

Thinking about quality in assessing police performance



James Willis
Department of Criminology,
Law and Society
George Mason University

**Based on research with
Stephen Mastrofski**
Department of Criminology, Law
and Society
George Mason University

What's the story?

- Quality as a measure of police performance
- The science and craft of police work
- Values and facts
- Possibilities for advancing “good” policing

Why quality is important

- The public cares very much about how police make decisions especially when they encounter them directly
- Police themselves care very much about the craft of policing and make judgments accordingly
- Scholarship has tended to focus on quantity and not quality of patrol work
- There is an absence of standards for assessing *quality* of police performance



A marriage of craft and science

“Ladies and Gentleman, let’s meet our couple ...”



- Police science – culmination of knowledge based on empirical research
 - Social science promises to revolutionize discretion
 - Importance of randomized controlled experiments
 - Image of professional patrol officer as technical expert
- Police craft – culmination of knowledge based on hands-on experience
 - Importance of situated knowledge and developing particular skills
 - High value put on flexibility to fit response to specifics of situatiOn
 - Image of professional patrol officer as someone who has “street smarts” and is wise, compassionate, and fair



CRAFTSMAN

Three couplings

1. Science dominant, craft submissive
 - Limitations of craft knowledge
 - Limitations of scientific knowledge
2. Craft dominant, science missing or superficially applied
 - “Presentational strategies” (e.g., Compstat)
3. Craft and science as equal partners
 - Testing and validating craft knowledge

A true marriage

- How might science and craft work together to improve the quality of patrol work?
- A couple of possibilities:
 1. Shift more attention to testing tactical choices of patrol officers
 2. Test the effectiveness of craft and science
 - Science alone
 - Craft alone
 - Best of science and craft

Doing the right thing

- Making good judgments
 - Not just “how much”, but “how well”
- Neighbor dispute scenario
 - What is the best response?
 - Little consensus on how to respond



Improving quality

- Challenge of applying general rules and knowledge to specific situations
- Tap into craft knowledge and apply science to problematic or common place encounters
 - What does evidence show?
 - What values are important and what should be the priority?
 - Role of police leadership

Conclusion

- Use science to cultivate and test what craft has to offer
- Advance reform by strengthening the marriage between craft and science

Quality and
Craftsmanship,
brick by brick...