

Dispatch Center Retention:
Centralizing versus Decentralizing Police Department Dispatch Centers

Approved: Dr. Cheryl Banachowski-Fuller

Date: April 14, 2011

Dispatch Center Retention:
Centralizing versus Decentralizing Police Department Dispatch Centers

Recommendations for an ideal police department dispatch center

A Seminar Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree
Master of Science
in
Criminal Justice

by
Lindsey M. Michels

2011

Acknowledgements

A master's degree is something that I have always wanted to achieve, I just didn't know when in my life that would occur. Working towards the completion of this degree has been motivating, enlightening, and exhilarating. Without the support of my family, colleagues, and the staff at UW Platteville, I would not be where I am today. They all gave me hope and encouragement to pursue my dreams and follow this journey.

First, to my husband Joe. You were the first person to encourage me to pursue my degree, even though you knew it would mean less time spent together. You have supported me throughout my journey and always had the utmost confidence in me. You never complained when I had to stay home to do homework, rather, supported my time spent on schoolwork. Without you, your patience, and your support, I would not be where I am today.

To my parents and family, you have supported me since day one. You always had encouraging words of support when you knew times were tough. Always willing to lend an extra hand, run errands, etc. to help get things done while I did my homework. Thanks for your support and for having high expectations for me.

To my colleagues, especially Chief Lukoski, you presented me with the idea for this seminar paper. Although I knew it would be challenging, you were always there to encourage me to pursue the topic and provide advice. You were willing to help out any way you could with information and research. If it wasn't for the constant encouragement, I may have backed down from this important topic. To the dispatchers at the Ripon Police Department, you all mean the world to the department, the community, and me. I can only hope that the research done for this paper and any presentation of it will help the Ripon Police Department to retain the wonderful dispatch center we have. We all know how much work you all do and how important having a decentralized dispatch center is, especially when seconds count!

To all of the instructors at UW Platteville. You all have provided me with a wonderful education and a wealth of knowledge. Distance learning is not always easy, but you all made it a wonderful "classroom" and made learning enjoyable. To Dr. Banachowski-Fuller, you have been a wonderful advisor. You allowed me to pursue a topic that I am absolutely passionate about for my seminar paper and provided support throughout it. Thank you to all the professors for everything that you have done in the learning profession for Criminal Justice.

ABSTRACT

Dispatch Center Retention: Centralizing versus Decentralizing Police Department Dispatch Centers

Lindsey M. Michels

Under the Supervision of Dr. Cheryl Banachowski-Fuller

Police dispatch centers have been utilized in one way or another since policing has begun. Over the years, these centers have continued to develop and evolve. During the last decade, the emergency services dispatching centers have changed significantly, not only with the technological advances in equipment, but also with consolidations as well. Many factors have had an influence on dispatch centers merging; those include the internal and external environments, citizens, and the economy.

The problems faced by dispatch centers as the result of growing populations and increasingly complex technology can be daunting. Both the internal and external environments directly affect dispatch centers and their productivity. Technology is also very important, especially when a department is dealing with emergency services and high call volumes.

More recently, police dispatch centers have been consolidating, or centralizing themselves. Typically, the dispatch centers will consolidate many small city centers into one large countywide center, in doing this, they lose many of the key components that allow them to carry out their everyday functions. There are many arguments for and against the centralization of dispatch centers, which will be discussed in this paper.

When police departments lose their dispatch centers, they also lose many assets, as dispatchers have more responsibilities than just dispatching police, fire and EMS. They take on several tasks that officers, secretaries and management do not have time for.

Centralizing dispatch centers have many effects on a police department. Along with the many advantages, there are also disadvantages of centralized and decentralized dispatch centers. It is clear that many departments and communities are torn in which one is more effective, and in order to determine that answer, both must be compared in-depth.

Anticipated Outcomes

This research paper will compare and contrast and verify whether centralization or decentralization of police dispatch centers is the best solution to maintain the success and organizational goals for the department and community as a whole. The success of a police department dispatch center is something that needs to be addressed on a daily basis, or in formal meetings with the stakeholders of the city and community, and their interest in mind. This paper will give a recommendation of an ideal or model police department dispatch center.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE.....	i
TITLE PAGE.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
------------------------	----

SECTIONS

I.	Introduction: The Need for Decentralized Police Dispatch Centers	1
II.	Review of Literature	6
	a. History of Dispatch Centers	6
	i. Administration	8
	ii. Structure and Composition	10
	b. Influence of Internal and External Environments that Lead to Centralized Dispatch Centers	12
	i. Changing Population	12
	ii. Technology Advancements	13
	iii. Economy	15
	iv. Attrition	16
	v. Public Safety	16
	vi. Department Morale	18
	vii. Politics	19

c.	Literature Review on the Problems of Centralized Dispatch Centers	20
III.	Examples of Centralized and Decentralized Dispatch Centers	28
a.	The Minnesota Study	29
b.	IACP Study: May 2003	32
c.	Borough of Princeton and the Township of Princeton Study	35
d.	Human Contact	35
e.	Community Services	36
f.	Departmental Procedures and Administration	37
IV.	Recommendations for an Ideal Effective Decentralized Dispatch Center	40
a.	Maintain Human Contact with the Citizens and Community	41
b.	Sustain Public Services that the Dispatch Center Provides to the Community	44
V.	Summary and Conclusions	47
VI.	References	48

Section I: Introduction: The Need for Decentralized Police Dispatch Centers and Maintaining Retention

Every police department wants to have an ideal or model dispatch center, as dispatch centers are utilized for many different functions within the department and the community. However, over the years dispatch centers have changed significantly in several ways: through technological advances and consolidations (IACP Researcher, 2003, p. 5). Many departments, especially smaller ones, face the issue of dispatch center retention. Local city and county officials are pushing for the centralization of dispatch centers due to budgets, technology costs, etc. These issues are forcing them to evaluate centralizing versus decentralizing their dispatch centers (APCO: RETAINS, 2005).

There have been recent movements to centralize dispatch centers, over the past several years. For example, the IACP, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, has created a “Services, Support and Technical Assistance Project for Smaller Police Agencies” (IACP Researcher, 2003, p.iii). The idea of consolidating law enforcement services continues to interest many police and sheriffs’ departments. Because of this, the IACP has developed a study and unique planning approach for consolidation of police dispatch centers.

Police departments are confronted with many challenges when considering the merging of their dispatch centers. The challenges and factors they must consider include the internal and external environments, citizens, and the economy. Dispatch centers are tending to focus on technological improvements rather than staffing increases (911 Dispatch Services, Inc., 1995).

The trend, as of late, has been for several dispatch centers to consolidate or centralize into one center that serves many towns, villages, cities, and counties. However, when dispatch centers consolidate, many departments lose several key components that help them to operate and carry out daily functions (Stojkovic et al., 2008).

Police chiefs suggest that when a police department consolidates their dispatch center, they also lose several important assets (Watson, 2009). Police chiefs advocate that decentralized centers provide locally focused service at a reasonable cost, and they note their 911 dispatchers do everything from writing reports to handling walk-in complaints (Watson, 2009). More importantly, there is a need to keep dispatch centers decentralized because these centers increase community human contact and services, and maintain efficient department procedures (NIJ, 2008). This goes hand in hand with the Community Policing approach, retaining a decentralized dispatch center will allow for a foundation of trust to be formed between the police department and the community that will produce solid achievements (BJA, 1994, p. vii).

There is a need to keep police department dispatch centers decentralized. Once a dispatch center becomes centralized, the police department as a whole loses many valuable assets (IACP Researcher, 2003). Decentralized dispatch centers allow for 24-hour monitoring of the department, city, and they provide on-site security to the building. They also monitor several alarms and the call outs of numerous facilities and services. Once a dispatch center becomes centralized, they lose the aforementioned duties along with many other key aspects of law enforcement (IACP Researcher, 2003).

According Carol Buracker and Associates, Inc. (2005, p. 62): "A law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services dispatch system should be designed, installed, operated, staffed and

maintained to provide the maximum practicable efficiency and reliability for transmission and receipt of requests for public safety service. The safety of public safety services providers and the safety of customers (stakeholders) should be a cornerstone of a responsive public safety dispatch system". A decentralized center can provide all of these items in a professional, timely, and experienced manner.

As can be seen from the examples above, centralizing dispatch centers have many effects on a police department. Along with the many advantages, there are also disadvantages of centralized and decentralized dispatch centers (IACP Researcher, 2003, p. 5). It is clear that many departments and communities are torn in which one is more effective, and in order to determine the answer, both must be compared in-depth, which is the goal of this research.

This paper will argue that decentralized police dispatch centers are the most effective and efficient in providing services to the community and to provide recommendations for an ideal or model for a decentralized police department dispatch center. Research suggests that retaining dispatch centers in police departments is essential to having an efficient police department (BJA, 1994). When centers remain decentralized, the totality of police services, officer and citizen satisfaction, and the capacity of the agency to better serve the public and fight crime remain intact (IACP Researcher, 2003).

