

Measuring Value in a Modern Police Organization



Comparatively, policing in the 1980's was arguably simpler than what front line officers endure today. Thirty years ago, platoons had a sufficient amount of staff to respond to calls; a duty belt was equipped with minimal use of force options and, on the odd occasion, a handheld radio was available. Today, however, many agencies find themselves short-staffed, equipped with more equipment and under heightened scrutiny for the purpose of their community engagement that often provided intelligence and kept criminal activity in check.

Arrests and laying charges for common crimes was also a simpler task. Most, if not all of the evidence was in paper format with typed "will say" statements for officer and civilian witnesses being the essential elements of most cases. Perhaps a few colour photographs for a crime scene or victim's injuries were also included but, regardless of the complexity of an investigation, the evidence disclosed to the prosecutor was contained in a court envelope and transported to and from court by a police courier.

Fast forward three decades and a police officer's job isn't so simple anymore. Platoons today do not have sufficient officers at their disposal. Doing more with less has reached a critical low and most routine calls that result in charges contain so much digital information that terabytes are required by the agency to store and share with other public safety partners and the prosecutor. With the trend of digital information showing no signs of retreat, police services are desperately looking at ways to manage and share the information that they rely upon.

Rising costs of policing

Conversely, the costs associated in keeping our communities safe is one of the most common challenges facing police leaders. With the cost of policing on a sky rocketing trajectory, providing essential community safety and doing so with the least amount of officers becomes a difficult equation to solve. Law enforcement is not a one size fits all model, as there are many interconnected factors to calculate the exact amount of officers per capita. The fundamental duty of a police agency has always been to enforce law and order, and provide its citizens with a sense of safety and security. These obligations are not profit makers but rather come out of the taxpayer's pocket.

Police agencies provide their communities a wide range of public services. The types of services vary from crime prevention and responding to collisions, to investigating crimes and apprehending offenders. These day-to-day tasks also make measuring their performance difficult. Those police agencies that concentrate only on one or a handful of performance dimensions to the exclusion of others, do so at their own risk.

Is there a better way to measure value in policing?

One may ask if there is a measure other than cost containment while ensuring the police provide the best public safety service. That benchmark can be value-based policing, which examines how efficient and effective a police agency is performing in every aspect of its core functions.

Efficiency, as a measure can relate to a specific function using per dollar, per officer, per employee, or per hour.

Efficiency is a ratio of outputs or outcomes to inputs. For example, if one police agency is able to solve the same types of crime compared to another similar sized police agency with half the amount of officers, the former is twice as efficient as the latter. For this example, other factors will need to be included such as demographics, and community involvement.

Effective police forces are those that produce or *output* low crime rates, low rates of re-victimization, higher quality of life, feelings of safety, and a higher clearance rate for crime.

Being highly efficient and effective are two key objectives that police agencies need to achieve, as they are the common characteristics of any well-operated business.

In terms of an output that police produce daily but often overlooked is the vast amount of information generated, collected and shared. Information is the end game product and can pinpoint the level of safety, security and the enforcement of law and order the public is receiving.

Digital information has changed everything



Most of today's information is digital data. Digital devices and media are a part of our social, professional, and personal lives. Digital evidence is contained in any investigation and is more prominent than the structured forms found in a case. Clearly, the evolution, development and proliferation of digital assets will continue to expand.

Police are obligated to provide prosecutors with all of the information surrounding the charges laid in a disclosure package. The disclosure assembly and delivery has traditionally been a manual process and the role of the investigating officer. This may have been fine in the 80's but in today's digital world there are better options that are worthy of consideration.

Before discussing solutions, police leaders must first ask if their agency is efficient and effective in terms of the business cycle of charges laid, disclosure and disposition for each case prepared.

Questions to consider include:

1. Have you calculated how many persons, sworn and civilian are involved and quantified the time it takes on average for a case to be prepared and disclosed to the prosecutor?
2. Have you measured the life cycle from officer to court in the preparation of prosecution packages?
3. Have you measured the number of errors produced for the production of prosecution packages?
4. Have you accounted for redundant steps that are in place for the production of prosecution packages?
5. Is your disclosure process evergreen?
6. Have you considered the impact of your current disclosure process on your officers, prosecutors, community?

If you have answered no to any of the above questions then it is time to examine your disclosure process as it is affecting the efficiency and effectiveness value of your police agency.

