

Compstat: the manager's perspective

Gennaro F. Vito[†], William F. Walsh[‡] and Julie Kunselman[§]

[†](Corresponding author) Department of Justice Administration, Brigman Hall, Room 203, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 40292. tel: (502) 852-6509; email: gf.vito@louisville.edu

[‡]Department of Justice Administration, McCandless Hall, Room 201 University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 40292. tel: (502)852-0330; email: wfwals01@gwise.louisville.edu

[§]Division of Criminal Justice and Legal Studies, Building 85/155, University of West Florida, Pensacola, FL 32514. tel: (850) 857 6197; fax: (850) 4742334; email: jkunselman@uwf.edu

Received 23 October 2004. Revised and accepted 29 November 2004.

Gennaro F. Vito is a professor in the Department of Justice Administration at the University of Louisville, where he also holds a faculty appointment in the Administrative Officer's Course of the Southern Police Institute. He holds a PhD in public administration from The Ohio State University. His research interests are concerned with criminal justice policy analysis and program evaluation and police management.

William F. Walsh is the Director of the Southern Police Institute (SPI) and professor in the Department of Justice Administration in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Louisville. He holds a PhD in Sociology from Fordam University. His current research interests include drug problems in public housing and issues in police administration and management.

Julie Kunselman is an associate professor and coordinator of the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of West Florida. She holds a PhD in Urban and Public Affairs from the University of Louisville. Her current research interests are criminal careers and recidivism, program evaluation in criminal justice, and police management and administration.

ABSTRACT

Originally established by Commissioner William Bratton and his colleagues in the New York City Police Department, Compstat has emerged as a new organisational paradigm in policing. This

paper presents data drawn from the written views of police managers from across the USA. The respondents were attending the Administrative Officer's Course at the Southern Police Institute of the University of Louisville, Kentucky. During the course of their studies, they read several works on Compstat, including Silverman's (1999) work, NYPD Battles Crime. Content analysis of their written comments reveals the strengths and weaknesses that they associate with the Compstat model.

INTRODUCTION

Compstat (*Computerised Statistics*) is a goal-orientated strategic management process that uses information technology, operational strategy and managerial accountability to control crime and police neighbourhoods. Its mission is the reduction of crime and the continued enhancement of a community's quality of life. Compstat has been acclaimed as a new police management paradigm that is revolutionising law enforcement management practice (Henry, 2002; McDonald, 2002; Walsh, 2001). In 1996, Compstat was awarded the prestigious *Innovations in American Government Award from the Ford Foundation* and the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Compstat is in the process of being

replicated by Indianapolis, Indiana, Louisville, Kentucky, Boston, Massachusetts, Baltimore City, Maryland, Prince George's County, Maryland, Newark, New Jersey, New Orleans, Louisiana, Broward, Orange, Citrus and Polk County Sheriff's Offices, Florida, Seattle, Washington, Los Angeles, California, Hickory, North Carolina, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and the Illinois and Delaware State Police. Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley has entitled it Citistat and adapted it as his primary management process for the government of the city of Baltimore (Swope, 2001).

The development of this process has been attributed to the innovative strategies and the dynamic management processes developed under former New York City Police Commissioner William Bratton and carried on by his successors Howard Safir & Bernard Kerik (Bratton & Knobler, 1998; Henry, 2002; Kerik, 2001; Maples, 1999; Safir, 1997; Silverman, 1999). Compstat is a product that evolved in the New York City Police Department weekly Crime Control Strategy meetings that began in January 1994 as a means to increase the flow of information between the agency's executives and the commanders of operational units, with particular emphasis on crime and quality of life enforcement information. William Bratton and his command staff designed these Compstat meetings as a way to make his 76 precinct commanders and their officers accountable for the crime rate (Silverman, 1999).