Dispatch centers are of great importance to all police officers, departments, and the communities they serve. When seconds count, the dispatcher is the very first responder in any emergency situation. Therefore, they are a vital piece in all criminal justice organizations and must be treated that way. If dispatch centers are consolidated they lose a lot of the well-established links between department personnel and the dispatcher themselves. It is important to

keep in mind all of the advantages and disadvantages of centralized and decentralized dispatch centers.

The public and administrators are currently pushing for the centralization of police dispatch centers. Centralizing dispatch centers looks good at face value, eliminating costs, less employees, etc., however, there are many downfalls to centralization. Society must realize and be informed of the research regarding both positions. In this paper, it will be argued that decentralized dispatch centers are more efficient than centralized dispatch centers.

Law enforcement agencies, policy makers, and city and county council members must be educated about the research before making decisions on whether or not to keep independent dispatch centers or merge with other dispatch centers to have one large center for the entire county. Therefore, all relevant issues, not just the main ideas that most people consider regarding dispatch center retention must be taken into consideration. In order for an educated decision to be made by the entities named above and to implement the most ideal dispatch center, the advantages and disadvantages of both centralized and decentralized dispatch centers must be considered and applied.

The goal of this paper is to provide recommendations for an ideal decentralized police dispatch center, a center that increases community human contact and services, and maintains efficient departmental procedures. This paper will, first, address definitions of important terms. Second, this paper will address an in-depth literature review including the history of dispatch centers, the influence of internal and external environments that lead to centralized dispatch centers, and a theoretical framework. Third, this paper will compare examples of centralized and decentralized dispatch centers. It will evaluate and compare costs of dispatch operations, labor

issues relevant to joint dispatch, transitional issues of an operational or human resources nature; identify the advantages and/or disadvantages of a joint dispatch center, and identify the staffing, operations, management, and costs of a joint dispatch center. It will also identify potential obstacles, if any, of a joint operation and ways to mitigate/overcome those obstacles. The paper will ultimately provide a recommendation for an ideal police department dispatch center.

The results of this paper will serve as an educational tool that may be used by all levels of law enforcement, administrators, and city council members who need research background when making decisions on centralizing or decentralizing their dispatch center.

Section II: Review of Literature

The following section is divided into three parts. The first part provides a history of dispatch centers. The second part is a discussion of the influence of internal and external environments that lead to centralized dispatch centers. The third part is a discussion on the problems with centralized dispatch centers. These discussions will help give justification to the recommendation of an ideal, effective dispatch center that is decentralized.

History of Dispatch Centers

It was not very long ago when police officers would sit at the front desk awaiting a citizen complaint. A citizen would walk in or phone the police department and the officer would put the information on a “job card”. They then took the card to the radio operator who then dispatched the run. Each public service, fire, ambulance and police had their own dispatch centers. Over the years, larger agencies started to employ civilians who would still take the job down on a card and dispatch the closest cars available (Allen, Dispatch Monthly Online, February 2005).

When dispatch centers came about, it was out of the realization that seconds count in situations in which police officers are responding to. Therefore, there was a need to have civilians taking the complaint and dispatching the officers. To this day, seconds still count, and centralizing a dispatch center may increase the amount of time it takes for an officer to get the call. However, in a decentralized dispatch center, the dispatcher is only taking calls for one specific department, allowing calls to be dispatched right away.

The dispatch center began to radically change in February of 1967 when President Lyndon Johnson's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice issued its

report, recommending that police departments have a single number to call, and that eventually that single number should be used nationwide (911 Dispatch Services, Inc., 1995). In January of 1968, AT&T announced their designation of 911 as a universal emergency number at a press conference in the Washington (DC) office of Indiana Rep. Ed Roush, who had championed for Congressional support for "one number" (911 Dispatch Services, Inc., 1995).

On February 16, 1968, the first-ever 911 call is placed by Alabama Speaker of the House Rankin Fite from Haleyville City Hall to U.S. Rep. Tom Bevill (Dem.) at the city's police station (911 Dispatch Services, Inc., 1995). According to the Dispatch Magazine (1995), in March of 1973, the White House's Office of Telecommunications issued National Policy Bulletin Number 73-1, which recognized the benefits of 911 and encouraging its nationwide adoption. The statement also provided for the establishment of a Federal Information Center to assist jurisdictions in planning and implementing 911 systems. In part, the policy said, "it is the policy of the Federal Government to encourage local authorities to adopt and establish 9-1-1 emergency telephone systems in all metropolitan areas and throughout the United States, and 9-1-1 emergency telephone system efforts should be initiated in both urban and rural areas at the same time, whenever practicable" (911 Dispatch Services, Inc., 1995). This was the beginning of dispatch and call centers for law enforcement.

In Michigan, Senate Bill number 492 was enacted as "an act to provide for the establishment of emergency telephone districts." Among other things, this bill also defined consolidated dispatch. It stated, "consolidated dispatch means a countywide or regional emergency dispatch service that provides dispatch service for 75% or more of the law enforcement, firefighting and emergency medical services and other emergency services within

the geographical area of 911 service district or services 75% or more of the population within a 911 service district.” It was then that centralized or consolidated dispatch centers were born in Michigan. This trend of central dispatching continues to grow rapidly all across the country (Dispatch Services, Inc., 1995).

According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), when discussing consolidation and its relationship to police department dispatch centers they state that there are many variations of consolidation. However, for purposes of this paper, the definition they give of functional consolidation is most relevant. The IACP (2003) defines functional consolidation as, “Two or more agencies combine certain functional units, such as emergency communications, dispatch, or records” (pg. 1). The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) also defines this as “full consolidation: Multiple agencies share common facility and consolidate call taking and dispatch operations across multiple disciplines” (p.1).

Administration

Dispatch center administration and leadership play a large role in the quality of employees hired and the work that they produce. One way to assure city administrators, citizens, and others that a city needs their own dispatch starts with good management skills and their ability to lead by example. Also, instituting a well-thought-out training program for all employees is fundamental (IACP, 2009). They must train employees well to aide in their professional development. Another asset administration needs to have is leadership and the ability to obtain employee involvement. They must also be motivated to develop curriculum and learning objectives, and encourage the dispatchers to strive to do their best every day.

Once dispatch centers are consolidated the administration of them changes. No longer will there be an administrator from each department, rather one administrator for all the dispatchers. The questions of who has control and how much control and input does a specific department's supervisors have on the central dispatch center arise.

Consolidation of dispatch centers can have many effects not only on the officers, dispatchers, citizens, and community, but it also largely affects administration (IACP, 2009). For example, it causes administrators to feel a loss of control and threatened by consolidation which can lead to them aggressively resisting change. It can also create both intraorganizational and interorganizational conflict. When the structural makeup of a department is changed, i.e. they lose their own dispatch center; conflict can arise between administration, line-staff, and other support staff. Interorganizational conflict occurs when different organizations share a common purpose (the same dispatch center) but disagree about how that purpose will be achieved or used (Stojkovic et al., 2008). When the goals and objectives of one organization are in conflict with those of another organization, problems start to arise. Interorganizational conflict is one of the single most important issues facing administrators of the criminal justice system today (Stojkovic et al., 2008).

Administrators must realize the role that conflict plays in organizations can be both beneficial and harmful. Leaders must learn how to live with, adapt to, and cope with conflict effectively. However, this can be difficult in times where they have little or no control over something (the dispatch center) that plays such a large role in their everyday activities.

Dispatch Center Structure and Composition

Dispatch or communications centers are all structured differently per the specific city, county, state, or federal agency's needs and policies. However, many have the same foundation on which they operate. A dispatch center is defined as a facility from which resources are ordered, mobilized, and assigned to an incident (www.usda.gov, 2010). Dispatch centers typically are under the supervision of the chief or captain and contain full-time and part-time staff. Some of the duties of the communication officers are receiving all incoming complaints and reports of crime. The communication center personnel operate multi-frequency radio equipment and mobile data computer terminals to dispatch police, fire, and emergency medical services within the city and sometimes other jurisdictions (Taylor et al., 2005). They process, index, and file the warrants and court orders that are received by the department to be served by the police officers when a person is located. They also handle any citizen complaints that come in via the police department, parking tickets, and many other tasks (McCarron, 2005).

Communications officers have many responsibilities, as they are the "hub" of the police, fire, and emergency services. They are accountable for taking all calls made by the general public to the 911 emergency centers and for gathering the essential information from the caller to determine whether or not emergency response services are needed at the location or incident described by the caller (NIJ, 2007). They also maintain status and locations of all active calls for service and all active public safety personnel when the citizens call on the non-emergency line. Communications officers must have knowledge of law enforcement terminology and procedures, geography of the jurisdiction they are working for and surrounding areas, skill in communicating

using two-way radios and be able to think clearly and act quickly in emergencies (NIJ, 2007).

Multi-tasking is an essential part of the job.

Communication centers must also uphold specific standards to be effective. The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., (CALEA), has a Public Safety Communications Accreditation Program provides a communications center, or the communications unit of a public safety agency, with a process to systemically review and internally assess their operations and procedures (CALEA Online, 2007). Not all Communication Centers are CALEA certified, however, they should consider it.

