

## Production and Craftsmanship in Police Narcotics Enforcement

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### THE PRODUCTIVITY DILEMMA

During the past decade, complaints of poor productivity have beset American government and industry. This issue's sense of urgency led to a veritable avalanche of hearings and publications. One early salvo was the testimony of star economist Milton Friedman who, during Congressional hearings in 1969, contended that nothing could more benefit the American economy than a rapid rise in industrial output.<sup>1</sup> Since then, his views have been underscored by other notables, including Lester Thurow (*The Zero-Sum Society* 1980) and Richard Bolling and John Bowles (*America's Competitive Edge* 1982).

While recent accounts indicate that productivity has taken a turn for the better, our preoccupation with it continues. Unfortunately, we may be neglecting an equally pressing concern: product quality. Indeed, one productivity advocate, Donald Fitch (*Increasing Productivity* 1982), has gone so far as to rename Ouchi's "quality circles," "productivity circles," with no apology at all to a key purpose of the quality circle concept: enhancing the quality—not merely increasing the numbers—of finished goods (Ouchi 1982).

While Ouchi's writings and Ford's "Quality is Job 1" campaign may signal a new trend, it is doubtful that pressures for quantity and quality can peaceably co-exist. Since doing a job well can take more time than

doing it poorly, it may be impossible to maintain product quality without adversely affecting its numerical output (Hackman and Oldham 1980). This dilemma, which is endemic to assembly lines, was specifically taken into account by Ford when it converted a plant to produce its new "World Cars":

"People don't want to build junk," said Donald Ephlin, head of the U.A.W.'s Ford department.

"Top management is convinced of the need for quality, but the pressure at the local levels is for production and the foremen will cheat a bit to get the numbers . . . But if they do it now we're going to raise hell" (*New York Times* 1980, p. D-7).

Even so, observers raised serious doubts about the proposed rate of 50 cars an hour:

John Runtje, a former sociology professor who worked for five months on an assembly line, said that "once the line gets up to speed, problems will develop, and there will be at least one job that is physically impossible to do" (p. D-7).

The tension between quantity and quality has also affected the service sector. In a recent example, a telephone company fired an operator whose on-line helpfulness led her to exceed an "average work time" standard. Management defended this goal as a "perfectly accepted practice," which it seems to be. But the criterion drew scorn from a union representative,

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<sup>1</sup>Hearings Before the Joint Committee on Productivity, 96th. Cong., 1st. Sess. (1979).

who said it caused operators "to try to get rid of a customer real quickly—for instance those who stutter or can't speak English" (*Helena Independent Record* 1984, p. 2-D).

The utility of numerical goals seems even more questionable when the things to be measured are inherently difficult to quantify. As a noted management expert, Rosabeth Kanter, pointed out:

Wherever output is nonquantifiable, non-divisible or long-term—the work done by scientists, managers, market strategists, financial analysts—then measurement is no more rigorous than the process by which Americans evaluate a President's performance. No one knows how to measure the productivity of jobs involving information the way we do for assemblers or baseball players (1981, p. A-31).

### PRODUCTIVITY AND THE POLICE

Inevitably, demands for increased productivity have spilled into the governmental sector. There, declining revenues have caused stiff competition between public agencies for their share of the budgetary pie. The need to document performance has led bureaucracies to quantify their work; for example, by counting the amount of roadbed laid or the number of refuse pickups made. The police, in turn, have responded by counting numbers of arrests. But a nationwide study brought the usefulness of this measure into question 12 years ago:

In evaluating performance, police departments rely heavily upon how many arrests officers make. Such a criterion, standing alone, is inappropriate as a measure of success in crime control unless factors such as the quality of the arrest and the ultimate disposition of the case are considered (National Advisory Commission 1973, p. 151).

"Quality" policing, it is said, requires more than simply making lots of arrests. It can mean rendering valuable; noncrime-related public services, maintaining peace and order, solving serious crimes, apprehending habitual offenders, and so on. On occasion, "quality" might even call for avoiding, rather than effecting, an arrest:

Arrests or citations as criteria of productivity are themselves distorting. Much superlative police work never results in arrests. In fact,

skill may be deployed to avoid arrest, rather than to effect it (Toch 1971, p. 43).

Of course, the pressure to make arrests flows from many sources. For example, politicians and the public regularly demand that the police "clean up" areas beset by muggers, inebriates, and drug peddlers. Such pressures may be justified. However, it is equally likely that the imperative to make arrests could push aside other, equally worthy goals. This is the reason why contemporary observers of policing have repeatedly cautioned that performance must not be evaluated by arrest statistics alone (Marx 1976; Goldstein 1977; Grant, Grant, and Toch 1982).

### THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the hypothesized conflict between production and craftsmanship in the setting of police narcotics work. Its aims were to operationalize the meaning of "quality," to define the origin and nature of pressures to produce, and to determine whether such pressures affect what narcotics officers actually do.

Admittedly, police officers, and their agencies, do not make decisions in a vacuum. They are subject to numerous internal and external pressures. The role that such factors play in police decisions has been addressed (Skolnick 1966; Manning and Redlinger 1977; Sherman 1978; Wilson 1978; Manning 1980). Such studies often conclude that what the police essentially do is either serve their own bureaucratic self-interest or those of a power elite.

Here, a different approach is taken. Viewing police work (specifically, narcotics enforcement) from the perspective of an industrial enterprise, the author emphasizes two factors—production and craftsmanship—which are of great import in the private sector. While this cannot control for the impact that extraneous variables, such as political considerations, agency resources, and individual abilities, have on officer decisions, such influencers are not wholly ignored. The study sample includes agencies of varying size and mission. Their goals and resources are identified. Bureaucratic, public, and political pressures are discussed. The purpose, in brief, is not to deny the salience of issues other than quantity and quality, but to use these two factors as a new way to probe the decision-making aspects of the police workplace.

### Agencies and Sampling

The difficulty of gaining access to narcotics agencies, as well as the relatively small number of officers

they employ, made random selection impractical. The agencies that constitute the sample were selected because of their participation in an ongoing, nationwide study of police undercover work. Officers interviewed were those available; in most cases, they comprise a substantial proportion of their unit. (The number of respondents per unit is indicated parenthetically under

"unit size" in table 1.) These practices obviously limit the extent to which findings can be generalized to other settings. However, agencies did vary in size and mission and were geographically dispersed: four (including the two used for pretesting) are located in the Eastern U.S., one in the Central U.S., and three in the Western U.S.

TABLE 1  
UNIT DATA

Unit/ Type	Service Area/ Population	Agency Size(a)	Unit Duties	Unit Size(b)	Unit Org.	Monthly Budget(c)	Tactics Used(d)	Targeted Drugs(e)
A/1	City/ 200,000	200	Vice, drugs	8 (1) (1) (4)	1 Lt. 1 Sgt. 6 Ofc.	\$1,400	Observ. Buy-bust Sch. warr.	Marij. Pills
B/1	City/ 2,000,000	2,400	Drugs	8 (1) (5)	1 Lt. 1 Sgt. 6 Ofc.	\$250	Observ. Buy-bust Sch. warr.	Marij. Pills
C/1	City/ 200,000	450	Vice, drugs	12(1) (4)	2 Sgt. 10 Ofc.	\$60	Observ. Buy-bust	Marij. Pills
D/1	City/ 600,000	900	Drugs	13 (1) (7)	1 Lt. 2 Sgt. 10 Ofc.	\$3,000	Buy-bust Observ. Sch. warr.	Marij. Pills Cocaine Heroin
E/2	Metro area/ 3,000,000	50 (task force)	Drugs	50 (1) (6)	Dir. 3 Lt. 5 Sgt. 41 Ofc.	\$3,500	Buy-bust Sch. warr. Buy-up	Cocaine Heroin Marij.
F/2	City/rural 300,000	11 (task force)	Drugs	11(1) (3)	Dir. 10 Ofc.	\$1,500	Buy-bust Buy-up Sch. warr.	Marij. Pills Cocaine Heroin
G/2	(Same agcy. as unit C)	N/A	Vice, drugs	16(1) (3)	2 Sgt. 14 Ofc.	\$1,500	Buy-bust Sch. warr. Buy-up	Marij., Pills Heroin

Pretest units are omitted.

(a) Sworn personnel; "task force" indicates multiple agencies involved.

(b) Parentheses indicate number sampled (excludes five police executives).

(c) Buys and informers.

(d) Listed by frequency of use.

(e) Listed by seizure frequency.

The original sample was made up of 8 agencies and 53 officers. Eight line-level narcotics officers, employed by two agencies, helped pretest the instrument. This left a study group consisting of 45 officers, employed in 6 departments. The group includes 32 field investigators, 7 first-level supervisors (all but one a sergeant), and 6 higher-ranking command officers (that is, division commanders and bureau chiefs). One

agency had two drug squads, each with a distinct mission; accordingly, a total of seven discrete narcotics units (exclusive of the pretest units) are included in the sample.

Units were categorized according to their official mission. Four units (A, B, C, D) were supposed to concentrate their efforts on users and "street-level" dealers. These were designated "Type 1." Three units

(E, F; G) were supposed to concentrate on "major dealers" and "wholesalers." These were designated "Type 2."<sup>2</sup> As table I illustrates, the tactics employed, as well as the nature of drugs seized, varied according to unit type.

