

BY

Arif Alikhan, JD, President
and General Counsel,
TacLogix, Inc.

Rising Crime and Reducing Harm

Why Risk Management Strategies Are Necessary when Crime Increases



Image by Adolf Martinez Soler/Shutterstock.

“Prevention is better than the cure.”

—Erasmus of Rotterdam,
Dutch Philosopher, circa 1500 A.D.

VIOLENT CRIME IS INCREASING IN MANY CITIES WHILE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES ARE LOSING OFFICERS AND ENCOUNTERING SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES IN RECRUITING NEW ONES.

This is forcing police organizations to prioritize the staffing of personnel to field assignments while training, policy, compliance, and other administrative positions go unfilled. Moreover, community concerns and the demands of political leadership are requiring agencies to direct all their attention to enforcement and patrol-related efforts

to address the immediate problem of rising crime.

This may seem the most logical time to deprioritize longer-term, strategic policing efforts like risk management initiatives and investments in training, accountability, and organizational development, but when violent crime

“

When violent crime increases, so does the risk of dangerous encounters and negative outcomes.

”

increases, so does the risk of dangerous encounters and negative outcomes. These outcomes can include physical harm to community members and officers, costly lawsuit payouts, medical costs for those injured, and reputational harm to the agency that can diminish public trust.

Agencies that defer these important initiatives until crime subsides are potentially engaged in a shortsighted approach that will lead to them taking on substantially more risk and even greater costs in the long run. Agencies should therefore consider balancing the immediate need to deploy more resources in the field with the important functions of mitigating the risks inherent in fighting crime and protecting the public from harm. This can be done only through organizational systems and effective strategies to manage risk and reduce harms to the public, workforce, and agencies.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND HARM REDUCTION IN POLICING

Risk management refers to the process of identifying, analyzing, and mitigating risks inherent while engaged in policing activities. It involves assessing the likelihood and potential consequences of risks and implementing strategies to eliminate or mitigate those risks whenever reasonably possible. Most importantly, it is designed to reduce or eliminate the harms that will result from officers taking unnecessary risks while attempting to perform their duties.

Policing is an inherently dangerous profession where officers are expected to engage in activities that involve the

potential for physical and other harms. When officers and organizations do not employ the strategies necessary to mitigate those risks, the result can be injury or death to an officer or a community member. It can also result in financial costs such as lawsuits, as well as cause damage to an organization's operational effectiveness, reputation in the community, and level of public trust.

Some common strategies for managing risks and reducing harms in policing include the following measures:

1. Providing ongoing training and education for police officers on how to identify and mitigate risks in their work, including more effective tactics—such as de-escalation—and problem-solving strategies
2. Ensuring officers are not engaged in taking unnecessary risks and instead prioritize officer safety protocols to enable the safe resolution of inherently dangerous circumstances
3. Developing and enforcing understandable policies and procedures that outline appropriate actions for officers to follow that are consistent with evidence-informed practices and current law
4. Using technology and other tools, such as body cameras and dash cameras, to increase transparency and promote accountability
5. Conducting regular assessments to identify and prioritize potential risks—and developing problem-solving models to mitigate those risks
6. Establishing protocols for responding to and managing negative outcomes and high-risk situations

7. Developing after-action protocols and promoting a learning culture for continuous improvement

In addition, the success of these strategies is dependent on an agency-specific, commonly understood model that everyone from line-level personnel to top management can apply in tactical, operational, and strategic processes; planning; and decision-making.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RISK MANAGEMENT AND HARM REDUCTION INITIATIVES

When developing a comprehensive risk management and harm reduction program, a police agency should consider the following four-stage approach.

1. DEVELOP A WRITTEN STRATEGY

First, develop a written strategy with identifiable responsibilities, actions, and measurable outcomes. Risk management and harm reduction efforts need to have a strategy tailored for the organization so that there is a unified effort.

The strategy must also be written for and shared with the entire agency. A clear, concise strategy tailored to a particular operational environment and community that is made available to everyone is necessary for any effort to be successful.

The strategy should also emphasize the importance throughout the organization of reducing harm—not risk elimination, which is not consistent with the obligations of police agencies to protect the public from crime and violence. The central feature of risk management in policing is to distinguish between

taking necessary risks, which officers are expected to do, and engaging in unnecessary risk due to bad tactics, inadequate training, or poor judgment.

2. LIMIT THE FOCUS AREAS

The second consideration is to limit the strategy's focus on one to three key areas of risk that result in the greatest physical, organizational, and financial harms to the agency and its community. Agencies often try to mitigate risks in too many areas, which can dilute the effectiveness of efforts in the areas that are most in need of attention. Instead, an agency should determine one to three areas where a concentrated effort can reduce the risk of the most significant harms to the public, workforce, and agency. An agency can do this by examining the available data and identifying the risks that result in the most substantial physical, organizational, and financial harms.

3. USE A PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH

The third consideration is to use a systematic, analytical, problem-solving approach to reduce potential harms, develop solutions, and measure impacts.

In his book *The Character of Harms*, Malcolm Sparrow, former detective chief inspector in the UK and now a professor at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, argues that most problems are not simply the result of individual behavior, but instead are the product of broader systems and processes that produce harms.¹

He argues that these harms are best addressed through a systems-oriented approach that seeks to understand the underlying causes and then develop targeted, effective interventions to solve these problems and reduce the resulting harms.