The program has become the primary method for a communications agency to voluntarily demonstrate their commitment to excellence. CALEA Accreditation requires the communications center or unit to develop a comprehensive, well thought out uniform set of written directives. This is one of the most successful methods for reaching administrative and operational goals, while also providing direction to personnel (CALEA Online, 2007). CALEA Accreditation also is a means for developing or improving upon a communications center's relationship with the community or the agencies it services, strengthens an agency's accountability, both within the agency and the community, through a continuum of standards that clearly define authority, performance, and responsibilities, and can limit a communications center's liability and risk exposure because it demonstrates that internationally recognized standards for public safety communications have been met, as verified by a team of independent outside CALEA-trained assessors (CALEA Online, 2007).

There are various reasons not all dispatch centers are CALEA certified; one of the major reasons is the initial cost and the annual cost to stay up to date and trained. On top of the costs, is

the additional training and time spent learning the standards. The agency must decide if the accreditation and benefits are worth the costs.

Influence of Internal and External Environments that Lead to Centralized Dispatch Centers

According to The Communications Security, Reliability and Interoperability Council (2010), there has been a clear trend over the last two decades towards public safety system consolidation, with radio networks developed to cover counties, regions, and even states (p. 4). Similarly, jurisdictions have merged their communications dispatch centers across agencies and political boundaries. In the majority of cases, there are benefits to consolidation. The sharing of resources allows for the elimination of duplicate costs, supports coordinated responses, provides greater interoperability, and ultimately leads to more effective and efficient service (CSRIC, 2010). Driving forces from political, economic and service quality factors are increasingly demanding public safety officials consider consolidation with neighboring communities of interest. The consolidation process often poses numerous challenges from operational, governance, funding and technical perspectives and is a complex, multi-dimensional issue. In the following section, some of the internal and external environmental influences that lead to centralized dispatch centers will be discussed.

Changing Population

The problems faced by dispatch centers as the result of growing populations and increasingly complex technology can be daunting. Due to economic changes, amongst other things, the populations of cities seem to be changing more frequently. The eras of establishing a home and family in one city and remaining there for a lifetime are a thing of the past. People are constantly on the move, therefore, creating fluctuations in population.

When discussing the issue of centralizing a dispatch center, the jurisdictions considering consolidation must gauge existing local city and/or county support for consolidation of any kind (IACP Researcher, 2003). According to the International Chiefs of Police Association (IACP) (2003), jurisdictions must first gauge if law enforcement personnel, local and county officials, and citizens actually want to proceed with consolidation (p. 8). The outcome of this “survey” depends largely on the population at the time it is given. The willingness of a jurisdiction to centralize a dispatch center may change with the fluctuation of the population.

Technology

Technology is very important, especially when a department is dealing with emergency services and high call volumes. In fact, according to the Academy of Architecture for Justice (2009) they state that the new generation of 911 centers is designed to capture ideals characteristic of facilities past, yet reflect modern standards of security and connectivity (p.1). The dispatcher-oriented center truly balances the art of the design and interiors with the highly technical and specific science of communication. These principles embody the four P’s of contemporary communication center design: planning, public, personnel, and protection (Loomis, 2009, p.1).

Technology is constantly changing, which directly affects the equipment used by dispatch centers. According to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), “Public safety officials make decisions about communications equipment policies and practices every day” (NIJ, 2007). The public safety communications industry is evolving almost daily as well, causing a need to evaluate the rapidly changing communications landscape (NIJ, 2007).

Technology in dispatch centers range from telephones, conventional radios, wireless communications, and voice over protocol, to computer-aided dispatching (CAD) (NIJ, 2007). Those in favor of centralizing dispatch centers argue that there would be only one need to upgrade technology, therefore lowering overall operating costs (IACP Researcher, 2003). However, those who oppose consolidation believe that consolidation is likely to increase costs, especially to standardize all the equipment and update the technology (IACP, 2003).

Public safety agencies have traditionally owned and managed their own communications equipment. Shared governance creates complexities that are new to many agencies. Successful projects have important roles for every jurisdiction involved (NIJ, 2007). Through technology agencies involved in governance must learn to trust one another.

The trend of cell phones and iPhone and I pad applications is becoming ever more popular. With the advancement of technology a CAD app has been created. Henry Unger, president of Hitech Systems Inc. states, “This app gives public-safety personnel powerful information wherever they are, exactly when they need it (PoliceOne.com, 2011).

According to Craig Froehle (2006), customer service operations are being subjected to rapid, technology-driven change (p. 5). The ubiquity and sophistication of new information technologies, such as the Internet, have fundamentally changed, and continue to change, how organizations interact with their customers, such as police department dispatchers (Froehle, 2006, p.5). Technology has advantages to the centralization of dispatch centers, because it is causing movement away from face-to-face contact and focusing on technology-mediated methods.

Historically, customer contact has been described in terms of the customer having a physical presence in the service system (Cook et al., 1999). While the introduction of new communication media and expanded customer touch-points, the characteristics of an effective customer service process/system are experiencing significant change (Boyer et al, 2002). These changes and the evolving world of technology can either be beneficial or disadvantageous to police department dispatch centers.

An evolution from face-to-face to virtual interaction has occurred (Froehle, 2006, p.12). Through technology and studies of media richness, features have found that synchronous computer-mediated exchanges allow for more equality across participants; which can enhance building, whereas asynchronous exchanges more closely resemble face-to-face, small group interaction in this regard (Culnan & Markus, 1987). Martins et al. (2004) found that, “media richness has been found to positively affect impact team effectiveness, efficiency, amount of communication, the relationships among team members, and team commitment (p. 811), which would point a department towards a centralized dispatch center. Technology is an environment that can greatly influence a police department dispatch center; it is something that must be considered when making the decision of whether to remain decentralized or to centralize the center.

Economy

The economy also has an impact on the decision of whether or not to centralize a dispatch center. As we are in a time of economic recession, it is important to keep in mind salaries and benefits. Bob Greenberg (2009) discusses how this time, the economic downturn is different than in times past. Greenberg (2009) states, “the convergence of the downturn and the rapid changes

in consumers' lives will have a drastic effect on the agency landscape” (p. 2). Smaller departments have a tougher time retaining dispatchers due to the fact that they can't always offer the most competitive wages or benefit packages. Due to these factors many agencies have combined to create a central or joint dispatch center. In his article Greenberg talks about companies in general and suggests that, “we're equally likely to see further consolidation in agencies this time around” (2009, p.AM2). This directly applies to how the economy is impacting dispatch centers.

Central or joint dispatch centers look attractive to city officials, the budget, and citizens, in the fact that they result in a net reduction of personnel, saving in dispatching personnel costs before salary and benefits, savings for equipment upgrade (now only having to upgrade one center versus multiple), among many other perks (IACP Researcher, 2003). But, along with the good, come the downfalls. Many argue that centralized dispatch centers save on costs; however, combining them could actually incur costs to taxpayers, as they are just transferred to where the dispatch center is (IACP Researcher, 2003). There is also the extra monthly cost on cell phones, because they will need special software to insure that 911 calls go to the correct dispatch center.

The economy is a large factor when a department, village, city, or county is considering centralizing their dispatch center. The expenses and savings must be weighed and compared thoroughly in order to make an educated decision.

Attrition

Retaining dispatch centers and personnel are key factors when it comes to centralizing dispatch centers. Attrition is defined by Lieutenant Andrew Hawkes as, “the gradual wearing down or weakening by friction; or a gradual diminution in strength due to constant stress”

(policeone.com, May, 2010). Retention rate can also be defined as, “the proportion of the total number of employees who remain with the organization during the previous years. Turnover (or attrition) is the complement of retention” (Taylor et al., 2005, p.19). The attrition rate could vary greatly depending upon how the merge goes and can directly impact the environment of a dispatch center to lead to a centralized center.

Law enforcement agencies across the United States are experiencing a problem retaining employees in their communications centers. This is due to a plethora of factors including, but not limited to: fiscal limitations, budget constraints, and increased workloads. According to a study conducted in 2005 by The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO), the national average attrition rate for communication centers is 17% (p.viii). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) (2004), estimates indicate that across the United States there are 17,876 local police and state departments, and 3,067 sheriff’s offices. Using the above estimates, Dispatch Monthly Online (1999) estimates a total of approximately 195,791 full-time public safety dispatchers nationwide (Dispatch Monthly Online, Facts and Figures).

Those in favor of consolidation look at dispatch attrition, in the effect that sworn and civilian personnel may have greater opportunities for advancement (IACP Researcher, 2003). There may be higher attrition or turnover of communications personnel in a consolidated dispatch center, because it takes more time to adjust to consolidation. There also may be early resistance, which tends to give way to reluctance, but those who are in favor of consolidation say that acceptance comes with time and experience (IACP Researcher, 2003).

Public Safety

Central dispatch centers raise the question of how safe the public will be without a dispatch center present in their community. The external environment of the community directly impacts the decision, as people are any organizations most valuable resource. The public is often not aware that effective communications is a challenge for public safety organizations (NIJ, 2007). With consolidation the question of whether the calls, both emergency and non-emergency, will be adequately covered and dealt with in a timely manner.