Type 1 units used three enforcement strategies: observation, undercover "buys," and search warrants. Each unit utilized the observation technique. Officers occasionally received tips from informers that a user or small dealer would be in possession of drugs at a certain time and place. Drug users and peddlers were also identified by correctly observing public areas where drugs were sold. Either way, the suspects who materialized were detained and frisked for drugs. (Two units also gave alleged users a simple test that checked pupil reaction to light.) Arrests were based on possession of narcotics and, where used, results of the test.

Each Type 1 unit also made undercover purchases of drugs. Most purchases were made by officers in public places, such as bars and parks. Some buys were assisted by introductions from informers. In either case, transactions were normally followed by an arrest (the so-called "buy-bust"), which allowed recovery and re-use of buy money. Less frequently, arrests were delayed until a coordinated "sweep" was made. This avoided tipping off potential targets and maximized the number of defendants. (However, buy money was lost.) Purchases were usually limited to small, single-dosage quantities of the less expensive drugs, such as marijuana and "pills" (barbiturates and amphetamines in tablet form).

Three of the four Type 1 units also used search warrants. These were usually based on tips from users. Though somewhat complicated to obtain, search warrants were often favored because they provided an opportunity to make cases and seize substantial quantities of drugs at a relatively low cost.

Type 2 units emphasized going after the "harder" drugs, such as heroin and cocaine. Informer-based undercover buys and search warrants were frequently employed. Often, multiple purchases were made from the same source. The goal was to gain more severe adjudicative sanctions and to infiltrate higher levels of

the drug trade, the so-called "buying up." This variant of the "buy" strategy typically begins with one or two small transactions with a street dealer. Undercover agents then ask for a larger quantity, thus hoping to gain an introduction to the dealer's source. At that time, an arrest is made or the ploy is repeated.

### Research Strategy

Two complementary methods were employed; a rank-order instrument and personal interviews. The rank-order instrument was designed for and exclusively administered to line officers. An interview protocol was also devised; all respondents, including supervisors and administrators, were interviewed. All work was accomplished during single, private sessions held with each respondent. (The instrument, when used, was administered before the interview took place.) In-office unit practices were observed and, to the extent allowed, relevant agency and unit records and manuals were reviewed. All work was done overtly but without stating more than to say a study of narcotics work was in progress.

### Instrument

The purpose of the instrument was to explore the relative salience of production and craftsmanship in a quantifiable manner. The methodology employed is analogous to a structured Q-Sort (Kerlinger 1973).

A card deck was constructed by deriving, from the literature, a pool of brief statements that seemed to describe various tasks performed by narcotics agents. The draft instrument consisted of 19 cards, each bearing a single statement. Some statements (for example, "making cases" and "keeping things simple") seemed consistent with the production imperative, while others (for example, "following through on all leads" and "getting at the bigger dealers") involved notions of quality. The deck was tested by asking the eight pretest officers to place each card in one of three categories: consistent with production ("quantity"), consistent with craftsmanship ("quality"), and consistent with both or neither. The purpose of the pretest was twofold: first, to insure that the cards comprising the final Q-sort were meaningful to police narcotics officers, and second, to discern whether, at this crude level, a distinction between production and craftsmanship could be drawn.

The process led to the identification of five cards (selected by agreement of at least seven of the eight pretest officers) as being consistent with production, and five with craftsmanship:

<sup>2</sup>Three distinct levels of dealers were identified: "street dealers," who sold single dosages; "major dealers," who supplied street dealers and some users; and "wholesalers," who only supplied other dealers. It seemed that many of the "street dealers" were also users, and supported their habits by making petty sales to friends and associates. These could more aptly be termed "user-dealers."

Production	Craftsmanship
1. Making cases	6. Getting at the bigger dealers
2. Taking junkies off the street	7. Working to the ultimate source
3. Keeping things simple	8. Identifying everyone involved
4. Quickly closing with an arrest	9. Following through on all leads
5. Taking small dealers off the street	10. Seizing assets

The working Q-sort consisted of the above 10 cards. It was administered by asking respondents to lay out the (shuffled) card deck from left to right, placing each card in order of its relevancy to the officers' everyday job. This created a forced rank-order ranging from 10 (most relevant) to 1 (least relevant). Results were tabulated by item and unit.

### Interviews

The interviews served as a check on the validity of the instrument and enlarged the scope of the inquiry. Questions were posed in three areas:

1. What does it mean to do a good job as a narcotics officers?
2. What is a "quality case"?
3. Are there constraints on doing quality work?

Interviews were recorded on tape. Unresponsive replies were followed up with queries that directed respondents to one of the three major areas. However, the process was open-ended and every effort was made to avoid suggesting a response. Additional questions, or "probes," were used to clarify important issues. Interviews continued until significant comments in each area were obtained. These comments were later extracted by playing back each tape, in full, and transcribing pertinent remarks.

