

Police-Academic Partnerships: Replicating What Works and Eliminating What Doesn't

SIPR-GMU Symposium Programme

**Police Scotland Headquarters,
Tulliallan Castle, Scotland**

20 October 2014

**Robin S. Engel, Ph.D.
Professor**

**Director, Institute of Crime Science
University of Cincinnati**

Email 10 October 2014

- Phoenix Homicide Clearance Project has “no effect” on clearance rates
- National Institute of Justice
www.crimesolutions.gov
- Initiative conducted in 2004
- Evaluation study published in 2009
- Email alerting practitioners sent in 2014
– A full decade after the project!

Mind the Gap!



MIND THE GAP

- There is a gap between research and practice in policing
- Gap can be measured in both time and relevance
 - Described by police as the gap between “theory and results”
 - Described by academics as the gap between “innovation and traditional policing”
- Reality: Somewhere in the middle

Clinical vs. Actuarial Police Decision Making

Clinical

- Experiential
- Intuition
- Unconscious decisions
- Gut instinct
- Practice

- *Blink* (Gladwell, 2005)
- *Gut Feelings* (Gigerenzer, 2007)

Actuarial

- Empirical
- Data driven
- Analytics
- Statistical evidence
- Research

- *Moneyball* (Lewis, 2003)
- *The Checklist Manifesto* (Gawande, 2009)

Debate in Policing

- First-hand knowledge (clinical) vs. expertise of data analysis (actuarial)
- As agencies are pushed toward data driven decision making, officers often resist full implementation because of their intuitive knowledge
- Initially perceived as a trade-off

Clinical vs. Actuarial

- “It’s devilishly hard for traditional, non-empirical evaluators to even consider the possibility that quantified predictions might do a better job than they can do on their own home turf” (Ayers, 2007).
- Alternatively, we often tend to easily dismiss the important of instincts in professional settings, yet accept their accuracy in personal encounters

When Clinical Meets Actuarial: The Impact of EBP

- What is Evidence-Based Policing?
- Identifying practices and strategies that accomplish police missions most cost-effectively
 - Concerned with **Effectiveness** and **Efficiency**
- Test hypotheses with empirical research to find what works

What is Evidence-Based Policing?

Sherman's (2013) "Triple-T" Strategy

- **Targeting**
- **Testing**
- **Tracking**

Source: Sherman, Lawrence W. (2013) The rise of evidence-based policing: Targeting, testing, and tracking. In Michael Tonry (ed.) *Crime and Justice in American 1975-2025*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. 377-452.

What is Evidence-Based Policing?

- Debate about “evidence”
- EBP is not just actuarial ...
- A blend of individual clinical experience with the best quantitative and qualitative external research
 - Insider knowledge
 - Outsider research

Value of Police Experience

- Officer intuition, opinion, experience, etc. should not be used as “evidence”
- But ... should be used to provide context
 - Develop and implement strategies
- Innovation in policing is not from evidence – rather evidence accumulates and supports innovation

Research Often Lags Behind Police Practice

- Why? Research is reactive, not proactive
- Most academics do not understand the research priorities and needs of police
- Most police executives do not understand the importance of research to guide decisions about technology, strategy implementation, and training
- Most research now focuses on evaluation

Who Should “Own” Police Science?

- **Weisburd & Neyroud (2011)**
 - New paradigm to change relationship between police and science
 - Requires police adopt EBP and universities become active participants in everyday world of policing
 - Shift in ownership of police science from universities to police

Who Should “Own” Police Science?

- **Sparrow (2011)**

- Critique of EBP

- EBP represents potential threat to scientific inquiry needed for problem oriented policing
 - Research methods embraced by EBP are tiny fraction of scientific methods relevant to policing
 - Police-academic relationship proposed for EBP is unstable and unsustainable

Police Science and P-A Partnerships

- Share some of Sparrow's concerns
- EBP may widen the gap between academics and researchers
- Partnerships developed predominately for evaluation are often problematic and not sustainable

P-A Partnerships...

What Doesn't Work?

Type 1: Agency needs/has grant and needs evaluation to get funding

- Promoted extensively by U.S. funding agencies
- Do not dev'l into “partnerships”

Type 2: “Local” partnerships

- Academics often lack capacity/expertise to provide meaningful assistance

Type 3: Personality-based partnerships

- Not sustainable

Type 4: Politically initiated / driven

- No trust

P-A Partnerships ... What's Promising?

- Embedded Personnel “exchanges”
 - Academics embedded in agencies & police embedded as students
 - UC Chief’s Scholars Program
- Institutes
 - Employ academics, students, and practitioners
- Academic Consortia
 - SIPR
 - Ohio Consortium of Crime Science (OCCS)

Role of Academic Partners

- Scholars should work with police on:
 - political management
 - organizational design
 - training
 - enhancing educational standards
 - dev'l analytical methods
 - dev'l operational tactics and strategies
 - participation in problem solving projects
 - chairing inquiries and commissions
 - serving extensively as consultants to police executives (Sparrow, 2011)
- And yes, sometimes evaluate strategies

Why Evaluations Alone Will Not Build Partnerships...

- “Rigorous evaluations are an awkward, inefficient, and unnatural way to learn about what works when we are interested in small-scale, small-claim, discrete interventions” (Eck, 2002)
 - And this is where the bulk of daily policing occurs
- Academics need to have “skin in the game”
 - Work with practitioners directly to implement best practices

Promoting What Works and Eliminating What Doesn't

- Mind the gap! Work to lessen through partnerships
- Use inquiry methods rather than just evaluation— be reflective
 - “Knowledge acquired gets integrated during the process, it influences the design and thereby modifies the outcome” Sparrow (2012)
- This should be the major contribution of academic partners!

Questions?

Contact Information

Robin S. Engel, Ph.D.

Director, Institute of Crime Science
Professor, School of Criminal Justice
University of Cincinnati

PO Box 210389

Cincinnati, OH 45221

robin.engel@uc.edu

(513) 556-5850 (office)

(513) 218-7210 (cell)