



## ARCHIVED - Archiving Content

### Archived Content

Information identified as archived is provided for reference, research or recordkeeping purposes. It is not subject to the Government of Canada Web Standards and has not been altered or updated since it was archived. Please contact us to request a format other than those available.

## ARCHIVÉE - Contenu archivé

### Contenu archivé

L'information dont il est indiqué qu'elle est archivée est fournie à des fins de référence, de recherche ou de tenue de documents. Elle n'est pas assujettie aux normes Web du gouvernement du Canada et elle n'a pas été modifiée ou mise à jour depuis son archivage. Pour obtenir cette information dans un autre format, veuillez communiquer avec nous.

This document is archival in nature and is intended for those who wish to consult archival documents made available from the collection of Public Safety Canada.

Some of these documents are available in only one official language. Translation, to be provided by Public Safety Canada, is available upon request.

Le présent document a une valeur archivistique et fait partie des documents d'archives rendus disponibles par Sécurité publique Canada à ceux qui souhaitent consulter ces documents issus de sa collection.

Certains de ces documents ne sont disponibles que dans une langue officielle. Sécurité publique Canada fournira une traduction sur demande.

Analyzing Police Practices and Innovations: A SWOT Analysis of CompStat

November 16, 2009

By: Jon Markus

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Police agencies are constantly searching for innovative techniques and strategies in terms of crime reduction and community safety. Yet many of them typically do not think of incorporating business principles when developing programs and initiatives. This paper will explore some of the advantages and disadvantages of CompStat; a relatively new policing strategy that incorporates performance measurement practices shared by many private organizations.

## **2.0 WHAT IS COMPSTAT?**

CompStat is a management strategy originally developed by the New York Police Department (NYPD) in the mid 1990's to reduce crime at a time when the crime rate was at an all time high. Short for "Computer Statistics" or "Comparative Statistics", CompStat was introduced by the NYPD under the leadership of then Police Commissioner William Bratton and his Deputy Commissioner Jack Maple.<sup>1</sup> It is now used by hundreds of police agencies across North America as an effective crime fighting tool.

It is not a computer program as many people originally thought, however, a variety of computer applications are used in the process. These programs include department record management systems (RMS), Excel, and ArcGIS (or other geographic information systems). All of these are used interactively to capture data, analyze the results, and present the findings at weekly and monthly meetings where the information is shared and criminal activity is scrutinized by the chief and deputy chiefs.

CompStat is really a performance measurement tool to ensure that every division within the organization is working at its optimum capacity. Though there are many variations the basic concept is as follows:

1. Accurate and Timely Intelligence: Know what is happening.
2. Effective Tactics: Have a plan.
3. Rapid Deployment: Do it quickly.
4. Relentless Follow-up and Assessment: If it works, do more. If not, do something else.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Silverman, 1999; p. 99

<sup>2</sup> Godown, 2009

The CompStat Strategy is also a problem solving tool that is similar to processes in other fields such as the Scientific Method, the Issue Management Process used in business, and the Planning Process used by city planners. See below:

<b>Scientific Method</b>	<b>Planning Process</b>	<b>Issue Management Process</b>
Ask a Question	Identify the Problem	Issue Identification
Do Background Research	Design Alternatives or Courses of Action	Issue Analysis
Construct a Hypothesis	Compare Consequences and Select an Alternative	Option Generation, Evaluation and Selection
Test Your Hypothesis by Doing an Experiment	Develop Plan of Action and Implement Alternative	Program Design and Implementation
Analyze Your Data and Draw a Conclusion	Maintain and Review on Current and Up-to-date Basis <sup>3</sup>	Assessment of Results and Continuous Improvement <sup>4</sup>
Communicate Your Results <sup>5</sup>		

What makes CompStat unique is the accountability aspect and the consistency of this accountability on an ongoing basis. Commanders (or inspectors in Saskatoon) are often put on the “hot seat” during CompStat meetings and must answer tough questions posed by the chief or deputy chief; and they must have answers.

- Are your goals being met?
- Why is crime up in your area?
- What’s working (not working)?
- What are you doing about it?

In many cases, it’s not the fact that there is an increase in crime in a certain area but the fact that nothing’s being done about it that raises concerns.