## FINDINGS

### Instrument

Since 10 cards were used, responses were scored by assigning 10 points to the item ranked most salient, 9 points to the item ranked next in salience, and so on. The least salient item received one point. A salience score was computed for each item by summing all the points given that item by the officer-respondents. The maximum possible salience score was 320 (10 x 32 officers); the minimum was 32 (1 x 32). Figure 1, which distributes items according to their salience

score, indicates that item 1, "making cases," was most salient overall.

Table 2 tabulates salience scores by dimension (quantity/quality) and by unit type (Type 1/Type 2).<sup>3</sup> Here, the scores represent the overall salience of each item for each unit. (These scores were obtained by summing each item's individual salience scores, unit by unit, then assigning that item a rank that corresponds with its relative standing. Tied ranks are handled in the conventional manner.)

The row sums indicate the emphasis placed by each unit on "quantity" and "quality." The maximum score for each dimension is 10+9+8+7+6, or 40; the minimum is 1+2+3+4+5, or 15. Simple inspection suggests that Type 1 units may give more weight to "quantity," while Type 2 units may give

FIGURE 1

### DISTRIBUTION OF ITEMS BY SALIENCE SCORE

Item	Score
1 Making cases	270
	+
	+
	+
	+
	+
5 Taking small dealers off the street	218
9 Following through on all leads	205
	+
6 Getting at the bigger dealers	196
8 Identifying everyone involved	194
	+
	+
7 Working to the ultimate source	175
	+
	+
2 Taking junkies off the street	153
	+
	+
	+
3 Keeping things simple	119
10 Seizing assets	118
4 Quickly closing with an arrest	112

<sup>3</sup>Units were measured because of the various agencies, missions, and organizational settings involved. This decision was supported by finding markedly similar response patterns within five units. Kendall's *W* (a coefficient of concordance) was computed at .67 for officers in unit A, .60 for unit B, .37 for unit C, .64 for unit D, .33 for unit E, .75 for unit F, and .75 for unit G.

TABLE 2  
DISTRIBUTION OF SALIENCE SCORES BY ITEM, UNIT, AND UNIT TYPE

		ITEMS												
		Quantity					Quantity							
		1	2	3	4	5	Sum 1-5	6	7	8	9	10	Sum 6-10	
Type 1	A	10.0	3.5	7.0	6.0	8.0	34.5	3.5	2.0	5.0	9.0	1.0	20.5	S A L I E N C E  S C O R E S
	B	8.0	10.0	2.0	3.0	9.0	32.0	4.0	5.0	6.0	7.0	1.0	23.0	
	C	10.0	6.0	4.5	2.0	9.0	31.5	4.5	7.0	3.0	8.0	1.0	23.5	
	D	10.0	5.0	1.0	2.0	9.0	27.0	8.0	6.5	6.5	4.0	3.0	28.0	
	Sum													
UNITS	A-D	38.0	24.5	14.5	13.0	35.0		20.0	20.5	20.5	28.0	6.0		
Type 2	E	10.0	1.0	4.0	3.0	6.0	24.0	9.0	2.0	8.0	6.0	6.0	31.0	
	F	10.0	4.0	2.0	1.0	6.0	23.0	5.0	7.0	8.5	8.5	3.0	32.0	
	G	5.0	1.0	2.0	3.0	4.0	15.0	10.0	9.0	6.0	7.0	8.0	40.0	
	Sum													
	E-G	25.0	6.0	8.0	7.0	16.0		24.0	18.0	22.5	21.5	17.0		

Item Salience (based on column sums)

		High			Medium			Low				
		10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Rank
Type 1 Units		1	5	9	2	7&8	7&8	6	3	4	10	Items
Type 2 Units		1	6	8	9	7	10	5	3	4	2	

more weight to "quality." (The letter identifiers were assigned post hoc.)

The column sums portray the overall salience of each item by unit type. The sums can be transformed into salience ranks that indicate each item's relative standing, by unit type (range 1-10, with 10 as most salient). These scores are depicted in the small table, which places each item under its respective salience "rank." Inspection of the scores indicates that: (1) item 1, "making cases," is the most salient for both unit types; (2) Type 1 units accord higher salience to items 2 and 5 (junkies and small dealers) than to items 6 and 10 (bigger dealers and seizing assets), while Type 2 units do the opposite; and (3) units of both types downgrade items 3 and 4 (simplicity and quick arrests), while they accord substantially higher ratings to items 7, 8, and 9 (working to the ultimate source, identifying everyone, and following through).

It seems that the simple "quantity/quality" analysis, accomplished by comparing row sums, is insufficient. The columnar data indicates that variability in salience scores, between units, is most pronounced for items that act as surrogate indicators of unit goals.

