

# The challenges of moving into management

## *A survey of Canadian police officers*

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Middle managers, particularly front-line supervisors, play a challenging and important role in Canadian policing. Their primary responsibility is to balance the needs of upper management with those of front-line officers.

A number of factors can contribute to the difficulty of this already formidable task, including the fact that: (1) the concerns, expectations and interests of these two different groups are often in conflict; (2) many middle managers are in their first managerial position, which often requires a transition period to learn effective management, supervision and leadership skills; and (3) middle managers almost exclusively have been promoted from within the ranks, which can potentially lead to role conflict and cause relationship stress when they are put in charge of peers.

Considering the impact that good management/supervision can have on a police agency and its officers, overcoming the challenges of providing effective management/supervision is extremely important. Most police scholars believe that police reform and organizational renewal is virtually impossible without the involvement of middle managers.

There is also growing evidence that the "style" of police management/supervision directly influences the way subordinates behave (good or bad behaviour depending on the example set). The role of effective management in reducing police misconduct and corruption is also well documented and supported by studies from around the world.

Sound police management is even more important now than in the past. Canadian police agencies are currently undergoing (or will soon undergo) change on multiple fronts which will have clear implications for police management. The following issues are most relevant:

(1) A large number of senior police officers are expected to retire in the near future, resulting in many promotional opportunities for management positions. While beneficial for those competing for promotion, this has



the potential for long-lasting negative effects if systems are not in place to maximize the chances of the right people being promoted and if credible leadership, supervision and management training are not provided.

(2) Canadian police agencies will, or already are, experiencing a massive hiring period, which will result in many new and inexperienced officers working the front-line. This will pose challenges for police managers/supervisors who must oversee these new recruits and raises important questions that need to be resolved (e.g., how will having so many new employees working together impact their professional development?).

(3) The profile of the new police recruit in Canada is also changing. Today's recruit is older, better educated and comes to the job with more diverse life experiences. They will most likely expect more from their managers (e.g., with respect to better management practices) and from the job (e.g., with respect to greater personal fulfillment through work).

### The current study

Despite its importance, relatively little is known about the role of middle management/supervision in Canadian policing. To address this gap we surveyed Canadian police officers about their views on various management issues. Three hundred and twenty-eight male and female officers of varying age, years of service and rank were given surveys dealing with topics related to management, supervision and leadership. For the purposes of this study, the ranks of corporal, sergeant and staff sergeant

Table 1: Survey results

STATEMENT	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE
Good management is important for the achievement of your service's goals & objectives.	86.9	7.0	6.1
Good management is important to you in fulfilling your daily policing responsibilities.	81.0	8.8	10.0
Most police managers have been well trained.	34.4	21.3	43.8
Most police managers you have worked for have been effective.	52.8	18.6	28.7
In your experience, most supervisors or managers make the transition from the "rank and file" to middle management well.	58.5	27.1	13.7
Promotion to a management position is sought after by many officers in your service.	82.6	7.6	9.4
The promotional process in your service is fair and well understood.	32.9	17.7	49.4
The promotional process in your service results in capable, competent people being promoted.	33.8	16.5	49.7

were considered to be the supervisors/middle managers in question as appropriate to each responding officer's particular police service.

The major themes were the role and effectiveness of police management/supervision, the promotional process and availability and adequacy of training.