The knowledge and opinions of the public can be measured through assessing their opinions through surveys, public forums, or focus groups. If it is found that the majority of the citizens are aware of a consolidation plan and that they accept it, that acceptance can directly impact the decision to centralize the dispatch center (O'Brian). The public must embrace the idea of consolidation as it is their safety and interests that could become compromised by the centralization. Citizens can be a major force in supporting projects once they understand the situation. Some governance structures even include members of the public on their boards (NIJ, 2010) to aide and assure a smooth transition.

Department Morale

This internal environment can directly affect and lead to a centralized dispatch center. The transition from a decentralized to a centralized department depends greatly on the attitudes and perceptions of sworn officers and civilian employees (IACP Researcher, 2003). If the employees are willing to accept and support the consolidation plan, then the morale will remain high. However, it is up to the administration and those in favor of a centralized center to educate

other members of the positive influences that consolidation could have on the internal and external environments.

Another way department morale can be kept high is by inviting key agencies early on in the process. Leaders who are not involved in the early stages may feel left out, which could lead to their being unsupportive of the entire idea. Agency officials are more enthusiastic about being involved in a project when they can influence early decisions (NIJ, 2007). Creating a strong partnership with those within the department and improving the interagency communications can also increase the support for consolidation.

Politics

Central or joint dispatch centers look attractive to city officials, the budget, and citizens in the fact that they result in a net reduction of personnel, saving in dispatching personnel costs before salary and benefits, savings for equipment upgrade (now only having to upgrade one center versus multiple), among many other perks. Politicians in city and counties may consider consolidation to be an answer to some of their fiscal problems. In fact, the IACP Researcher (2003) stated “consolidation is especially attractive to city and county decision makers in regions with numerous smaller police agencies, where fragmentation or redundancy in policing may be present and where fiscal challenges exist” (p.1).

Politics also play a large role in the criminal justice system and dispatch centers. When dispatch centers become centralized often times debates arise. Politicians will debate how to handle their police and emergency medical services dispatching, which services they should use to keep business fair to all communities involved, etc. For example, communications systems

have continuing sustainment and maintenance costs and many existing public safety interoperability projects involve representatives from all branches of government (NIJ, 2008).

The NIJ (2008) suggests that elected officials need to understand the long-term commitments and benefits of these projects, for without the support and understanding of elected officials, long-term funding will be challenging. Politics have a large effect on the community and police department as a whole. Even more so, they have an effect on whether or not a dispatch center becomes centralized or not. Consolidation must ensure shared ownership and mutual trust, and involve elected officials and other decision makers to be successful (NIJ, 2008).

Literature Review on the Problems of Centralized Dispatch Centers

There are many internal and external influences that lead dispatch centers to become centralized as stated above. However, there are many advantages to maintaining a decentralized police department dispatch center, as several problems become prevalent when centers are consolidated.

One of the first issues with consolidation is the question of what will happen to the department's values and traditions. Departments typically have very strong identities. Officers and staff take a great deal of comfort in these identities (IACP Researcher, 2003). Consolidation will produce a loss of identity, and force officers and other staff to adopt and adjust to the new agency's identity. Along with the identity dilemma, is the loss of face-to-face contact for the department employees and citizens. Craig Froehle (2006) conducted a study on service personnel, technology, and their interaction in influencing customer satisfaction. The study (2006) looked at customer service representatives and six characteristics that are prevalent in

practice, they included: courtesy, professionalism, attentiveness, knowledgeableness, preparedness, and thoroughness (p.14). Christie and de Alberdi (1985) defined a form of technology-mediated communication as task-oriented or “task-execution”, which is oriented towards achieving goals, solving problems, and making decisions (Kettinger & Grover, 1997, p.520).

Researchers Culnan and Markus, Lea and Spears (as cited in Froehle, 2006) have cited concerns over the theoretical underpinnings and empirical support for, Media Richness Theory and/or Social Presence Theory. This would directly affect centralized dispatch centers in the effect that smaller communities are now obliged to speak to a dispatcher through a phone system and/or automated system, rather than face-to-face. Froehle (2006) found that media can vary in richness, and one concern is the way that lean media is used. For example, the richness of emotions is limited when speaking through a phone, intercom, or other mediums (e-mail, etc.). Kahai and Cooper state that, “such adaptive behaviors can entirely mitigate the structural and technical boundaries of a given medium, which may limit its potential for supporting truly rich communication” (2003, p.290).

Froehle’s study (2006) found that the three customer service representative (CSR) characteristics related to task-execution are: thoroughness, knowledgeableness, and preparedness, were influential in creating a positive customer experience in all environments (p.24). Based on the study, they found that CSR’s have the most information about the company’s or department’s services. Froehle (2006) indicated through his findings that it was important to people (customers) to have their problems or issues taken care of during the first encounter, as they prefer not to have contact with the CSR multiple times to resolve an issue

(p.24). This is especially important in regards to law-enforcement and centralized dispatch centers, as if a citizen calls for help or assistance and gets put on hold or disconnected because the dispatcher is busy dispatching another officer from a different jurisdiction, the person may become frustrated and hang up, only to have to call again, or even worse, not call back at all.

Many citizens rely on the face-to-face contact with a dispatcher or someone when they walk into a police department lobby. When a citizen walks through the front door they feel that their problem is emergent and they want to deal with it and address it right away. However, by consolidating dispatch centers, that face-to-face contact is taken away and replaced by technology. A citizen now walks in the front door of the police department and pushes a button or picks up a phone to hear an automation of choices or waits to talk to someone in another city that is going to try to help them out. In his study, Froehle (2006) indicates that lean media may put pressure on the intimacy and thoroughness dimension that was so vital in face-to-face environments, and influence customer contact immensely (p.26).

Besides the face-to-face contact that is lost in consolidation, there are also several other drawbacks to centralizing dispatch centers. Operationally speaking, the drawbacks include: (1) difficulty adapting to a new configuration, (2) shift changes, (3) revision of patrol areas, (4) adjustments to rank structure, (5) potential reduction of patrol strength in either the city or the county (IACP Researcher, 2003, p.12). The Belvedere-Boone Police Department (as cited in the IACP Researcher, 2003) stated that there would be gains for the county, but losses for the city in overall service, unless the total number of officers was increased (p.12).

Other operational concerns that can surface when dispatch center consolidation occurs are the deployment of officers, emergency services, and the fire department. Several decisions

and new protocols will have to be implemented to determine the best and most efficient way to approach this. Decisions such as, how officers will be deployed, how patrol sectors or districts will be designed, how patrol allocation per shift and sector will be determined, and how preliminary deployment decisions will be evaluated after implementation must be made (IACP Researcher, 2003). The above decisions all take time and a lot of collaboration to arrive at a resolution that will appease all departments involved. This may even require hiring outside sources to evaluate the decisions made to ensure that they are best for all departments involved, which in turn incurs more cost to the departments.

Another concern when dispatch centers become centralized is the fact that no two departments share an identical law enforcement philosophy. While crime prevention and response are givens, one department may focus on special programs and initiatives, while another may have a single community-oriented, problem-solving approach (IACP Researcher, 2003). Along with a department's philosophy is the "culture" of the department. Each individual police and dispatch department develops its own unique culture, including: department-wide perspectives, attitudes and informal coping mechanisms. Consolidating two or more departments could greatly affect this culture, and cause officers and other staff to rebel against the identity and culture of the new agency.

An additional problem that arises with centralized dispatch centers is the creation of new policies, procedures, and protocols. Departments have spent countless hours creating a policy and procedure manual specific to their department, city, and environment. When consolidation occurs, a lot of the policies and procedures must be changed, and all personnel must be trained in them before they are implemented. This creates another cost to all departments, as there needs to

be a thorough evaluation of existing policies, procedures and protocols. However, sufficient time, money, and effort must be put into this critical task to make all necessary changes to ensure that they are adequate for each individual situation (IACP Researcher, 2003).

Retention, salaries, benefits, and promotions of dispatch center staff are also directly affected by consolidation. Retaining experienced staff may become more difficult when a department decides to become centralized, as employees with tenure may fear the loss of their seniority or even their job. This in turn causes staff to become concerned about their futures, including assignments, supervision, and rank. When consolidation occurs, several liabilities arise for all departments involved. Some of them include: loss of control by individual agency leaders, increased legal liabilities for both former departments, tension between dispatch staff, and resistance to change by the dispatch personnel (IACP Researcher, 2003).

According to a study on staffing and retention in public safety communication centers conducted by Taylor et al. (2005), six of the major factors that communication center employees use to determine their satisfaction with their position include: 1) recognition and relationships; 2) the work environment; 3) scheduling; 4) salary and benefits; 5) training; and 6) work breaks (p.26). All of the above-mentioned factors are affected when a department decides to consolidate, which could lead to high turnover. This directly affects the quality of service provided due to the fact that new people are being hired and not only have to learn the “system” but also must be trained, and centers may risk losing their experienced dispatchers. That means that there is a need to train replacements, which often times translates into additional overtime and costs due to the time demands of mentoring new employees (Taylor et al., 2005).