There is little variability, thus minimal disagreement, about the salience of making cases or of doing technically proficient work.<sup>4</sup>

Interviews and Observations

As stated earlier, questions were posed in three topical areas: doing a good job, the quality case, and constraints on doing quality work. Response content was analyzed by discerning response patterns in each area. These patterns were analyzed by unit, unit type, and job assignment. (Multiple responses were allowed.) Excepting the first topical area ("doing a good job"), response patterns were markedly similar across job categories (that is, line officers, supervisors, and

<sup>4</sup>Due to the small n's, sums are used instead of means, and variability is explored with descriptive rather than inferential statistics. Further research with a validated item pool and larger sample would allow the use of two-way or factorial analysis of variance. Essentially the same results were obtained when units C and E (which had low Kendall W's) were omitted.

administrators). And, without notable exception, responses were consistent among units and between unit types.

**Doing a Good Job.** Line officers evidenced two dominant response patterns. Twenty-three (66 percent) felt that doing a good job meant to make lots of arrests. Nineteen also felt that it meant to do "quality" work. (Only three believed that it required the arrest of a major dealer.) Further probes indicated that officers made a distinction between what they most favored—making "quality" cases—and what they believed their agencies most favored—making lots of arrests:

All departments being . . . what they are I'm sure they are looking for quantity as well as quality with the main thrust being on quantity, on numbers of cases that are turned out and people in custody as well as seizures. <But> the quantity of seizures . . . would be secondary to the number of cases that each investigator . . . has done.

Make cases, put people in jail, numbers. Our department right now is heavily into numbers. It's not so much the quality of the case but it's how many cases you do, because there are stat's . . . being taken through the chain of command.

Every unit maintained detailed statistics of arrest and arrest-related (for example, narcotics seizures) activity. The data was regularly compiled into reports that were forwarded through the chain of command. Four units were also involved in "management by objectives" (MBO) programs with specified numerical goals. A fifth unit had similar, unwritten goals that were known to every officer. Line officers were kept informed of their unit's performance in reaching these goals, and competition between officers was fostered (one sergeant, of a Type 2 unit, went so far as to post current per-officer arrest figures on his office door). The salience of making arrests was unmistakable. One officer said:

It's knowing that monthly there's an activity sheet made out . . . there's a number as to how many search warrants we did, how many drug buys we did. If you have only two or three search warrants you hear nothing about it <but if> you have zero you're gonna hear about it . . . It's kinda a subtle hint that it doesn't look good . . . They don't <go> so far as to say "why did you have zero there" as opposed to "you had a zero!"

Line officers felt that the most important source of pressure was their agency. But they also mentioned other factors that encouraged production. One was peer pressure:

You know, in the back of your mind you want to look good, there's a lot of peer pressure, are you going to get <the suspect> or aren't you? You want to live up to the standards.

Another was the desire to keep busy:

I don't like to be stagnant. That's the one thing I always liked about working patrol, I could always keep on the move.

It was evident that external and internal pressures interacted to some degree. Officers wanted respect from their peers. They also gained satisfaction by being active. But if these influencers were absent, agency pressures were more than ready to fill the gap:

I think everybody feels the pressure of inactivity sometimes. I came back off <a> major investigation . . . and sat at my desk for two weeks trying to develop every phone call that I got . . . I think it was a self-generated pressure <but> if you kick back too long they're going to say something for sure.

Most line officers agreed that, in the abstract, making lots of arrests could be a good thing. (Indeed, making arrests is why they were there.) But officers also felt that production pressures were so intense that enforcement efforts inevitably became skewed towards the less significant, but "more easily worked" violations:

It filters down <that> they want higher numbers, so inevitably we give them higher numbers. You turn in your monthly report, you've got <only> two arrests <so> they say "you only had two drug arrests?" Now, you may have gotten the two biggest dealers in the State . . . but they're still going to complain because you've only got two. You turn in a monthly report where you get fifteen or twenty arrests . . . now they say that's good.

First-level supervisors did not deny the salience of making arrests. But their definition of doing a good job was usually couched in terms of "busyness" and "activity":

I want to know if <my officers> are putting out the effort, if they're really . . . doing any work.

A lot of people go through the motions. If you've . . . got <officers> coming into the office and sitting around . . . and they don't seem to be doing anything I want to call them in here <and> ask them what they're working on.

Supervisors felt that their intimate knowledge of unit activities made arrest statistics superfluous. Even so, they agreed that "stat's" were important to administrators. This was due, in part, to the fact that executives were so removed from "the field" that they had little else to go on to evaluate their personnel. One sergeant said:

The higher up through the chain of command you go you probably are looking at the number figures, trying to determine . . . "are these guys really making arrests? We know that the crime is out there, are they on top of it?"