Sparrow convincingly argues that the best approach is similar to untying a knot on a rope by analyzing its structure, experimenting by tugging at it from different directions, and working with it until it loosens, is removed, and is no longer a problem in using the rope system.² Similarly, police agencies should examine the systems involved in the particular focus area, such as uses of force, and examine the systems that lead up to the resulting harm to identify where the problem potentially exists (the knot on the rope), and identify potential solutions to the problem.

In 2015, Chief Charlie Beck and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) instituted its Risk Management and Harm Reduction Strategy using Sparrow's paradigm to address harms caused by employee-involved traffic collisions, uses of force, work-related injuries, and workplace conflict for the 13,000-person agency.

The LAPD appointed risk management coordinators in each of its 21 field divisions who provided training and additional support in the field to address risk management concerns. Data from throughout the organization were aggregated and analyzed to identify trends, monitor potential problems, and measure the impact of interventions. The program's progress and data were also reported publicly every quarter to promote transparency and inform the public about the LAPD's efforts at harm reduction. After five years of the program, the agency saw significant reductions in incidents and fewer physical and financial harms in all four focal areas.³

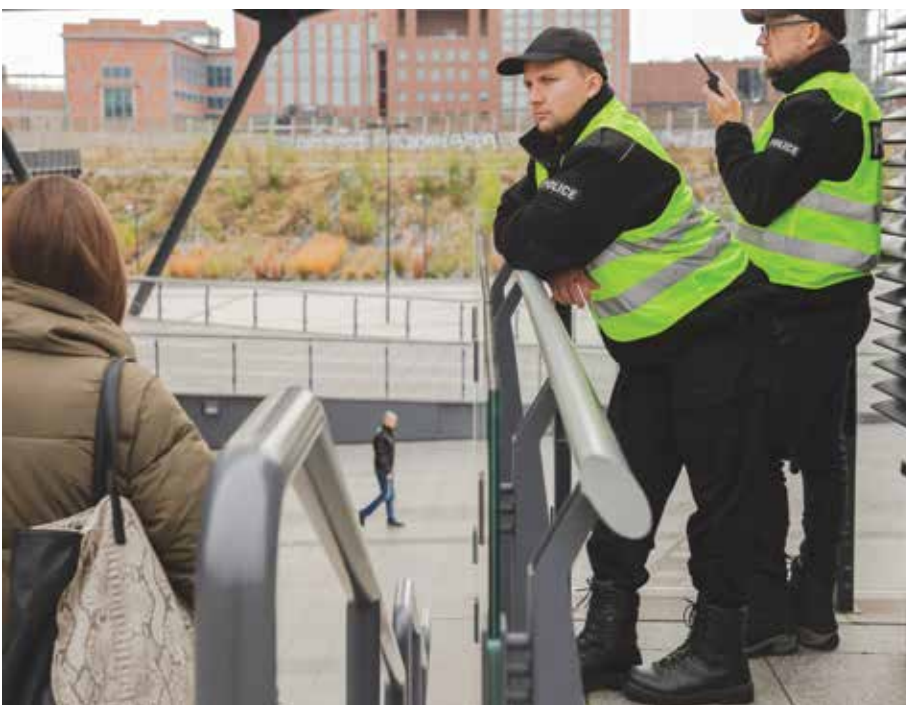
4. LEARN, INTERVENE, AND LEARN AGAIN

The fourth consideration is to take advantage of every opportunity to identify lessons from every incident and also learn from other agencies and sectors about effective methods to reduce harms.

Every use of force, traffic collision, or employee injury has a cause, and an agency can diagnose the cause only if it has systems in place to identify, examine, analyze, learn from, and then apply what was learned from the incident. By having these systems, an agency can identify potential risks before they occur and, if an incident has occurred, mitigate any future harm or damage. And when lessons are learned, it provides the opportunity to make the necessary changes in training, policy, and other processes so that the agency can operate more effectively and safely in the future.

CONCLUSION

A reasonably resourced, sound risk management strategy is needed especially when increases in violent crime increase the probability of more high-risk



contacts and activity. The near- and long-term costs of failing to invest in the necessary training and other important components to prevent physical, organizational, and financial harms can be avoided with sound prevention and intervention strategies implemented now, rather than when facing much more costly and painful results later. ☑

NOTES:

¹Malcom K. Sparrow, *The Character of Harms: Operational Challenges in Control* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²For a more comprehensive description of this analogy, see Malcolm K. Sparrow, "Problem-Oriented Policing: Matching the Science to the Art," *Crime Science* 7 (October 2018), art. 14.

³Los Angeles Police Department, *Annual Report on Risk Management and Harm Reduction Strategy* (2018), http://www.lapdpolicy.com.lacity.org/080619/BPC_19-0217.pdf.

LMU | Lincoln Memorial University

Master of Science in Criminal Justice

Take the *next* step in your career



100% Online
30 Credit Hours
Can be completed in **16 months**
No GRE required
Enroll in January, May or August

Choose from *three* tracks

- Administrative
- Applied Professional
- Research




Values | Education | Service



Unlock the Potential



THE STONO GROUP, LLC

DATA-DRIVEN CONSULTING & RESEARCH

Equipping Law Enforcement for Excellence through:

- Data Integration
- Strategic Application
- Innovative Solutions



Start Now:
info@thestonogroup.com
www.thestonogroup.com