Facility needs, upgrades, and changes are directly affected by the centralization of dispatch centers. Several assessments need to be conducted to test the feasibility of using either the sheriff's facility or the city's facility. They must also include an evaluation of possible appropriate expansions and renovations to meet needs of a combined department. An analysis of the cost of upgrading either the county or city facility to meet the consolidated agency's space needs, compared to other available options including building new and adaptive re-use of an existing non-law enforcement facility must be done to ensure the most cost-effective center (IACP Researcher, 2003).

The existing equipment and the cost of any current updates must also be taken into consideration. Buying technology is only half the answer. People have to use the technology correctly. "As important as it is to have systems, processes and procedures in place, having the right and best people doing the work is often a critical tipping point" (Swift, 2009, p.55). If a city recently invested money into upgrades to the dispatch facility, and now they want to "get rid of it" to consolidate, there may be a lot of unhappy people, which could cause several problems and issues for management, the city, and the community.

A common theme when discussing centralized dispatch centers is that of funding and costs. The initial thought is that consolidating centers will save on costs, with the thought that one center is more cost effective than several small centers. However, consolidation can actually create more costs for everyone involved. All of the problems discussed in the last several pages cost departments money. From the assessments, evaluations, and feasibility studies that must be conducted both internally and externally to the training, equipment, and technological upgrades, they all cost the department's involved money.

Funding and shared costs can become a large issue for the involved agencies. Questions of how revenue acquisition will change, whether or not levels of revenue will change, how costs of the new consolidated department will be shared amongst all agencies involved, and who is going to decide how those costs are handled. There are many ‘unknowns’ when centralizing a dispatch center, which can be of concern not only to the department, but also to the community as a whole. Consolidation of dispatch centers could cause significant changes in programmatic, revenue, and funding practices in all jurisdictions (IACP Researcher, 2003).

Lastly, the issue of management arises when discussing centralizing dispatch centers. All involved want to know who is going to manage the new agency and how the command structure will be set up. Legal affairs also arise when discussing management matters, such as who will be responsible for evaluating and resolving legal matters, and what must be done to satisfy all legal requirements. Chiefs, department heads, etc. are all trained to take an active role in their departments (Police Chief’s Desk Reference, 2009). However, when a department’s dispatch center is physically moved to another location, the management of the specific city may lose control over any part of the dispatch center. When this occurs, management loses one of the most important assets that they were trained in.

When an individual is being trained to become a police leader, they are taught several things about personnel administration. According to the IACP’s guide for newly appointed police leaders (2009), “strong and effective leaders rely upon their organization’s personnel. Nowhere is this truer than law-enforcement, where the officers and support staff is the life’s blood of the police department, and the chief of police must depend upon them to succeed in advancing the

department's mission. Even the smallest change in personnel, can have a profound effect upon all its members..." (p.161), and centralization of police dispatch centers create that change.

There are many internal and external influences that lead to dispatch center centralization. As more centers merge, the issues and problems of consolidation become more prevalent. It is difficult to combine centers when there are issues, and "if the right systems aren't in place, profitability is almost impossible" (Swift, 2009, p.52). As the research above reflects, consolidation of dispatch centers can create several problems within in the department, as well as in the community as a whole, which can lead to more negative than positive outcomes.

Section III: Examples of Centralized and Decentralized Dispatch Centers

The following section will discuss several examples of centralized and decentralized dispatch centers. It will look at many different feasibility studies that have been conducted throughout the United States for different departments, and will look at the outcomes and recommendations that professionals have given based on the studies.

A communications center is the nerve center of police, fire, and medical service provision. It is the critical link, the lifeline, between the public and its protectors: the firefighters, paramedics, and police officers (Buracker et al., 2005). Police and emergency service operations revolve around the communications center and its ability to properly receive and transmit information. Tracking of information, request and apparatus is the responsibility of the communications center to effectively provide for the demands of the public and emergency responders. A 9-1-1 operator is the public's first contact with emergency assistance; and can provide information and directions that will save lives (Perdue, 2000).

The process of local governments studying and debating how to reorganize their dispatch centers and their emergency service delivery system is an activity that is consuming hundreds of cities, counties, and states. This process is often one filled with debate, animosity, accusations of power grabs and related unpleasantness between local agencies. Due to this, many agencies are conducting feasibility studies, which are the use of outside consultants to provide a proposal and report on assessment, recommendations, and implementation options that are most fitting for the departments being examined (Linnee & Freeman, 2010). In this section several feasibility studies in different parts of the United States and their outcomes will be explored.

The Minnesota Study

The first study that will be looked at is the ‘Minnesota Study’. This study look at six different Minnesota counties (Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, and Rock), referred to as “SWMN 6”, which solicited proposals from a consulting firm for the execution of a Regional 9-1-1, Dispatch, Radio Study, and Recommendations (Linnee & Freeman, 2010). Based on their in-depth study of the costs, funding, staffing, technologies, workloads, and operational issues present in today’s the SWMN 6 “emergency communications service delivery system”, Linnee and Freeman (2010) of GeoComm encourage the SWMN 6 group and related public safety service providers in the SWMN 6 to envision a new way to deliver these services (p.6-1).

Linnee & Freeman (2010) identify several alternatives to the six counties in their recommendation section. The first alternative they suggest is to keep the dispatch operations for the six counties the same as they are today. By doing this there is no change, and no disruption to people’s lives. Service levels stay at what they are today. It also avoids the political problems of cutting jobs and trying to figure out where a merged dispatch center would be located (p.6-2). However, they also state that it would probably cost considerably more money over the next ten years, especially if the county desires to implement NG 9-1-1, console access to ARMER, CAD, and MDCs, include more dispatcher training and better dispatcher supervision.

The second alternative Linnee & Freeman (2010) offer is to implement “virtual dispatch consolidation.” Under this type of consolidation each of the six dispatch centers could operate physically independently, as they do today, but they would all be using shared E9-1-1 call taking equipment, shared radio console equipment, shared CAD, MDC and mapping equipment such

that they would work just like they are all in the same room (p. 6-2). The benefits of this alternative include that everybody gets to stay where they are now and continue to provide the local services they do today. In addition, some increased capability to handle call spikes and provide coordinated response via shared CAD would be present. This would avoid some of the political problems of cutting jobs and trying to figure out where a merged dispatch center would be located (p. 6-2). A few of the drawbacks of this option would include: no cost savings in local personnel costs. This alternative would not be as effective in doing “team dispatching” as everyone in the same room would be. There would have to be a high reliance on data networking and each individual center would still have to purchase single dispatch center upgraded equipment (Linnee & Freeman, 2010).

The third option would be to merge one, two, or three agencies into one dispatch center. While this action would obtain some of the advantages set forth in a six (or greater) county-merged dispatch center, the member base over which the costs could be spread would be smaller. As such, it may be more difficult to justify such attributes as dedicated supervision and always having at least three dispatch capable staff on duty at a time to deal with flurries of activity (p. 6-3). One of the downfalls of this option is that there may not be enough cost savings to offset the trials and tribulations of going through the process.

The fourth suggested alternative is if one or more of the dispatch centers decide to shut down their dispatch operation and “purchase dispatching services” from another dispatch agency. This is not a very favorable alternative because there is no direct control of operations and related decisions, and only that level of control that one could contractually obtain and enforce

from the seller (p.6-3). Presumably, the purchaser would have to pay all costs related to extending the seller's technology to their county, such as CAD, MDC access, etc.

The final recommendation and ultimately the one that Linnee and Freeman suggest for the SWMN 6 is to merge all six agencies into one jointly owned and managed dispatch center. Linnee and Freeman's (2010) primary reasons for this recommendation are 1) the level of professional dispatching services that could be provided by a staff that was dedicated exclusively to this function, under active supervision, with regular and quality training provided and with stringent quality assurance and control mechanisms in place and under professional executive leadership would far exceed that which any of the individual agencies can provide today and 2) Such a consolidated dispatch center can provide this array of better emergency communications services with higher level equipment, more competently implemented and used, with significantly greater ability to handle spikes in work load at a lower cost than what is being spent for these core services today, and a dramatically lower cost than if these enhanced services and capabilities were to be provided in each of today's six independent dispatch centers (p. 6-4).

Although Linnee and Freeman provide a final recommendation of the consolidation of the six dispatch centers, all of the other factors such as management, staffing, operation, funding, costs, and location must also be considered. Linnee and Freeman provide several suggestions of how to implement the most efficient centralized dispatch center. However, one must keep in mind that this is a study that two people are conducting, and ultimately providing suggestions to six different entities. Linnee and Freeman (2010) project a \$1,319,930 annual operating cost for this six county dispatch center, which would be 24.5 percent less than what is being spent by the six counties separately today (p. 2-3). But they also recognize that some of the potential cost

savings could be reduced for a given county should said county choose to spend money to replace some of the staff time available when there were 9-1-1 dispatchers in their Sheriff's Office to replicate some of the functions that 9-1-1 dispatchers performed when they were there. One must also take into consideration the cost of the feasibility study and the \$2.258 million to build and equip this newly configured six county dispatch center with the appropriate E9-1-1 equipment, CAD system and ARMER radio system control consoles and recording devices (p. 2-3).