On a weekly basis, personnel from each of the Department's 76 Precincts, nine Police Service Areas and 12 Transit Districts compile a statistical summary of the week's crime complaint, arrest and citation activity, as well as a written recapitulation of significant cases, crime patterns and police activities. These data, which include the specific times and locations at which the crimes and enforcement activities took

place, are forwarded to the Chief of the Department's Compstat Unit where they are collated and loaded into a city-wide database. The Compstat unit's computerised information system analyses on a weekly basis the crime and disorder statistics, and then disseminates them to operational managers in a report. The Compstat report contains crime complaint and arrest activity at the precinct, patrol borough, and city-wide levels, and presents a concise summary of these and other important performance indicators. These data are presented on a week-to-date, prior-30-days and year-to-date basis, with comparisons to previous years' activity.

Precinct commanders and members of the department's management team can easily distinguish emerging and established crime trends as well as deviations and anomalies, and can make comparisons between commands. Each precinct is also ranked in each complaint and arrest category. The weekly Compstat Report and Crime Strategy Meetings do not focus simply on enforcement of the seven Index Crimes. They also review data on the number of shooting incidents and shooting victims as well as gun arrests.

Operational managers are held accountable for addressing the crime and disorder issues and trends associated with the Compstat Report's data for their areas. Under Compstat, operational managers are empowered to focus, manage, and direct their unit's problem-solving process. Traditional, Community and Problem Oriented Policing strategies are integral parts of their operational tactics. A principle objective of the Compstat process is not to just displace crime but to reduce it and create a permanent change in the community. Compstat is not just about crime statistics but crime control (Safir, 1997).

The underlying concept of Compstat is that police officers and police agencies can have a substantial positive impact on crime

and quality-of-life problems facing the communities they serve if managed strategically. It presents police executives and managers with a new way of looking at police organisations and police activities. It is radically different from the accepted concepts and practices that have guided police administration through most of its existence and points to new methods and strategies similar to those used by business managers that police agencies can use to fulfill their mission (Henry, 2002). Compstat emphasises the vital link between information, operational decision-making and crime control objectives (McDonald, 2002). However, as a management tool, its impact extends way beyond crime fighting and can be applied to any organisational setting. Its strength is that it is a management process that can adapt to constantly changing conditions.

THE SAMPLE

Compstat may be emerging as a new management paradigm. However, the voices of the practitioners — the police managers charged with the reorganisation of their departments and the implementation of Compstat have been relatively silent. Police managers have been identified in the literature as resistant to change and innovation (Greene, Bergman, and McLaughlin, 1994; Goldstein, 1990; Kelling and Bratton, 1993; Moore and Stephens, 1991; Skogan, 1994; Sparrow, Moore and Kennedy, 1990; Sykes, 1994). The data reported in this study are not based upon a probability sample. However, they are drawn from an availability sample of 47 police managers representing 42 police departments from Minnesota to Florida. The average size of the agencies they represent is 471 officers. The department size ranges from 19 to 2,787 officers. In terms of rank, our respondents featured one deputy chief, one inspector, three majors, four captains, fifteen lieutenants, and twenty-three sergeants.

METHODS

The Administrative Officers' Course at the Southern Police Institute

The data in this paper reflect the views of students attending the Administrative Officers Course (AOC) at the Southern Police Institute (SPI) at the University of Louisville. Created in 1951, the SPI is a division of the Department of Justice Administration in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Louisville. It is an advanced management institute whose mission is to enhance the professional development of law enforcement practitioners.

The Administrative Officers Course is a 12-week, accredited, college level educational programme. The course curriculum consists of 15 credit hours that provide instruction in leadership, administrative management, personnel issues, organisational behavior, current issues in law enforcement, problem solving, and administrative law.

The data for this analysis came from the answers of AOC students to take-home examination questions. These respondents were enrolled in the graduate course option, JA 665: Special Topics in Policing. During the course, students were required to read Eli Silverman's work, *NYPD Battles Crime: Innovative Strategies in Policing* (1999). As part of the instructional programme they received instruction on the Compstat process and were addressed by a municipal Police Chief and an operational commander from a county sheriff's office in Florida who are both using this managerial process. The results were compiled over three semesters of class work. In the examination, students were asked to give their views on Compstat by answering the following question:

In your opinion, what are the three best and three worst ideas in Compstat as presented by Silverman?