Another reason why arrest statistics were important was that administrators were regularly pressured by city officials and citizen groups to "get the pushers off the street." This caused recurrent "clean-up campaigns," which yielded high numbers of arrests. The "numbers" were duly reported through the police hierarchy as proof of the efficiency of narcotics enforcement efforts. An unfortunate byproduct, however, was that resources were diverted from use against perhaps more serious (but less visible) drug violators. One sergeant complained:

One of my big complaints is that you've got to take time from a big problem to take care of some little-a---- problem . . . <Police administrators> might call out and say "hey, we got a call from the City Commissioner and there's junkies congregating <in a park> and want <it> cleaned out . . . You've got to pull everything you've got and go in the park for two d----- weeks and do surveillance and arrest people.

Good "numbers" were also seen as a handy way to justify budgets, especially to City Hall. The competitive spirit that attends such matters was reflected in this sergeant's comments:

When I go in front of City Commissioners and such I tell them that my unit makes more arrests than any other unit in the Department. My <superior> does the same thing.

There was consensus, at the field level, that making lots of arrests was important to the "grunts" because of

pressure from "higher-ups." And the executives we interviewed readily conceded that arrest figures were used. A bureau chief said:

I'll look at <arrest figures> and calculate whether . . . arrests are up or down or so forth and I've also got records out there that I keep on a per-case basis of the <amounts> of <marijuana> and cocaine . . . that we take off the street.

But administrators insisted that doing a good job meant much more than just making arrests. Executives who administered Type 1 units felt that a better measure was a lack of citizen complaints about drug trafficking. A division commander said:

I get a lot of phone calls . . . People will call in "we think there's a house down the street that's a dope dealer." It may or may not be but I'll assign that to the <narcotics unit> . . . In terms of evaluating them <I will consider if> they resolved <that> problem.

Similarly, an executive with responsibility for a Type 2 unit said that, instead of looking at arrest figures, he evaluated his drug unit by measuring his community's general "level of (drug) activity." When asked how this was done, he replied:

<It's> a very nebulous kind of thing, it's more instinctive than factual, probably.

Other Type 2 executives seemed especially proud of their unit's big "knock-offs." One said:

The major dealer's the guy we knocked off in . . . with 170,000 quaaludes, that's a pretty big bundle, you know, about \$8-10 a pill, that's quite a haul.

These administrators were well aware that the relative difficulty of making "big cases" made number of arrests a misleading indicator of success. But, at some level, numbers were salient even for them. Their dilemma is illustrated in this response to a follow-up probe, "are individuals rated on the basis of how much they produce?"

Nah. Well, overall, yeah, but if you're saying do we have quotas or standards or if you do these many arrests you're doing an exceptional job, nah, I don't think so . . . Undercover work might require three month's work for one arrest.

In any case, executives agreed that production fig-

ures were used as a tracking device and diagnostic tool:

The point is an ongoing level of enforcement . . . There's always going to be your up and down . . . If I think <arrests are> going down <I'll> keep an eye on the monthly <report>.

"Ups" and "downs" that went beyond established ranges were usually seen as a cause for concern. A division commander who otherwise belittled the value of "numbers" said:

Numbers themselves don't mean much but if there <are> drastic changes then I am going to be asking <the sergeant> "what's the problem, why do we have a decrease here, why's there an increase here?"

The impression was that administrators seemed to have much less to say about the usefulness of arrest statistics than what a literal reading of their subordinate's comments would imply. For this reason, executives were also asked if they were concerned that their reasons for using arrest data were misconstrued. Most seemed unconcerned. A police chief said:

You tell people what you do with <arrest statistics>. Some will <believe it>, some won't, some will choose not to <and> even if they do they'll tell someone else <the chief> is a d---- liar. But I don't think that's too important. Ultimately, over time, people compare notes and put their heads together as to what their experience with the Chief has been.

The "Quality Case." There was a single dominant response pattern. Twenty-three line officers (72 percent), as well as every supervisor and administrator, replied that a "quality case" meant a technically sound investigation that led to prosecution and conviction. A line officer said:

A quality case is a case where you cover all the little aspects. You make sure that your reports are descriptive, that they contain all the elements of the offense necessary for prosecution, that the evidence is properly handled . . . At the end of the shift or the next day I don't want to have to sit there and say "aw, s----- . Boy, I messed this up!"

This definition of quality remained consistent throughout the police hierarchy. One sergeant said:

Quality is covering all the bases, investigating

all avenues . . . not leaving any loose ends untied. You don't <want to> get embarrassed and surprised in court because you didn't check out some things. <Quality means> making sure you got the right address and right description on a search warrant . . . that you thoroughly search the place . . . that you have any seized evidence checked for fingerprints . . . that you have properly interviewed all the suspects . . . that you documented <reading them> their rights . . . that your report is correct and complete.