The IACP Study: 2003

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) provides educational documents and technical assistance to many law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. With the rising interest of consolidating law enforcement agencies, the IACP designed a unique, two-phase planning approach for consolidation. The phases include an initial one-day intensive retreat for all key decision makers. Following the retreat, if there is consensus to take further steps toward consolidation, a phase-two comprehensive evaluation is undertaken.

While the IACP's two-phase approach is for those wishing to consolidate services, it takes many steps and precautions to ensure that it is the best decision for the agency. IACP (2003) suggests that all too often, jurisdictions considering consolidation rush into spending thousands of dollars to hire consultants to conduct a study and recommend for or against consolidation (p. 4). The step most often missed is that of gauging existing local city and/or county support for consolidation of any kind. If no consensus to move toward consolidation exists, consultant recommendations to consolidate are premature and of little value (IACP Researcher, 2003).

The IACP approach helps jurisdictions gauge if law enforcement personnel, local and county officials, and citizens actually want to proceed with consolidation, and if it is feasible both politically and financially. Phase one of the IACP approach, which is called the ‘retreat model’, helps jurisdictions make preliminary assessments of consolidation potential, determines if key decision makers concur that consolidation is a good or bad idea, and whether consolidation between particular agencies will or will not be cost-effective (IACP Researcher, 2003, p. 4). The retreat approach has proven itself an effective way to examine and evaluate the issues that arise in weighing consolidation.

The retreat model has several key goals and components integrated within it. The key goals of the model include: informing participants of preliminary information on consolidation to allow them to decide if there is sufficient reason to continue dialogue, and to continue to study and evaluate the consolidation option, identify the issues that need to be resolved to make an informed decision about consolidation, and identify the necessary steps that must be taken to successfully accomplish planning and implementation of consolidation (IACP Researcher, 2003, p. 5). The IACP (2003) also suggests that the key components of the retreat include: 1) Concerns and expectations of participants, 2) Facilitator’s overview of consolidation issues, 3) Issues Panel: Two keynote presentations, 4) Breakout group sessions on the identified issues, and 5) Report-out from breakout groups and action plan (p.5).

The next part of the process is that once jurisdictions arrive at consensus to proceed beyond a retreat’s preliminary discussions to a formal feasibility study, then a series of additional steps is called for. These planning and implementation steps are all part of a complete feasibility study. Once a successful retreat and complete feasibility study has been completed the agencies

can move onto the phased transition plan. At this juncture, the consolidating agencies are positioned to take a series of action steps to put the consolidation in place. The order in which tasks are accomplished, and the time provided for each, is the last hurdle. Solid planning at this transitional phase will ensure that both agencies enter into the new agreement in a positive manner (IACP Researcher, 2003, p.13).

Lastly, a process and outcome evaluation of the consolidation must be implemented to parallel the consolidation steps. The IACP (2003) suggests that this evaluation will provide critical information on consolidation progress and allow for course corrections when and if needed (p.13). The consolidation planning team must agree in advance on the objective indicators of consolidation's success, including personal satisfaction indicators. The evaluation plan must allow for these criteria to be documented and measured in both objective and subjective ways (IACP Researcher, 2003).

The IACP worked with several agencies when implementing this approach, two cities in Wisconsin, and a city and county in Illinois. Interestingly, at the time of the study, in all of agencies the consensus was not to pursue consolidation. This goes to show that although there are great models and studies available, that research and assessments must be done to ensure that consolidation is the best answer for a particular agency. The IACP (2003) urges those considering consolidation to avoid simplistic assessments, as consolidation must be viewed in the totality of police services, officer and citizen satisfaction, and the capacity of the new agency to better serve the public and fight crime (p.15). The IACP's model (2003) was designed to facilitate rational and informed decision-making about consolidation, and aid police and their governing bodies in assessing all aspects of partial or complete agency consolidation (p.15).

Borough of Princeton and the Township of Princeton Study

Feasibility studies have been conducted for many agencies in the United States and each one had different proposals and outcomes. Carroll Buracker and Associates conducted a study in 2005 for the Borough of Princeton and the Township of Princeton police departments. In this study, Buracker and Associates provided options of three different dispatch organizational models: 1) separately organized and located dispatch centers, 2) co-located but separately organized dispatch centers, and 3) combined dispatch centers for the two agencies. Buracker and Associates found that there appear to be significant benefits available to Princeton Borough and Princeton Township police departments through the implementation of a combined public safety dispatch model (p. xiv).

Human Contact

As it has been suggested throughout this paper, once agencies decide to consolidate, many changes occur within the department and community. One of the major matters that is directly affected by consolidation is human contact. In Buracker and Associate's study (2005) they suggest that three functions need to be adequately addressed in a joint dispatch center and one of those includes a walk-up function for visitors and/or victims (p. xix). For the walk-up function, in a joint dispatch center, records personnel would provide basic services during the day, Monday through Friday, which would be in addition to their daily duties and work. However, during the evenings and weekends, a direct telephone line to the centralized center would be needed outside the entrance of the center that is no longer staffed. This directly impacts human contact in the effect that visitors and victims no longer have the face-to-face contact, rather they must deal with their issues and problems over a phone. Victims of crime, fires and

medical situations want the 9-1-1 calls answered in a timely manner and very quick service; this could be jeopardized by the elimination of human contact.

Community Services

Not only does the loss of human contact affect citizens with police matters, it also affects visitors who may stop by the police department for information, directions, or help. In their study Buracker and Associates (2005) state that, “Princeton is the home of six National Historic Landmarks, nine historic sites and districts, and Princeton is an academic and tourist community” (p.2). The fact that there is not someone at the police department to directly speak to may prevent visitors from stopping in, or may even create a sense of uneasiness in the event that a visitor has an emergency, exactly what type of help they may receive. Services that people once went to the police department for would no longer be available at that particular department. This may cause citizens to have to travel to obtain services through human contact that used to be available in their own town or city.

One of the primary challenges to consolidation relates to basic human nature and a fear of both loss of control and decrease in responsibility. These fears lead to community services to the public being directly affected by consolidation of a dispatch center. Often times services that were once offered to the public are no longer available in certain jurisdictions. In his study, Buckley suggests that consolidation must also be supported by the public, whom often has become accustomed to a certain perceived level of service (1993). If those services are taken away, this could produce unrest among the citizens and the community.

Departmental Procedures and Administration

A study conducted by the Communications Security, Reliability and Interoperability Council (CSRIC) in 2010 stated that, “personnel issues can be some of the most problematic in any consolidation and require a great deal of thought at the policy level early on in the project” (p.4). When consolidation occurs department personnel and administration can be altered greatly, and could negatively affect the department in many ways. However, the CSRIC study suggests that consolidation offers unique opportunities to create the desired organization, not necessarily the one inherited from previous administrations or one which has resulted because of numerous evolutions of various management styles (2010, p.25). It is also suggested that consolidation has a positive impact on staff training and professionalism, which improves service level overall (CSRIC, 2010). Yet they also note that it is an opportunity that can be both challenging and enlightening as the agencies involved explore how they might collectively improve service levels for their constituencies (CSRIC, 2010).

The success of any consolidation effort is going to be contingent on avoiding any pitfalls. This can be a difficult task when there is talk about altering departmental procedures and administration. For if a department feels as though they are sacrificing any part of their tradition or heritage they may be quick to withdraw (Junell, 1991). According to an April, 2010, survey conducted by the Consolidated Center Directors Network (CCDN), 69% of respondents stated that the largest challenge to consolidation was related to personnel issues such as training, and mingling of different staffs and unions (APCO, 2010, p.1). Some of the disadvantages of utmost concern when discussing consolidation can be in the area of personnel. Some positions will have to be reclassified in order to meet the needs of the new organization. Communication center and

customer standard operating procedures (SOPs) may conflict and cause confusion for command and field personnel. Additionally, each participating agency must agree on common dispatching procedures that will meet the needs of all involved (Perdue, 2000).

The CSRIC's (2010) study relied on interviewing experts who had been involved in successful consolidations to glean lessons learned that produced the richest understanding of the challenges and effective practices each consolidation project required (p.12). Through the interviews the group was able to conclude some common experiences shared by case study participants, which suggest a typical consolidation process including six phases. The phases are: 1) Identification of an Effective Champion, 2) Interest Building, 3) Feasibility Study, 4) Planning Phase, 5) Implementation/Transition Phase, and 6) Post-Consolidation Phase (CSRIC, 2010, p.23).

The CSRIC is in favor of consolidation and makes many suggestions and recommendations for departments, however, they also point out some of the drawbacks that must be considered during consolidation. They suggest that consolidation efforts are often met with seemingly unforeseen challenges, open communications and frequent discussions to identify and address issues of concern will help to alleviate the perceived threats and problems (CSRIC, 2010, p28). In regards to the issue of cost-savings, which is often used in arguments for consolidation, the CSRIC (2010) found that while cost savings are possible, two points are critical. First, not all consolidations result in cost savings. Second, in those scenarios where cost savings are achievable the actual realization of the savings may not occur for several years due to capital and other start-up costs (p. 29).