### **3.0 SWOT ANALYSIS**

There are many valid arguments both for and against the use of the CompStat process as an effective, long-term, management tool. The best way to illustrate the CompStat paradigm is by the use of a SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats); not to be confused with the other SWAT acronym commonly used in law enforcement! Typically SWOT is used to assess a particular organization, whether it is a small business, a large corporation, or a certain section or unit within a larger organization; and it is not generally used to assess a

<sup>3</sup> Hodge, 1991; p. 171

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence, A. T. & Webber, J., 2008; p. 37

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.sciencebuddies.org/mentoring/project\\_scientific\\_method.shtml](http://www.sciencebuddies.org/mentoring/project_scientific_method.shtml)

management tool or process. As well, this analysis will address the CompStat process as the tool itself and not one particular program implemented in a police agency, although, examples may be drawn from certain agencies.

### **3.1 Strengths**

#### Use of Technology

Many technical innovations have been developed in recent years that allow police agencies to access intelligence in a timely manner, and it is crucial for the CompStat process that this information is able to be analyzed and presented so that an efficient and effective response can be made. Many police agencies use their in-house RMS to capture the relevant information and analyze it in a spreadsheet format. The use of geographic information systems has recently afforded many police agencies the luxury of analyzing real-time data in terms of space and time (spatial and temporal). In addition to crime statistics, other civic information such as zoning designations, housing type, park locations, and demographic information such as age, sex, and income can all be shown in various ways on the map as well. Data has been collected by police agencies for many years but by the time this information is in a ready to use format, it is too late to establish trends or develop effective operational plans to prevent undesirable activity from developing into a major problem.

#### Geographic Accountability

Another strength of CompStat deals with the geographic accountability aspect. The city is divided up into geographic areas (three in Saskatoon) with an inspector or commander in charge of each. This person is accountable for the criminal activity occurring in their area and must answer to the deputy chief regarding steps to be taken to address the problems. This geographic accountability model is beneficial for the internal organization as well as the public as a whole. It acts as a humbling experience for the commanders whose areas experience an increase of criminal activity. The strategy of having one person held accountable (in the end) provides incentive for the commander to motivate his/her team to work that much harder.

### Information Sharing

Arguably one of the most important aspects of the CompStat process is the information sharing among officers and divisions within police agencies. In Saskatoon, for example, reports are produced on a daily, weekly, and 4-week basis and set out to everyone who's involved in the CompStat program. Originally they were sent to the executive officers and those in charge of the divisions but the list of recipients is constantly growing due to the volume and quality of information being distributed. Apart from the reports themselves, CompStat meetings are held every 4-weeks and are attended by all of the divisional inspectors as well as their staff sergeants and sergeants who make up the frontline supervisors who carry out the various operational plans and investigations.

### Team Building

CompStat acts as an excellent team-building tool as members can share in the success when objectives are met and the various sections or units work together to mitigate specific problems that arise. The meetings can also be a very trying experience for members of the command staff when their goals or targets are not met. This is when members of certain units, sections, or divisions pull together and come up with a game winning strategy to address the issues and develop solutions.

## **3.2 Weaknesses**

Despite the critical acclaim CompStat has experienced in its many variations across North America, there are weaknesses to the process in its basic form. As a result, there have been modifications to the original CompStat process in an attempt to overcome these weaknesses and tailor it to fit in with local police communities, programs, and cultures.

### Quantifiable Indicators

Many police agencies equate the success of their CompStat program and policing strategies with the reduction of crime statistics. Problems arise when the focus on the hard statistics and numbers detracts from the quality of work being done. This has been compared to Total Quality Management (TQM) practices that originated in engineering field.

“In practice, according to TQM, outcome data create fear by means of a “numbers game.” To hound officers to make more arrests, for example, may not only lead to low-quality arrests but can also depress morale. With an emphasis on numerical productivity, quality of performance in an organization declines, and so does motivation.”<sup>6</sup>

There is also the existence of ethical issues when certain commanders focus too narrowly on the reduction of crime numbers. In New York, for example, there have been at least five police commanders accused of reclassifying crimes to improve their statistics. “The NYPD had reached a point where some commanders were forced to falsify stats in order to maintain a continued reduction in crime.”<sup>7</sup>

### Shift of Authority

There has been shift of authority from front-line officers (patrol) to middle management that reinforces the paramilitary style of policing that has traditionally characterized many police departments. Other recent policing strategies such as community policing and problem-oriented policing (POP) have contributed to the “decentralization of command” or “debureaucratization”.