Is Compstat a viable option in your department?

Their answers were limited to five to 10 typewritten, double-spaced pages. They were also submitted on computer diskette. These answers served as the basis of our analysis.

Using content analysis methods suggested by Weber (1990), we analysed these student responses. The responses were tabulated in accordance with the test question. The number of responses was compiled and a listing of categories for each idea was developed. Finally, quotations that best represented the views of the respondents were compiled for each idea.

The findings presented here were drawn from a content analysis of their responses. This analysis should provide insights from those individuals charged with the implementation of community policing.

FINDINGS

The best elements of Compstat

Here, we present the rankings of Compstat elements as listed by these officers. The highest-ranked best idea from Silverman was the use of civil enforcement units to combat quality-of-life offences encountered by the NYPD.

Table 1: Summary of Compstat Element ratings by police managers

<i>Best Compstat Elements</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
1. Civil Enforcement Units	68.1 (32/47)
2. Pattern Identification Module	34 (16/47)
3. Establishing Accountability	27.7 (13/47)
Worst Compstat Elements	
1. SATCOM	48.9 (23/47)
2. Civil Enforcement Units	21.3 (10/47)
3. Recognising Officers Who Make Arrests	14.9 (7/47)

Use of civil enforcement units

William Bratton decided to use the department's legal unit to enforce laws that were often ignored to combat quality-of-life or broken-windows offences. These tactics include the use of civil enforcement to combat crimes like drug sales and asset forfeiture. The following quotations from officer's comments illustrate the reasons why these officers felt that civil enforcement is a potentially effective tool.

NYPD's use of their civil enforcement unit proved to be a remarkably effective tool for fighting crime and disorder. By placing the emphasis on property and its owners, this tactic identifies a defined target for police efforts. With thresholds lower than criminal convictions, civil remedies enable police departments to seize or shut down properties continuously used in criminal activity.

The Civil Enforcement Unit attorneys identified recurring crime and disorder issues and tailored criminal and civil remedies for each problem. Clearly this shows that agencies within the local government can assist the police, and more importantly, show the community that the police and the local government are working together to improve their quality of life.

A majority of respondents favoured such tactics to address ongoing issues such as public nuisance and drug offences (32/47 = 68.1 per cent).

Information processing through the pattern identification model (PIM)

PIM (Pattern Identification Module) is a multi-unit team composed of representatives of the housing, transit, patrol, detective, and organised crime control bureaus, and the robbery squad. The methods utilised by PIM include (Silverman, 1999: 119):

- review daily Index Crime reports;
- review daily narcotics complaints;
- identify patterns, trends, clusters, crime method and location;
- notify all other units;
- discern possible patterns mapping;
- keep perpetrator descriptions;
- confer across bureaus for trends;
- immediate notification of sharp increases in violent crimes.

In addition to monitoring and recording crime patterns, PIMs circulate Compstat messages and report back to their respective boroughs about city-wide hot topics, strategies, and criminal patterns. PIMs also act as 'borough tipsters'. They issue alerts about crime trends and patterns and provide a safety service by raising street cops' awareness of dangerous operations in their precincts. As Silverman notes (1999: 122), PIMs — give new meaning to the phrase 'problem solving' — instead of just collecting crime data they reinvigorate it into crime strategies.

The officers identified several reasons why they felt that PIM's could be an effective crime control tactic.

The PIM brought together representatives from the various detective squads, housing, transit, and patrol bureaus, and organised crime and narcotics bureaus. Their assignments included reviewing daily crime reports, narcotics complaints, notifying precinct commanders of sharp rises or declines in criminal activity, identifying patterns, trends, or clusters by crime method and location, updating crime mapping, and looking for trends occurring between precincts or boroughs. These things contribute to the organisation's elements working as a unified team with the ability to remain proactive and to react quickly to patterns in order to interrupt them and make arrests.

The formation of PIM in each district in my department would dramatically improve the department's ability to process and communicate information. Dedicating personnel to this task would identify crime patterns identified more quickly to allow for a quicker response. Most importantly, communication between the districts would improve, allowing a more cooperative effort toward crime reduction.