There are many examples of centralized and decentralized dispatch centers, and several feasibility studies that have been conducted for many agencies. The majority of the recommendations are to consolidate services, however, by the examples above, one can see that there are many obstacles that need to be overcome before agencies decide to consolidate. All of these factors need to be taken into consideration when an agency is trying to ensure that they have and provide an ideal and effective dispatch center.

Section IV: Recommendations for an Ideal Effective Decentralized Dispatch Center

Police department dispatch centers are a vital part in the operation of the department as a whole; they are the link to the community, officers, and other departments. Decentralized dispatch centers are ideal for the majority of police, fire, and EMS departments. Having a dispatch center in a police department allows for 24-hour monitoring of the department and city, they also provide on-site security for the building, amongst many other tasks. Dispatchers are required in departments to provide the maximum practicable efficiency and reliability for transmission and receipt of requests for public safety service. Once a dispatch center becomes centralized, the safety of public safety services and of the citizen's decrease.

It has been suggested throughout this paper that decentralized police dispatch centers are ideal for the majority of police departments and provide the most effective and efficient services. Recall earlier it was stated that a communications center is the nerve center of police, fire, and medical service provision. It is the critical link, the lifeline, between the public and its protectors: the firefighters, paramedics, and police officers (Buracker et al., 2005). Police and emergency service operations revolve around the communications center and its ability to properly receive and transmit information.

Decentralized dispatch centers are able to provide the above services more proficiently than centralized dispatch centers in many different ways. Decentralization is important in maintaining a department's values and traditions. Consolidation would produce a loss of identity, and force officers and other staff to adopt and adjust to the new agency's identity. Along with the identity dilemma, is the loss of face-to-face contact for the department employees and citizens. Froehle (2006) indicated through his findings that it was important to people (customers) to have

their problems or issues taken care of during the first encounter, as they prefer not to have contact with the CSR multiple times to resolve an issue (p.24). A decentralized dispatch center would allow for this to occur.

Another service a decentralized dispatch center can provide is a well-maintained quality administration and leadership staff, which has good management skills and the ability to lead by example. The IACP (2009) suggests that having a strong administration, will aide in a department's professional development. Through professionalism and on-site dispatchers, the department and community have direct access to the deployment of officers, emergency services, and the fire department.

When discussing dispatch centers and their importance of remaining decentralized versus consolidating, it is important for jurisdictions to gauge how law enforcement personnel, local and county officials, and citizens actually want to proceed. They also must take into consideration which method is feasible and best for the department and community both politically and financially (IACP Researcher, 2003). There are many 'unknowns' when centralizing a dispatch center, which suggests that remaining decentralized would yield the most ideal center.

Maintain Human Contact with the Citizens and Community

The world in which public safety communications systems operate has changed over the years and the demands on the systems have increased, however, what has not changed is the need for a highly qualified, well-trained human being at the police department or on the other end of the telephone to answer the call (APCO: Project RETAINS, 2005, p.1). By having a decentralized dispatch center, the department is able to maintain human contact with the citizens and community, which is of great importance.

With all the technology available to us these days, such as e-mail, cell phones and videoconferences, many departments see an opportunity to save money and maybe even run more efficiently, however, if this occurs, personal contact between individuals is lost (Lauer, 2007, p.46). When we cannot visit personally with someone who reports to us, something very important is lost, which is the aspect of human contact. Edward Lawler, director of the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business (as cited in Lauer, 2007), found that the desire for personal human contact is the way that people learned to work and relate to other people (Lauer, p.46). Lauer (2007) suggests that, "e-mail is great and so are cell phones and everything else that is available for us to communicate. But nothing, absolutely nothing, will replace one-on-one meetings. We need each other, and trying to automate personal relationships just doesn't do it" (p.46).

Ivy Hughes (2010) expands on the idea that human contact is important in her article *Constant Connectivity*. Hughes (2010) suggests that even with the expanding importance of social networking, human contact is still critical (p.78). Peter Shankman, founder of Help a Reporter Out, an online resource connecting reporters with stories and sources, (as cited in Hughes, 2010), states, "just because you're networking online doesn't mean you shouldn't be networking in person, everything you do should be networking" (p.78).

Decentralized dispatch centers are able to maintain human contact, which is very important in many respects. Often times, the first contact a citizen has with the police department is through the dispatcher. Therefore, citizens often base their impressions of the department largely on the service received from the dispatcher (Hartline et al., 2000). Human contact is often times decreased in a centralized center, as they use more automated formats in their answering

systems. If a center is centralized, it can be based in another city, when a citizen has a negative experience with the dispatch center, it not only affects their opinion and outlook on the dispatch center, but also on the police department.

Law enforcement and dispatching are service industries, meaning that all who are employed in those fields are dedicated to providing quality service to citizens. In order to provide excellent service, they must build relationships with the public. Jonathan Yates (2008) suggests that, “in all businesses, relationships are important, but for those in the service industry, they are even more critical” (p.25). Maintaining human contact with the citizens and community is a function of dedication, which is much more highly attainable through a decentralized dispatch center.

When communities lose their dispatch centers, not only do they lose certain services and the human contact, but they also lose trust. Citizens realize that they must now rely on technology and on talking to someone who is several miles away, to help them during their most critical moments. The increasing use of new information and communication technologies (ICT) can present several complexities to the services provided by dispatchers, law enforcement, and other emergency services. Thomas Molony conducted a study on African enterprise and discussed the importance of maintaining face-to-face and human contact in all business and non-business applications. Molony (2007) suggests that interpersonal communication is favored over ICT, and is very important in building relationships with others (p. 77). Decentralized dispatch centers represent exactly what Molony is suggesting, they are present in communities and provide the opportunity for citizens to be able to communicate with someone face-to-face.

Although technology is useful and often times necessary, centralized dispatch centers take away the human contact with the citizens and community. An effective decentralized dispatch center maintains human contact, and provides the richest multi-channel medium, face-to-face communication, which engages all the senses and sustains the social relationships within the community. (Urry, 2004, p.120). Due to our highly social nature as humans, it is important to individuals to maintain human or personal contact; decentralized dispatch centers can provide this to both the citizens and the community.

Sustain Public Services that the Dispatch Center Provides to the Community

A police department dispatch center provides many services to the community besides receiving and dispatching calls. Dispatchers talk to and take complaints that come in the front door, take payments for tickets, bills, etc., distribute temporary license plates, give directions, relay pertinent information from teletypes and other administrative messages to officers and emergency personnel, provide on-site security for the city building, among many other services. Dispatchers aggregate consumer and citizen preferences, procure and organize means of service production, and deliver services to constituents (Oakerson & Parks, 2011, p.147). Decisions about the output and service levels are made by the trained dispatch personnel.

Often times dispatchers can handle a call without having to contact an officer, they can answer a citizen's question, or solve the problem instantly. In a centralized dispatch center, these services are lost. A citizen listens to a recording, and ultimately gets put through to a dispatcher who will pass the call off to an officer's squad phone or create a call for the officer. By doing this, it takes the officer away from other duties they must perform, where as in a decentralized

center, the dispatcher would have taken care of the complaint and the officer would be able to tend to their other duties.

A decentralized dispatch center administers provision, and makes public decisions about which goods and services to provide, the quantities of each service to provide, and how to arrange for and monitor the rendering of services (Oakerson & Parks, 2011, p.148). A concern for effectiveness and efficiency in service production dictates a preference, Oakerson and Parks (2011) state that, “multiple provision units are to be preferred over a single large provision unit in order to accommodate multiple communities of interest that occur at various scales” (p.148). This would suggest that decentralized dispatch centers are better able to sustain public services to the community, as dominance by a single provision unit (centralized centers) leads to a production side dominated by large urban bureaucracies, while the presence of a large number of small local governments (decentralized centers) leads to a much more diverse set of production arrangements that includes both large-scale and small-scale producers (Oakerson & Parks, 2011, p.149).

The local public economy dictates the nature of the services they wish to secure, the nature of the communities in which they reside, and the amount of service they wish to receive. In smaller communities, the reduced population density affects both the demand and supply of local public goods and services, meaning that citizens of smaller communities expect that public services be readily available to them. Citizen groups are the principal source of initiative, therefore it is important for police department dispatch centers to sustain the public services that they provide to the community, which is accomplished through a decentralized center.

An ideal and effective dispatch center is one that is decentralized. Through a decentralized center a police department can maintain human contact with the citizens and community, sustain public services that the dispatch center provides, and continue to operate under the same administration while keeping departmental procedures the same. All of the above combined can be achieved through maintaining a decentralized center, and make for an ideal dispatch center.

VI. Summary and Conclusion

The success of a police department dispatch center is something that needs to be addressed on a daily basis, or in formal meetings with the stakeholders of the city and community with their interest in mind. “A law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services dispatch system should be designed, installed, operated, staffed and maintained to provide the maximum practicable efficiency and reliability for transmission and receipt of requests for public safety service. The safety of public safety services providers and the aftercare of customers should be a cornerstone of a responsive public safety dispatch system” (Buracker et al., 2005, p.14). A decentralized dispatch center can provide all of these items in a professional, timely, and experienced manner.