“They promoted the professionalization of the rank-and-file, who – equipped with the necessary training, education, and motivation to solve problems – are supposed to use their best judgment to make important decisions about how to solve problems and to serve the neighbourhoods to which they are assigned.”<sup>8</sup>

### Top-Down Approach

The traditional CompStat model echoes a top-down approach through various levels of authority. Here the manager or commander is strongly motivated to achieve his or her goals (in this case crime reduction) and will summon their underlings to “demand higher (targeted) productivity. This mentality is subsequently forced down through the ranks to the patrol officer who may be forced to act subservient to a rationale they are not expected to share. As a result, “they may become embittered and take out their frustrations on citizens.” (Toch and Grant, 2005) This idea is listed as a weakness of the basic CompStat model; however, it may also be listed as a threat that may be overcome with certain modifications of the model.

---

<sup>6</sup> Toch, Grant, 2005; p. 266

<sup>7</sup> same

<sup>8</sup> Weisburd, Mastrofski, Willis, and Greenspan, 2006; p. 290

### **3.3 Opportunities**

When conducting a typical SWOT Analysis, the strengths and weaknesses represent internal assessments of the subject (organization or process) while the opportunities and threats represent the external assessment. Keeping in mind that we are dealing with a process within an organization, there may be crossovers between the internal and external factors. Here, the external factors include influences outside the organization (beyond it's control) as well as within the organization.

#### Alternative Sources for Information

Perhaps the most important feature of the CompStat model is accurate and timely intelligence. Many police agencies rely on their in-house RMS (records management systems) to gather necessary information in a timely manner. However, there are many other data sources that are, for the most part, overlooked. Granted these do not form the basis of the reports or meetings but may contain crucial information that aids the development of effective tactics and efficient operational plans. Some of these include:

- Direct Observation;
- Surveys;
- Official Reports;
- Calls for Service;
- Officer Experience;
- Community Input;
- Interviews;
- Informants;
- Elected Representatives;
- Prisoner Debriefings; and,
- Other Agencies<sup>9</sup>

#### Tactical, Strategic, and Operational Analysis

There are basically three types of analysis used in the CompStat process to support police operations. These are included in the International Association of Chiefs of Police Model Policy (Haley, 1996):

---

<sup>9</sup> [www.jonmshaneassociates.com](http://www.jonmshaneassociates.com)



- *Tactical Analysis* - refers to case specific information provided to front line officers and investigators in order to achieve short term objectives. It provides support for ongoing operations and addressing calls for service in a timely manner;
- *Operational Analysis* - identifies priority areas stemming from problems that have occurred in specific areas of a city over a longer period of time, usually weeks or months. This type of analysis provides information to commanders for the allocation of resources to target crime reduction within a geographical area; and,
- *Strategic Analysis* - is more future-oriented and proactive. It helps police executives and senior management identify broad issues and set priorities which impact the organization as a whole. Strategic analysis not only identifies spatial and temporal trends but also addresses the questions of what does it mean? Is there a threat to property; to public safety? What impact does it have on policing in Saskatoon and on the community as a whole? And what can we do as a police service to mitigate that threat or eliminate it altogether?

#### Access to Other Civic and Regional Information and Resources

Given the fact that police agencies are civic departments they have access to a plethora of resources that can all be mapped and analyzed to identify trends and support ongoing investigations. These include planning and development information such as land use, zoning, property ownership, locations of parks and schools, demographics, health data, real estate, etc. These can all be used to identify and analyze areas of the city where places are most vulnerable and where people are subject to a lifestyle of criminal activity.

#### Transferable Management Strategy

The concept of the CompStat management strategy is deceptively simple; which is why the strategy can be easily transferred to other government and private organizations. New York City's Corrections Department, for example, introduced their own version in 1996 following the surging popularity of the NYPD model. Their version, named TEAMS (Total Efficiency Accountability Management System), has been credited with a dramatic reduction in inmate

violence. “Between 1995 and 1999, stabbings and slashing declined from 1093 to 70”<sup>10</sup>. TEAMS has evolved to include more than just jail violence and expanded to include almost 600 performance indicators including religious service attendance, maintenance work orders, health care, overtime, compliance with food service regulations, completed searches conducted, and personnel performance.<sup>11</sup>

Principles of CompStat are able to be used in the private sector as well. When Jack Welch was elected Chairman and CEO of General Electric (GE), revenues were \$ 27 billion. The company did \$129 billion in sales in 2000 after his transformation from an aging industrial manufacturer into a diverse global juggernaut.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.4 Threats**

One of the unique things about the Compstat strategy is it’s flexibility to adapt to changing situations and turn the threats into opportunities. More often than not, these may be opportunities to improve the CompStat process and tailor it to fit the needs of the organization.