This type of unit in my department would improve intelligence sharing in a manner that could make data available to be utilised by all components of the police department.

A total of 34 per cent of the respondents (16/47) supported the use of PIMs.

Establishing accountability

Through its reliance upon generating information and conducting regular meetings between all levels of officers in the organisation, the Compstat paradigm establishes accountability for goal attainment. The model targets crime conditions for all key decision-makers at their crime-fighting strategy meetings (Silverman, 1999: 108). Detailed minutes are taken at each meeting. Major issues requiring follow-up and resolution are identified. This official record is then used in post-Compstat meetings to ensure that everyone is 'on the same page' (Silverman, 1999: 110). The Compstat meetings:

- highlight areas that need improvement;
- provide for tactical follow-through;
- enforce compliance;
- provide for effective resourcedeployment;
- provide unit coordination;
- provide for multi-unit strikes against violence;
- maintain the most recurrent theme: follow-up and reinforcement.

In the meetings, discussions follow spikes — sudden upturns in particular crimes or shootings. They examine what crimes are rising most rapidly? How many weeks has a precinct been undergoing spikes? Are these crimes associated with other crimes? How long has it been since the precinct last appeared at a Compstat meeting? Meetings continue on a regular basis to ensure accountability.

Our respondents identified strongly with the need for accountability. Their quotes list their reasons:

The weekly NYPD Compstat meetings are instrumental in entrenching the fundamental change in operational practices that the Department wants to bring about. Sustaining any process requires constant monitoring. When observation and scrutiny are non-existent, the natural tendency is toward inactivity.

The weekly meetings foster the development of a team processes. Precinct commanders, knowing that they will be held accountable for problem resolution, push accountability downward in the organisation. Empowering employees throughout the organisation is important in institutionalising change. Line personnel now have a stake in the outcome of their daily activities.

The weekly meetings are also important in promoting communication horizontally across organisational lines. Rather than reinventing the wheel, units can exchange information and make modifications to their tactics according to their needs.

These meetings established a measure of performance and accountability that was central to Compstat's effectiveness. The meetings addressed the most essential question of the entire strategy: 'What are

you, as a precinct or bureau commander doing about crime?' The commanders were expected to not only have knowledge of the criminal activity within their areas, but to have also developed tactics to address those issues.

Just over one-quarter of the officer respondents (13/47 = 27.7 per cent) identified accountability as a particular strong point of the Compstat paradigm.

The worst elements of Compstat

The officer respondents identified several element of Compstat that they did not feel were functional, especially for their own departments. The top three obstacles as identified by these police managers are presented here. The top-rated problem was SATCOM (23/47 = 48.9 per cent).

SATCOM: Strategic and Tactical Command

The strategic and tactical command (SATCOM) replaced the traditional police administrative functional division of labour which placed each divisional unit (patrol, narcotics, detectives) under separate functional commands with geographically based management. All units working in a geographical area were under the area commander. Essentially, SATCOM gave precinct commanders the means to attack a particular crime problem that was uncovered by the Compstat analysis process with all the resources he or she needed. The aim was to allow commanders to take action that they would not otherwise be able to take without being circumvented by bureaucratic infighting or territoriality. Resources that are usually controlled by separate bureaus or units are assigned to the precinct, bypassing the usual chain of command that had previously controlled those resources. This allows the decision maker to bring all those resources to bear on a problem without the power struggles and

bureaucratic problems normally associated with their use. Nevertheless, these officers found some problems, particularly implementation issues about the programme.

Our department is considerably smaller than the NYPD and has very limited resources. The purpose of SATCOM is to bring multiple, divergent units under one command. In the NYPD it has value in ensuring that multiple units are not duplicating work and provides for communication across unit boundaries. Our organisation is not as fragmented in its organisation as the NYPD. However, cross-functional communication is an issue as well as individual commanding officer competition at times.