Common challenges with disclosure

While there are signs of improvement, the biggest culprits of inefficiencies in charge processing and disclosure are:

- Sworn members spending a considerable amount of time performing a clerical function.
- Repeated entry of tombstone data in various forms or documents often resulting in errors and re-work
- Multiple printed copies required by the prosecutor causing wasted time and money in printing and photocopying documents
- Inability to audit and track initial and additional disclosure

Prosecutors rely on the police's quality control measures to ensure that charge and disclosure packages are prepared correctly. Unfortunately, manual production of disclosure packages often result in prosecutors having to request the required information that should have been provided in the first instance and unnecessarily causes delays in the judicial process. These forms of postponements hinder early resolution for many cases but are particularly disruptive for domestic violence and impaired driving cases that are so common in our courts.

Electronic charge processing versus electronic disclosure

It is important to clarify two terms that are used interchangeably but are not synonymous: electronic charge processing and electronic disclosure.

Electronic charge processing is the process that affords police services with the ability to automate the production of charge packages including the automated electronic creation of all court forms and documents required to proceed with charges that are before the courts and the electronic delivery of those packages and all associated digital assets to the prosecution. Automated charge processing also provides the opportunity to have the charge package as part of an electronic brief.

Electronic disclosure is the collection, validation and compilation of all of the evidence collected for the charges laid into a Brief to the Crown. Included in the electronic form of delivery are all of the associated digital assets without needing the use of USB's, CD/DVD's. Although usually complete after a set timeframe, disclosure can be a continuous process until the conclusion of the case in court. Having the ability to deliver additional disclosure packages to the prosecutor with an updated index and content is an important feature that is worth consideration.

Electronic charge processing and electronic disclosure is the realm of case management software such as eJust CMS that enables police agencies to largely automate the production of charge packages and deliver those packages and all associated digital assets to the prosecution electronically.

The new norm in policing

Civilianization is the new norm in today's police organizations. Specialized civilians are performing a wider range of duties in today's policing world including the preparation of charges. By utilizing a charge management system and the use of a centralized charge-processing department comprised of civilian and a small contingent of sworn members, the increased value and benefits will be:

- Specialized team that will become subject matter experts in charge production
- Reducing the time required to produce charge packages in the range of 55%
- Reduction of error rate prevalent in manual production
- Established time allotment for the preparation of charge and disclosure packages
- Electronically providing access to prosecutors
- Relinquishing case preparation from the officer resulting in officers being able to be re-deployed to other duties or investigations more quickly

The benefits of electronic charge processing and disclosure

There are many benefits of electronic charge processing and disclosure. The value can be measured in time savings at various stages of the process and hard cost savings for items such as paper, toner, and printers. Studies have compared traditional paper-based charge processing versus the automated electronic charge processing and identified operational efficiencies in the range of 55-65%. If we were to compare the cost of manual versus automated production of 8000 criminal cases per year and using 55% as a savings target, a police service would be able to recover in excess of \$142,000.00 annually in staff costs alone. Savings for printing and storage would be on top of that. (*See chart below*)

	Cases Per Year	Time Required to Prepare Each Case	Total Minutes	Total Hours	Hourly 1st Class Constable Wage in Ontario	Annual Expenditure	Annual Savings
Manual	8000	45 min	360,000	6000	\$43.26	\$259,560.00	
Automated	8000	20.25 min	162,000	2700	\$43.36	\$116,802.00	\$142,758.00

By implementing an automated charge and disclosure solution such as eJust's Case Management System, the cost of the software would far less than the annual salary of one officer would be recovered in the first year of operation. By beginning at the end of an output that is produced every day and automating that process will positively affect specially trained civilians, officers, prosecutors and citizens.

As police leaders and their governing bodies search for new ways in becoming more efficient, examining the end game of traditional policing functions and automating key business processes in the production of charge packages, disclosure and the exchange of that information are some of the new transformational changes that forward thinking police leaders are adopting. Coupled with the advancements made in information management, the benefits will act as a catalyst in providing additional police resources while achieving substantial economic benefits. The taxpayer and politicians demand and deserve this change. Prosecutors will also benefit by being able to receive disclosure electronically in a timelier manner that will greatly improve the resolution/disposition cycle.

The next phase of information management will be the unification and streaming of all disclosable data via a private cloud by all public and justice stakeholders. Public safety agencies have realized this need as a basic requirement for a long time.

But that topic is for another blog.

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