. Parole as a craft, not a profession
 2. Academy trainers part-time
 3. Lateral transfer from CO to PO

CA Parole Academy War Stories

Crank's (1996) Model

Three Types of War Stories:

1. Crime fighting
2. Bureaucracy
3. Morality of personal responsibility

Crime-fighting war stories (59%)

- These types of stories highlight the need for:
 - 1) **controlling criminal behavior (70%)**
 - 2) maintaining personal safety (23%)
 - 3) keeping communities safe (7%)

Controlling Criminal Behavior:

- *Some years ago I had this parolee who had somehow obtained a new Toyota. It seemed a bit odd. I asked him about it and he had no good answer for where the car came from. So, we searched the car and found all the trim was loose--you know around the ceiling and carpets. We began to pull the trim down and found drugs and sales stuff everywhere. What did I do? **I took pictures of the whole thing, had um developed and stuck them in my report. Now that's what I call report writing. It literally wrote itself and damn if I didn't get him locked up again. Take pictures people, it works.***
- *When you get a new parolee on your caseload go for a little walk around the neighborhood [where he lives]. If you see a cop, exchange business cards and get a working relationship going with him. **You'll get information from the cops and you can work with them to get this jackass off the street if he goes sideways.** Also introduce yourself to the mailman and his [the parolee's] family. Everyone will give you dirt on your guy and every little bit helps when you're trying to get him back inside.*

Personal and public safety:

- Personal safety message in crime fighting war stories included drawing map of house for later use, good rapport and how to befriend police
- Public safety message in crime fighting war stories included the following:
 - *In initial interviews I always ask lots of questions. **The number one goal of parole is public safety, not rehabilitation.** We have to weigh public safety with rehab. If you have a parolee who is a druggie with no violations try to let him live in the community. If the parolee is a druggie who gets high then beats, rapes, pillages lock his ass up. **If you are a raping and pillaging fool you do not have a rehab option—not in my district.***

Bureaucracy War Stories (23%)

Two main types:

1. **Insider info on negotiating “legal & org structure”** (20%) (Crank 1996:280)
 - *“Find a person in your unit who writes the best reports and **copy samples for yourself**”*
 - ***Learn how to respond to a parolee** who informs your supervisor that you are being too harsh by saying “I do the same thing with everyone and I am fair and impartial.”*

Bureaucracy War Stories (cont...)

2. Pathways around “dehumanizing aspects of the cursive rationality” (Crank 1996:290) (6%)
 - *Even with all your equipment you'll never look as good as the guys in the shiny squad car [the police]. You probably have more power than they do though, because they make arrests and the bad guy's families bail them out five minutes later. When you arrest you have the power to then place a hold on the parolee so **they can't be bailed out. Don't acquiesce to the police department; don't shortchange your power, authority and position. It's yours.***

Key Theoretical & Practical Implications

At a theoretical level, this study contributes to the scarce but growing literature on occupational socialization & organizational change.

POINT ONE:

The parole case also concurs with an emerging argument that organizational change occurs within communication rather than communication being the by-product of change (Ford & Ford 1995).

POINT TWO:

Most salient stories were about crime fighting which is the antithesis of current reform efforts