This strategy to attack street-level and indoor drug sales allowed commanders to have authority over a variety of personnel, taking them out of their normal chain of command. This concerted effort was designed to significantly impact this particular crime element. Our police department does not currently have the resources to divert its full attention to this one crime area. Furthermore, while this type of activity fuels areas of crime it is not the single driving force of the majority of our crimes at present.

Their issues with SATCOM did not fault the concept. In fact, they believed that it would give commanders the weapons that they need to attack crime problems. There problems were with their department's ability to shift personnel efficiently and in sufficient numbers to get the job done or that their jurisdiction did not currently have the extreme crime issues that often present themselves in New York City.

Civil enforcement units

Paradoxically, a number of our respondents identified civil enforcement units as a

potential problem. This rating is in direct contrast to this element's high ranking as a strong element of Compstat. Here, 21.3 per cent of the respondents (10/47) identified the limitations of this approach.

Our state does not allow for this type of enforcement and our jurisdiction would not support this type of enforcement. I can see where this may become a great deterrent for drunk driving but it is not an option for us.

In this initiative, CEU attorneys identified recurring crime and disorder issues and came up with criminal and civil remedies for each problem. They used Nuisance Abatement Laws to target prostitution and indoor drug markets; they used Vehicle and Traffic Laws and the Department of Environmental Protection, to measure car radio sound levels, and gave summons to violators. Our officers are aware of the current laws and how to apply them. Plus, our department only has one lawyer on staff. A specialised unit is not needed for these problems.

Once again, the reasons for ranking this element, as a limitation is primarily an issue of implementation coupled with the absence of need.

Recognising officers who make arrests

Bratton set goals to stimulate arrests by police officers. This recognition would directly identify those officers who are top performers and make them known within the department. Stretch goals are a part of the motivational technique known as strategic intent. Stretch goals challenge organisations to forego incremental change in favour of 'reinventing' the standard ways of doing business. At NYPD, Bratton said that they were going to take back the city 'block by block'. Over a two-year period, Bratton

proposed to achieve a dramatic decrease in crime — 10 per cent the first year, 15 the next and 25 per cent in two years. Bratton (1998: 201–202) wanted people who were ‘not only going to think differently, but who were willing to go through walls to do it’.

Our respondents listed a number of problems with this approach:

It could make for bad public relations by giving people the impression that we have an arrest quota system.

It encourages a competitive atmosphere that could increase police brutality and decrease trust and communication between officers.

Almost 15 per cent of the respondents (7/47) stated their objections to this form of officer recognition.

CONCLUSION

When an individual found something wrong with any part of Compstat elements, it was not that something was wrong, but simply that the initiative could not be implemented in his or her department. For example, most of the resources and the personnel available to the NYPD are not available for other small agencies. Further, they felt that many of the Compstat elements are financially costly, involve a lot of personnel, and are therefore very difficult to implement in a small police department. Another interesting observation is that many of the programmes in Compstat as instituted by the NYPD, involved laws and statutes that are not the same in all local and state agencies in the United States (Kelling & Coles, 1996). Therefore, some of the more interesting interventions might not be implemented in other agencies simply because the laws would not permit it.

However, we must emphasise that these limitations, like SATCOM and the Civil Enforcement Initiative were tactical responses that were undertaken under the Compstat framework in New York City. As such, they are not basic elements of the Compstat managerial method. They may be beyond the ability of some police departments to implement. Departments can assume the Compstat method without adopting specific tactical initiatives more appropriately suited for New York City's crime conditions, like SATCOM and civil enforcement.

The belief that a department should adapt every tactical aspect of the New York City Compstat process is a common misunderstanding. Compstat has also been criticised for not making community policing its centrepiece (Weisburd *et al*, 2003) and for promoting a ‘zero tolerance’ mentality (See McArdle & Erzen, 2001). In fact, the Compstat managerial process involves none of these tactical elements. First and foremost, Compstat is a goal-orientated, strategic-management process that uses information technology, operational strategy, and managerial accountability to guide police operations (Walsh & Vito, 2004: 57). As such, the Compstat paradigm is a flexible process built upon a core set of managerial principles and practices, and can be used to guide a number of different operational, tactical strategies designed to meet the specific needs of a police department to serve its community. For example, the Denton, Texas police department has developed CAMstat — a Compstat-like framework that includes problem solving to reduce criminal activity in neighbourhoods (Wiley & Smith, 2003: 47). Strategy, not specific tactics, defines the heart of Compstat.