Officers and administrators generally agreed that the subjective value of a case was enhanced if certain characteristics were present. There was more prestige if an investigation involved "hard" drugs, if the violator was a major offender, or if a buy was made by an officer, rather than an informant. But virtually no one insisted that such factors had to be there in order to define a case as "quality." To do so, according to most officers, would have ruled out a considerable proportion of the arrests made.<sup>5</sup> The following comment, from a member of a Type 2 unit, was typical:

<Most targets> are middle-of-the-road dealers, a lot are users and a lot of them are living in shabby conditions. They may or may not have a nice car, a lot of them don't. If you do a thorough job and get a quantity of dope from these people that's a chargeable amount . . . I think that's satisfactory.

The overall impression was that virtually any case could qualify as "quality" as long as it satisfied the minimal criteria (technical proficiency, prosecution, and conviction). Indeed, one member of a Type 2 unit, who initially insisted he only prized working major cases, eventually said:

I don't care if it's a dime bag of grass or a hundred hits of heroin, it's against the law, you've got the man that committed the crime . . . You <got> that man that's dealing off the street, you've done it right, presented it properly to the court, you get him convicted, that's a quality case.

<sup>5</sup>Only unit G's statistics identified defendant positions in the narcotics hierarchy. (Over time, approximately ⅓ of its targets were at or below "street level.") The impressions that even Type 2 units focused their efforts on relatively petty traffickers is consistent with findings reported by Wilson (1978).

**Constraints on Quality Work.** There was a single dominant response pattern. Twelve line officers (38 percent), as well as every supervisor and administrator, said that a lack of money hampered narcotics enforcement. Inadequate finances were blamed for a host of ills, such as meager staffs, poor equipment, and the inability to make significant buys and to properly reward informers. Members of Type 2 units were particularly frustrated by practices that limited individual case expenditures. For example, it may cost several thousand dollars to "buy up" from a street dealer of hard drugs to his supplier. But when supervisors of Type 2 units were asked if that much money could be spent without making an arrest, they generally said no. Most said that the "buying up" practice often wasted money. They felt that good results could be obtained by either ordering up a large quantity from a street dealer, or by arresting the dealer and getting him to introduce an agent to his supplier (the so-called "twist").

However, line officers said that foregoing the "buying up" strategy made it virtually impossible to penetrate the narcotics redistributive system. "Twists" were often ineffectual because a dealer's arrest could not be kept secret. In addition, the relatively small quantity of drugs that is typically purchased on a first buy limits the seller's legal exposure, and may thus provide little incentive to inform on others. And, as one officer remarked, to order up a large quantity after making just one small buy is equally futile:

This particular case I'm working on right now. I've gone in there <and bought> a sample . . . It turned out to be . . . very low percentage cocaine. The crook then turned around to me and said O.K., I'll get you an ounce of good stuff, you can test that and if you like it, take the ounce. <We couldn't>. We should not have backed off from that ounce if we were trying to portray ourselves as being big-time people . . . we should have taken the ounce. And now we're having to deal with that problem. All we bought is a gram and we <>want> to jump from a gram to a pound.

Line officers suggested that the underlying reason for limiting per-case expenditures was that doing otherwise would diminish overall arrest productivity:

The police department likes those big cases <but on> the other side of the coin we've got a <fixed> amount of money . . . Realistically you could spend that figure in a day. They will not allow that to happen.

Time is another fixed commodity. So, if high productivity is essential, we should expect that outlays of time (as well as money) would be closely monitored. The time factor was the second most frequently cited constraint by line personnel, being mentioned by five officers.<sup>6</sup> Time limitations were not brought up by any supervisor or administrator. A member of a Type 1 unit said that a combination of production pressures and limited time forced officers to overlook any but the most petty violations:

The thing that keeps us off these pie-in-the-sky cases is that we don't have that kind of time . . . A team <two officers> <is expected> to bring in ten hypes a week . . . After <that> we're pretty much allowed to carry on our own investigations. <But> they don't want you to get tied up on something that's going to take you out for two and three weeks.

Type 1 units, of course, are supposed to arrest users. But, as the following member of a Type 2 unit reported, time pressures were also evident in her work environment:

That last case that I did took me a long time to put together . . . Everybody said "nah, nah, you can't do it, get one, do something else, blah, blah" . . . Well, it finally panned out. Well, when it pans out <they said> "oh, yeah, great case," but for a while we had people saying, "well, did you do anything today? Why don't you get busy? Do this, do that." The subtle pressures, you know, to produce, from supervisors.