Table 2: Survey results

STATEMENT	FREQUENCY	%
To you, what are some of the challenges faced by officers moving from the 'rank and file' into management positions?		
Lack of managerial training/experience	157	48.0%
Experiencing role conflict/confusion	139	42.5%
Difficulty managing human resources	39	11.9%
Disciplinary discretion	36	11.0%
Lack of departmental support	36	11.0%
Which is most necessary for success as a police manager		
Front-line experience	260	79.3%
Being able to motivate others	192	58.5%
Being respected by fellow officers	182	55.5%
Being a good role model	160	48.8%
Management training	92	28.0%
When they made the transition into management well, which of the following contributed to their success?		
Personal Maturity	204	62.2%
Prior career experience provided good preparation	187	57.0%
Comfortable being in charge of friends and peers	113	34.5%
Able to separate self from previous role	94	28.7%
Clear role expectations for new position	68	20.7%
3 things about the <i>most effective</i> police supervisor that set them apart.		
Professionalism	167	51.1%
Interpersonal skills	151	46.2%
Managerial training/experience	146	44.6%
Authoritative	124	37.9%
Communication skills	107	32.7%
When they <i>did not</i> make the transition into management well, which of the following contributed to their lack of success?		
Lack of personal maturity	150	45.7%
Prior career experience did not provide good preparation	114	34.8%
Promoted too early in career	109	33.2%
Lack of previous management/leadership experience	104	31.7%
Uncomfortable being in charge of friends and peers	88	26.8%
3 things about the <i>least effective</i> police supervisor that set them apart.		
Lacks authoritative skills	162	49.5%
Unprofessional	147	45.0%
Lacks managerial training/experience	110	33.6%
lacks interpersonal skills	86	26.3%
Poor communicator	78	23.9%
In your opinion, most <i>common</i> mistake new supervisors make is:		
Experiencing role conflict/confusion	125	38.2%
Disciplinary discretion	73	22.3%
Temptation to micromanage	31	9.5%
Lack of managerial training/experience	28	8.6%
Change within the department	23	7.0%
In your opinion, the most <i>serious</i> mistake new supervisors make is:		
Disciplinary discretion	84	25.7%
Experiencing role conflict/confusion	68	20.8%
Lack of managerial training/experience	35	10.7%
Difficulty making decisions	32	9.8%
Difficulty managing human resources	29	8.9%

The survey was sent to Canadian police agencies who distributed it to their members. An attempt was made to ensure that respondent agencies would be broadly representative of the Canadian police community as a whole (taking into account the size, location and type of agency). To ensure an adequate sample size, 450 surveys were distributed to 22 police services across the country. The response rate was 72.88 per cent (328).

### Results

Most officers believed sound police management is very important for achieving the goals and objectives of their agency as a whole and for fulfilling their daily policing responsibilities. When queried as to why, respondents believed (amongst other things) it ensures that public trust in the service is maintained (68 per cent), an agency's goals and objectives are achieved (60.1 per cent) and good employee morale is preserved (53.4 per cent). While most respondents did not feel police managers are adequately trained, they did feel managers they worked with were effective and transitioned well from their former rank.

### Survey results

There was little agreement amongst respondents about the key challenges new managers/supervisors faced but more agreement when they were asked about factors relating to effective managers/supervisors. The majority indicated front-line experience is the most

important criteria for success (79.3 per cent), followed by an ability to motivate others (58.5 per cent) and showing respect to fellow officers (55.5 per cent).

When asked what factors contribute to a smooth transition into management, the most common response was personal maturity (62.2 per cent), followed by relevant career experience (57.0 per cent) and an ability to feel comfortable supervising peers (34.5 per cent). The top three characteristics cited which set effective police supervisors apart from their less effective peers are professionalism (51.1 per cent), interpersonal skills (46.2 per cent) and managerial training/education/experience (44.6 per cent).

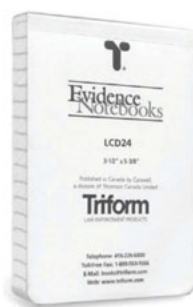
When asked what factors contribute to problematic promotions, the most common response was lack of personal maturity (45.7 per cent), followed by a lack of relevant career experience (34.8 per cent) and being promoted too early (33.2 per cent). The top three characteristics setting ineffective police supervisors apart are a lack of: authoritative skills (49.5 per cent), professionalism (45.0 per cent) and managerial training/education/experience (33.6 per cent).