The respondents did agree with the basic principles of Compstat. The need for managerial accountability, information analysis and sharing and tactical decision-making

ties into the basic mission of the department. A problem for many of these officers and departments who are in the adoption stages is that this is a total quality management process that cannot be incrementally introduced as community policing has been. Compstat is a strategic management processes that will require a re-engineering of the adapting police department otherwise it will fail to achieve its purpose. It is an organisational process which does not depend on the size of the agency, it can be readily adapted in a small or large agency. The implementation of the Compstat model in police departments bears further analysis and study.

NOTES

This is a longer version of a paper presented at the annual meeting of American Society of Criminology in Chicago, Illinois on 15 November, 2002.

REFERENCES

- Bratton, W. with Knobler, P. (1998). *Turnaround: How America's Top Cop Reversed the Crime Epidemic*. New York: Random House.
- Goldstein, H. (1990). *Problem-oriented Policing*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Greene, J.R., Bergman, W.T., & McLaughlin, E.J. (1994). Implementing community policing: Cultural and structural change in police organizations. In D.P. Rosenbaum, (Ed.), *The challenge of community policing: Testing the promises*, pp. 92–109. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kelling, G., & Coles, C. (1996). *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in our Communities*. New York: The Free Press.
- Kelling, G.L., & Bratton, W.J. (1993). *Implementing Community Policing: The Administrative Problem*, Washington, D.C.: US Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.
- Henry, W.E. (2002). *The Compstat Paradigm: Management Accountability in Policing*. New York: Looseleaf.
- Kerik, B.B. (2001). *Lost Son: A Life in Pursuit of Justice*, New York: Harper Collins.
- Maple, J., & Mitchell, C. (1999). *The Crime Fighter: Putting the Bad Guys out of Business*. New York: Doubleday.
- McArdle, A., & Erzen, T. (Eds.) (2001). *Zero Tolerance: Quality of Life and the New Police Brutality in New York City*. New York: New York University Press.
- McDonald, P. (2002). *Managing police operations: Implementing the New York crime control model — Compstat*, Stamford, CT: Wadsworth.
- Moore, M., & Stephens, D. (1991). *Beyond Command and Control: The Strategic Management of Police Departments*. Police Executive Research Forum, Washington, DC.
- Safir, H. (1997). Goal-oriented community policing: The NYPD approach. *The Police Chief* (December), pp. 31–58.
- Silverman, E. (1999). *NYPD Battles Crime: Innovative Strategies in Policing*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Skogan, W. (1990). *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American Neighborhoods*. New York: The Free Press.
- Sparrow, M., Moore, M., & Kennedy, D. (1990). *Beyond 9/11: The New Era of Policing*. New York: Basic Books.
- Spelman, W., & Brown, D. (1984). *Calling the police: Citizen reporting of serious crime*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
- Sykes, G.W. (1994). Accreditation and community policing: Passing fads or basic reform? *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 10, 1–16.
- Swope, C. (2001). Results for results. *Governing Magazine* (April 2001). www.governing.com/archive/2001/apr/omalley.txt
- Walsh, W. (2001). Compstat: An analysis of an emerging police managerial paradigm. *Policing*, 24, 347–362.

- Walsh, W.F., & Vito, G.F. (2004). The meaning of Compstat: Analysis and response. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 20, 51–69.
- Weber, R.P. (1990). *Basic Content Analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Weisburd, D., Mastrofski, S.D., McNally, A.M., Greenspan, R., & Willis, J.J. (2003). Reforming to preserve: Compstat and strategic problem solving in American policing. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 2, 421–456.
- Wiley, C., & Smith, T. (2003). The CAMstat service delivery initiative. *The Police Chief*, LXIX, 47–48.