Dispatch centers are a vital piece in all criminal justice organizations and are of great importance to all police officers, departments, emergency personnel, and the communities they serve. Law enforcement agencies, policy makers, and city and county council members must be educated about the research and relevant issues when considering dispatch center retention. It is critical for departments to do an in-depth analysis before making a decision about their dispatch center. Decentralized police dispatch centers are the most effective and efficient, and the best solution to maintain the success and organizational goals for the department and community as a whole.

VII. References:

- 911 Dispatch Services, Inc. (1995). *History of 911*. Dispatch Magazine on-line. Retrieved on July 12, 2010, from <http://www.911dispatch.com/911/history/index.html>
- Allen, G. (Feb., 2005). *Trends in dispatching*. Dispatch Monthly Online. <http://www.911dispatch.com>
- APCO (April, 2010). International Consolidated Communications Center Survey.
- APCO (2005). *Project Retains (Responsive Efforts to Assure Integral Needs in Staffing)*. Retrieved on July 15, 2010, from <http://www.apcointl.com/new/commcenter911/retains-faq.php>
- Boyer, K.K., Howell, R., & Roth, A.V. (2002). E-Services: Operating-strategy—A case study and a method for analyzing operational benefits. *Journal of Operations Management*, 20(2), p.175-188.
- Buckley, S. (March, 1993). *Consolidation of Fire Communications*. S. Daytona, FL: APCO Bulletin.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2004). *Local Police*. Retrieved on July 15, 2010, from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=71>
- Buracker et al. (June, 2005). Feasibility study of a joint police dispatch center for the Borough of Princeton and Township of Princeton. Retrieved on February 22, 2011 from <http://www.princetontwp.org/communications.pdf>
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2004). *Sheriff's Offices*. Retrieved on July 15, 2010, from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=72>
- CALEA Online. (Sept. 2007). Public safety communications accreditation. Retrieved on February 28, 2011, from <http://www.calea.org/Online/CALEAPrograms/Communications/commprograma.htm>
- Christie, B. & de Alberdi, M. (1985). Electronic meetings. In B. Christie (Ed.), *Human factors of information technology in the office*. New York: Wiley, p.97-126.
- Communications Security, Reliability, and Interoperability Council (CSRIC). (October, 2010). *Key findings and effective practices for public safety consolidation*. Retrieved on February 24, 2011 from http://pdf.911dispatch.com.s3.amazonaws.com/csrlic_consolidation_report_oct2010.pdf

- Cook, D.P., Goh, C.-H., & Chung, C.H. (1999). Service typologies: A state-of-the-art survey. *Productions and Operations Management*, 8(3), p.318-338.
- Culnan, M.J., & Markus, M.L. (1987). Information technologies. In F.M. Jablin (Ed.), *Handbook of organizational communication*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, pp.420-443.
- Dispatch Center. (2010). Retrieved on February 28, 2011, from <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=HOMELANDICSGL&parentnav=HOMELANDICSC&navtype=RT>
- Dispatch Magazine Online. (1999). *Facts and figures*. Retrieved on February 28, 2011, from http://www.911dispatch.com/info/fact_figures.html
- Froehle, C. (2006). Service personnel, technology, and their interaction in influencing customer satisfaction. *Decision Sciences*, 37(1), p.5-38. Retrieved March 1, 2011, from ABI/INFORM Global. (Document ID: 1029377591).
- Greenberg, B. (2009). This time it's different. *Brandweek*, 50(10), (March 9, 2009) p.AM2.
- Hartline et al. (April, 2000). Corridors of the influence in the dissemination of customer-oriented strategy to customer contact service employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 64(2), p.35-50.
- Hughes, I. (October, 2010). Constant connectivity. *Entrepreneur*, p.78.
- IACP. (May, 2003). *Consolidating police services: An IACP planning approach*. Retrieved on September 21, 2010, from <http://www.theiacp.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=fU9dovj4EGs%3d&tabid=87>
- International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2009). *Police chief's desk reference*. (2nd ed). McGraw-Hill Learning Solutions.
- Junell, R. (Sept., 1991). "Consolidation versus separate fire and police communication centers." *National Fire Academy*, Emmitsburg, MD.
- Kahai, S. & Cooper, R. (2003). Exploring the core concepts of media richness theory: The impact of cue multiplicity and feedback immediacy on decision quality. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 20(1), p.263-299.
- Kettinger, W.J., Grover, V. (1997). The use of computer-mediated communication in an interorganizational context. *Decision Sciences*, 28(3), p.513-556.
- Lauer, C. (March, 2007). The personal touch. *Modern Healthcare*, 37(12), p.46.
- Lea, M. & Spears, R. (1991). Computer-mediated communication, de-individualization and group decision-making. *International Journal of Machine Studies*, 34(2), p.283-301.

- Linnee, P. & Freeman, R. (February, 2010). SWMN 6 County regional 9-1-1 dispatch, study, and recommendations. *Geo-Comm*. Retrieved on March 15, 2011 from http://www.911.state.mn.us/PDF/SWMN-6_County_Regional_911_Dispatch_Study_and_Recommendations.pdf
- Loomis, S. (2009). Ideals and standards affect 911 center design. Newsletter of the *Academy of Architecture for Justice*. Fall 2009.
- Lukoski, D. (2005). *Dispatch Center Study*. City of Ripon, WI.
- Martins, L.L., Gilson, L.L., & Maynard, M.T. (2004). Virtual teams: What do we know and where do we go from here? *Journal of Management*, 30(6), p.171-186.
- Molony, T. (June, 2007). 'I don't trust the phone; it always lies': Trust and information and communication technologies in Tanzanian micro- and small enterprises. *Informational Technologies and International Development*, 3(4), p. 67-83.
- National Institute of Justice (NIJ). (June, 2008). *Effective police communications systems require new "Governance"*. Retrieved on February 28, 2011 from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/technology/communication/governance.htm>
- National Institute of Justice (NIJ). (November, 2007). *Interoperability overview*. Retrieved on February 28, 2011 from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/technology/communication/interoperability.htm>
- National Institute of Justice (NIJ). (November, 2007). *Communications interoperability basics for practitioners*. Retrieved on February 28, 2011 from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/technology/communication/interoperability-basics.htm>
- National Institute of Justice (NIJ). (2010). *Effective police communications systems require new "Governance"*. Retrieved on March 2, 2011, from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/technology/communication/governance.htm>
- Oakerson, R. & Parks, R. (February, 2011). The study of local public economies: Multi-organizational, multi-level institutional analysis and development. *Policy Studies Journal*, 39(1), p.147-168.
- O'Bryan, B. *Consolidating emergency services dispatch centers, is it successful?* Retrieved on October 14, 2010, from <http://www.emich.edu/cerns/downloads/papers/PoliceStaff/Managing%20the%20Police%20Agency/CONSOLADATING%20EMERGENCY%20SERVICES%20DISPATCH%20CENTERS.pdf>

- Perdue, A. (August, 2000). Feasibility study for consolidating fire and EMS dispatch Guilford County, NC. National Fire Academy. Retrieved on March 15, 2011 from <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/pdf/efop/efo23761.pdf>
- PoliceOne.com News (May 24, 2010). *Winning the war of attrition in your law enforcement career*. Retrieved on March 9, 2011 from <http://www.policeone.com/health-fitness/articles/2066880-Winning-the-war-of-attrition-in-your-law-enforcement-career/>
- PoliceOne.com News (February 6, 2011). *Computer-aided dispatch app comes to iPhone, iPad*. Retrieved on February 12, 2011 from http://www.policeone.com/pc_print.asp?vid=3296921
- Spears, R. & Lea, M. (1992). Social influence and the influence of the 'social' in computer-mediated communication. In M. Lea (Ed.), *Contexts of computer-mediated communication*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.30-65.
- Stojkovic et al. (2008). *Criminal justice organizations: Administration and management*. (4th ed.). Wadsworth: Belmont, CA.
- Swift, M. (2009). What's Next: As the economy stabilizes (we hope), the best advisors are priming their practices for growth. Here's what they're doing. *Financial Planning*, 39(9), pp.50. Retrieved March 7, 2011, from ABI/INFORM Global. (Document ID: 1850914531).
- Taylor, M., Gardner, V., & McCombs, B. (August, 2005). Staffing and retention in public safety communication centers: A national study. Retrieved on February 22, 2011, from <http://www.911trainer.com/docs/APCO%20Project%20Retains.pdf>
- The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO). Communications center consolidations considerations. Retrieved on February 22, 2011, from http://www.apcointl.org/new/commcenter911/downloads/CCC_Checklist_FINAL.pdf
- Urry, J. (2004). Small worlds and the new "social physics." *Global Networks*, 4(2), p.109-130.
- U.S. Department of Justice: Office of Justice Programs. (August, 1994). *Understanding community policing: A framework for action*. Retrieved on February 22, 2011, from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/commp.pdf>
- Watson, S. (October 6, 2009). 911 centers get calls to merge. *All Business*. Retrieved on October 14, 2010, from <http://www.allbusiness.com/government/government-bodies-offices-regional-local/13151567-1.html>
- Yates, J. (December, 2008). The importance of building relationships. *New Hampshire Business Review*, 30(26), p. 25.