Respondents raised role conflict most often (38.2 per cent) when asked about new managers'/supervisors' most common mistakes, followed by inappropriate use of disciplinary discretion (22.3 per cent) and a tendency to micromanage (9.5 per cent). The most common serious mistakes cited were inappropriate use



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of disciplinary discretion (25.7 per cent), role conflict (20.8 per cent) and lack of managerial training/ education/experience (10.7 per cent).

Most respondents agreed that many officers sought promotions, most commonly for increased pay (61.0 per cent), ambition (44.8 per cent) and a better pension (39.9 per cent). Results also indicate that many officers felt their agency's promotional process was unfair and not well understood and did not believe it resulted in capable people being promoted.

Most officers (56.7 per cent) indicated that their agency trains officers who have been promoted but few appear to provide any on-going mentoring or training to managers. There also appears to be a lack of pre-promotional training or mentoring to prepare officers for possible future management responsibilities. These findings likely explain the fact that most respondents felt their agency does not adequately prepare officers for promotion to middle management positions or allow them to develop to their full potential.

### Discussion

Canadian police organizations are contending with pressures such as the large-scale retirement of senior officers that reinforce the need for management and supervision of the highest calibre. The next five years will see an unprecedented influx of new police officers and newly-promoted middle managers. We believe the current study can help inform Canadian police agencies during this challenging transition period. The following implications

Table 3: Survey results

STATEMENT	YES	NO
Does your service provide specific management training to officers about to be promoted or newly promoted?	56.7	42.1
Does your service have any form of on-going mentoring or other training specifically for new managers?	21.6	72.9
Does your service conduct pre-promotional training, mentoring, or other development of officers to prepare them for possible future management responsibilities?	36.3	62.5
In your opinion, does your service adequately prepare officers for promotion to middle management ranks?	26.8	72.6
In general, is your service effective at developing the full potential of its officers?	18.6	80.5

may be particularly important:

1. The survey results present a picture of the ideal manager/supervisor. An effective manager has front-line experience, can motivate others, respects their fellow officers and is a good role model for subordinates. They are mature, professional, have good interpersonal and communication skills and have received appropriate training. Instead of experiencing role conflict, they can separate themselves from those they supervise and feel comfortable being in charge of peers. They use their disciplinary discretion appropriately and avoid micromanaging situations.
2. If future research demonstrates that these criteria do relate to managerial/supervision

effectiveness, this may allow agencies to select candidates for promotion that would perform in a manner superior to others. Basing promotions on these criteria might be useful for reducing the feelings of unfairness and confusion that officers appear to have towards current promotional practices and may increase the probability that capable people are promoted into management positions.

3. Identifying effective management/supervision criteria will also positively impact training, pre- and post-promotion. It is important to note that, when asked to list the criteria that characterize effective managers/supervisors, respondents did not list irreversible personal characteristics or rigid personality traits but rather specific skills sets or areas of knowledge that can be altered through training. The common/serious mistakes of new managers they identified can also be used to establish specific training objectives.

### Conclusion

Clearly the survey results simply reflect the opinions of police officers and it is important to stress that their views may be wrong (e.g., a view that adequate training opportunities do not exist does not mean this is necessarily true). While such views are important in their own right, it's important to also study these issues in a more direct, objective and systematic fashion (e.g., by conducting formal reviews of training opportunities).

It is also important to note that survey results typically lack the richness needed to gain a deep understanding of the issues of interest (e.g., while communication skills may indeed be important for effective management/supervision, it isn't clear from the survey what specific skills are important). Thus, it will also be important to follow up this research with one-on-one interviews with officers (read a summary of their comments in next month's issue).

Despite these limitations, we believe the study results emphasize the importance of middle management in Canadian police agencies. They suggest ways of ensuring that the right people are selected for these positions and trained in such a way that they can reach their full potential. Steps taken to improve the quality of middle managers, whether through improved promotional systems or more credible leadership and management training, will necessarily and positively influence the long-term health and viability of police organizations throughout Canada.

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