## ANALYSIS

Instrument and interview data are consistent in two important respects. First, making lots of arrests seems to be one of the most important things officers can do. Second, the routine narcotics work was placed on a much higher plane than what was initially supposed. Respondents balked at the idea that even "little" narcotics cases could be "simple," and felt that doing thorough, technically sound work was always impor-

<sup>6</sup>Time seemed to be a scarce commodity. But most officers rated instrument item no. 4, "quickly closing with an arrest," as least salient. Respondents explained this apparent discrepancy by pointing out that arrests were frequently delayed by factors beyond their control. Item no. 4 could be better phrased, "quickly closing cases."

tant. Such views reflect what Skolnick terms the "efficient professionalism" of narcotics police (1966, p. 20).

However, the accepted definition of a quality case seems artificial and unidimensional. It emphasizes technical aspects such as complete reports, but plays down such factors as severity of the offense and criminality of the offender. A clue to this puzzle is found in the interviews and observations. Officers reported considerable pressures to make arrests. Even supervisors agreed that good "stat's," more than "big" cases, were crucial to unit service. At the same time, financial resources seemed limited, and most cases, even for the Type 2 units, involved relatively petty violators. It may be that a narrow definition of case quality is an adaptation that allows narcotics police to maintain a craftsmanlike image while presenting the smallest possible impediment to production.

Yet, many officers gained special satisfaction by working major cases. At least at the practitioner level, more complex notions of product quality seemed to persist. Clearly, task complexity is a satisfier, whether in narcotics work or any other craft. That drug enforcement, as performed by these units, provided a rationale (and exhibited the pressures) to overlook this factor is eloquent evidence of unresolved conflict between the values of production and craftsmanship.

### Policy Implications

This study was of an exploratory nature. The examination of influencers bypassed a myriad of social, political, and organizational assumptions about police and policing. In addition, the findings are based on a limited survey and may be inapplicable elsewhere. Even so, the study developed support for the proposition that, given limited resources, narcotics police will focus on petty drug offenders because going after the "bigger" dealers has a high opportunity cost (produces fewer arrests) and thus yields fewer individual and organizational rewards.

It may be worthwhile to make a lot of minor drug arrests. Doing so, it is argued, can reduce the level of predatory crime. But the mission of Type 2 units is supposedly different. However, officers in the sampled Type 2 units reported significant pressures to produce. For them, working major dealers seemed, at times, to be more a goal than a descriptor of what took place. Their dilemma is illustrative of a perhaps greater problem; that, over time, a confusion over priorities (that is, quantity or quality) might transform numerical goals into an enforcement objective. As Kanter and Brinkerhoff (1981) have said:

Where goals are vague or ill-defined, effectiveness criteria may themselves become substitutes for the goal, particularly when they are more precise and suggest concrete actions. This is one of the central issues generated by the necessity to operationalize goals in order to measure performance (p. 328).

It has been suggested that the pressure to make arrests can divert resources and limit job satisfaction. It might also erode the moral fiber of the police. In one example, several Los Angeles vice officers were accused of allowing bookies to operate as long as they occasionally submitted to staged arrests. Defendants received small fines and were never jailed (*Los Angeles Times* 1982). Supposedly, the purpose of the plan was

to guarantee officers easy, plentiful arrests that lead to criminal filings, convictions and personal recognition in a department that has traditionally used numbers to measure a policeman's worth (p. 1).

Observers of contemporary policing have repeatedly pointed out that narcotics officers are difficult to supervise. Their duties mean irregular hours and intimate contact with criminals, and provide frequent opportunities to go astray (Sherman 1974, 1978; Alex 1976; Manning 1977; Wilson 1978; Marx 1980). To add to this a charged, production-oriented environment may be asking for trouble in an environment where the seeds for trouble already exist.

Significant pressures to produce are apparently generated and reinforced by sources external to police organizations. Resource battles between governmental agencies and public concern with visible criminal problems may cause production pressures to flow down the chain of command. These pressures can be augmented by competition within police agencies. It may be that such factors, in conjunction with budgetary restrictions, ultimately circumscribe the ability of local law enforcement officials to combat major narcotics traffickers.

While the police may not be able to resolve all these issues, a few policy suggestions can be advanced:

1. To avoid confusing measures and goals, police departments should specify, in writing, the objectives of their narcotics units, including the nature of targets to be pursued and the relative priority accorded to each. They should also set out the criteria by which individual and unit performance will be evaluated.

2. To minimize the possibly dysfunctional impact of numerical measures of productivity, their use must be restrained. Police and outside administrators should be informed that such measures are not always appropriate and can interfere with the police mission. Arrest statistics, in particular, must not be reified so that worthy but nonquantifiable objectives are excluded, or that taking improper "shortcuts" is encouraged. This calls for close supervision of narcotics administrators, supervisors, and line officers. It also requires the recognition and frank assessment of production pressures at all levels within an agency.
3. If making major cases is deemed important, it is necessary to provide adequate resources. It may also be necessary to purposely insulate officers from pressures to make arrests.
4. Agencies should integrate, into their inspection function, periodic assessments of compliance with these measures.

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