The High Costs of Leadership Failures
How to prevent bad things from happening to good police officers
Is it the vehicles they’re driving, the weapons they’re carrying, the body cameras they’re wearing—or the skills and values they’ve acquired through a formal leadership development program? Accenture believes leadership competencies are a key determinant of officers’ success in the field.

When talking about “leadership development,” this does not simply refer to periodic training seminars or coaching poor performers. Instead, it involves a strategic and ongoing effort to enable leadership to flourish across the organization—driving meaningful, sustainable cultural change and cultivating the instincts to do the right things.

Effective leadership development creates and strengthens the right organizational capabilities at every level of the force—arming sergeants and officers with the skills and mindset they need to thrive in today’s highly dynamic environment.

Leadership Quiz

1. How much of your annual budget do you allocate to leadership development, ensuring your workforce has the capabilities and decision-making skills to be effective in all situations?

Investing in leadership skills development is a key determinant of officers’ success in the field—and is far less costly than paying the price of police misconduct. Data compiled by the Wall Street Journal showed that from 2010 to 2014, Chicago paid out nearly $250 million to resolve misconduct cases; Philadelphia, $54 million; Washington, DC, $30 million; and Phoenix, $5.6 million.¹

2. What is the frequency and composition of your current leadership training? Is it limited to periodic seminars or coaching poor performers? Does it focus on the top ranks?

Effective leadership development is a strategic, ongoing effort that creates and strengthens capabilities and mindsets at every level of the force.

3. Is your organization working to build a leadership culture, where every officer is engaged and prepared to deliver on the mission and safeguard public trust?

Officers on the front lines are operating in a fast-moving world, requiring split-second decisions with impacts to protecting life and property, as well as individual rights.

4. How frequently do you update and refine your leadership development approach?

Leadership demands are changing. Traditional approaches and curricula are no longer adequate to address the competencies needed in today’s rapidly shifting society and complex crime landscape.

5. Have you identified the key goals your leadership program must address for the success of the organization?

An effective program empowers a police chief to develop new organizational capabilities and capacity, facilitates change and enhances culture and collaboration—while creating a pipeline of future leaders.

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As police chiefs consider how to allocate budgets—and where to focus time and attention to improve services and prepare for increasing challenges—there needs to be a much stronger commitment to building a leadership culture. Every officer needs to be prepared to deliver on the mission and to safeguard public trust. Without that commitment, police executives are increasing the odds that bad things will happen to good officers.

Why Now?
The first step to effective leadership development is rethinking the term “leadership.” An effective leadership program isn’t designed to train and serve only the top echelons of the force. Rather, it is designed to infuse the strategy and vision—and to build essential skills and competencies—throughout the ranks.

Why does this matter? For starters, police on the front lines are operating in a fast-moving world, facing split-second decisions with enormous implications for protecting life and property, as well as individual civil rights. On a daily basis, they’re dealing with the effects of poverty, addiction and mental illness. They’re facing increasingly sophisticated crime, with new challenges ranging from cyber-crime to counter-terrorism. And more than ever, what they publicly say and do can easily be recorded—and scrutinized.

At the same time, there’s a growing realization that the public no longer wants police officers to reduce crime at any cost. Citizens are increasingly interested in the “how” and “why” of police work. It is now crucial for every officer to exhibit appropriate attitudes and behaviors to preserve community trust and to make the right decisions, even under tremendous duress. Building those competencies and critical decision-making skills requires time and focus—and isn’t likely to occur if a leadership development program only targets the top ranks of a force.

To be sure, police have long invested in ongoing tactical training and education. But leadership demands are changing, and traditional approaches and curricula are usually ill-equipped to address the competencies needed to fight crime in today’s rapidly shifting society. Building a leadership culture motivates staff to take responsibility for their own development and individual achievement, inspiring performance at all levels and maximizing the potential of the entire organization.

An effective program also empowers a police chief to address a host of key goals: developing new capabilities and capacity, improving decision-making skills, facilitating change, enhancing collaboration, maintaining public trust and legitimacy, and creating a pipeline of future leaders.

The Building Blocks of an Effective Program

The potential advantages are clear. But how, exactly, can a police chief start the journey toward effective leadership development? Based on Accenture research and practical experience, a logical starting point is to outline a strategy and identify the behaviors, qualities and competencies crucial to collective leadership success.

While there are general principles and practices that can be leveraged, it’s important to remember that leadership development is not “one size fits all.” The skills and style of leadership must fit with each organization’s unique culture, focusing on the capabilities that align with its needs and goals. Generally speaking, an effective leadership development program should include the following steps:

1. Develop a leadership strategy and architecture

First, define the goals—including the attitudes, behaviors and competencies required to support leadership effectiveness and organizational performance. In addition, consider how to enable individual career development and growth. Recognizing mindsets and skills will vary across levels and functional areas, plot the distribution of capabilities and growth opportunities according to different ranks and job functions.

2. Conduct a 360 Leadership Development Assessment

Using action-oriented tools, evaluate the current situation, considering mindsets, behaviors and skills across all levels and functions. Comparing these assessments to the leadership strategies, a police organization can establish and clearly define the development needs that should guide program design.

3. Create the program

In developing a leadership culture and development program, ensure support of three key principles:

- **Build leadership as an organizational capability.** Leadership is not about attaining a particular role or achieving a certain rank. Rather, it is a capability that can and should be continually developed, managed and invigorated. A strong leadership culture fosters continuous learning and empowers personnel to further advance their skills.

- **Embrace “action” learning.** Policing is hands on, and leadership development should be, too. Give personnel the opportunity to learn by doing—using real, on-the-job challenges and then allowing for reflection on what they’ve done. Focusing on action and reflection builds leadership skills more quickly, using real-world experiences and relevant challenges to build expertise and capabilities.

- **Adopt data-driven measurement.** Put analytics at the heart of any leadership development program to drive accurate self-reflection and effective measurement of progress against program goals. Analytics also help identify how and where adjustments need to be made to improve learning and skill mastery.

A robust leadership development program is no longer “nice to have.” Today, chiefs should regard it with the same criticality as fuel for vehicles, ammunition for weapons or upgrades to core technologies.

After all, having the right culture and fostering the right mindset and skills may now be the most effective “protective gear” for officers out on the street.

By effectively preparing every level of a police organization, chiefs can reduce the likelihood of bad things happening to good officers, while increasing the odds of better outcomes for all stakeholders—and strengthening public trust and support.
About Accenture

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