#### Personnel Changes and Attitudes

There is generally a high turnover rate in many sections and units within most police agencies. Promotions and transfers tend to occur on a constant basis. On one hand it is good to have many officers trained in the many facets of policing, but on the other hand there tends to be a lot of time and resources spent on training officers entering new positions. In addition to the training aspect the new officers as frontline managers or supervisors may not “buy in” to the CompStat philosophy and ideas. The sense of fear of being on the hot seat may deter people from seeking management positions. To address this, Jack Maple, one of the founders of CompStat with the NYPD remarks:

“Nobody ever got in trouble because crime numbers on their watch went up. I designed the process knowing that an organization as large as the NYPD never gets to

---

<sup>10</sup> Silverman, 2006; p. 276

<sup>11</sup> same

<sup>12</sup> Wilson, 2006; p. 7

Nirvana. Trouble arose only if the commanders didn't know why the numbers were up or didn't have a plan to address the problem.”<sup>13</sup>

### Legislative Changes and Relationship with Judicial System

Legislation may pose threats as well as opportunities for the CompStat strategy. There is a consistent attitude that the police are playing a ‘catch and release’ game with the criminals; that the police keep arresting the same people for the same crimes. In order for CompStat to work in its strictest form, there must be an understanding that the police and judicial system work together to address criminal activity and that the criminals are sentenced accordingly. Out of 310,000 convictions in 2002-03 only 4,281 offenders were sentenced to a federal prison.<sup>14</sup> It is, however, beyond the scope of this discussion to delve into details regarding sentencing issues in Canada.

### Community Problems vs. Crime Problems

The traditional model of the CompStat strategy deals with the system as a “liability system” where someone is personally motivated to get the job done.<sup>15</sup> Here, one may question the effectiveness of targeted enforcement in the same area and arresting the same people over and over again. In this model, “no one is encouraged to seek out “not-yet-invented alternatives”. Advocates of community policing are at odds with the CompStat model and operate with the assumption that “community problems are not necessarily crime problems” (Toch and Grant, 2005).<sup>16</sup> This misinterpretation of the circumstances leading to criminal activity may, in fact, produce opportunities for officers to work with community partners to mitigate some of the underlying conditions and adverse situations that create criminal environments or produce offenders.<sup>17</sup>

“One of the ideas behind community policing is to empower the street-level cop to come up with solutions to a neighbourhood’s crime problems. When CompStat is focused on hard numbers, however, it shifts that authority away from the street cop and onto the precinct commanders in the CompStat war room.”<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Weisburd et al, 2006; p. 287

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.justicemonitor.ca/repeatoffenders.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Toch and Grant, 2005; p. 262

<sup>16</sup> Toch and Grant, 2005; p. 263

<sup>17</sup> same

<sup>18</sup> Toch and Grant, 2005; p. 259

## Reliance on Technology

There have been many technological innovations in recent years; most of which have made life easier for many people. They have access to more information and are able to retrieve that information almost instantaneously. However, with this overwhelming idea of ‘information at your fingertips’ it is easy to get carried away and rely on it too much. Chan (2003) notes that this reliance on new technologies has contributed to the “deskilling” of police officers:

“...police have become heavily reliant on information technology for information, and some are not comfortable with this situation. To these officers, reliance on technology has meant that police are no longer carrying knowledge in their heads, leading to the loss of ‘local knowledge’ and the neglect of traditional hands-on intelligence gathering.”<sup>19</sup>

He further explains the “general mistrust of computerized information and resentment against data collection for internal risk management and external accountability purposes”. Some police agencies use calls for service data which may not accurately reflect criminal activity in an area. For example, someone may call the police to come and speak with them at their home regarding a theft that occurred at their office which is downtown. Here, the theft would show up in their suburban neighbourhood because that’s where the officer was dispatched to. As mentioned earlier, the advances in technology have certainly revolutionized policing in terms of data analysis and presentation; the challenge is to understand the various technologies so that they may be used to attain the objectives originally intended.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Though ideas of geographic accountability and statistical analysis are relatively new to the law enforcement field; many organizations in the private sector have employed these types of processes for many years. The CompStat model is much like an ongoing SWOT Analysis in terms of identifying the agency’s strengths and weaknesses within the department and addressing the opportunities and threats outside the department. Further research and analysis of a CompStat program in a particular agency may greatly benefit the organization. The challenge for any police agency is to tailor the strategy to fit the goals and objectives of the local community.

---

<sup>19</sup> Chan, 2003; p. 668

## **Bibliography**

Silverman, E.B.; (1999). NYPD Battles Crime; Boston; Northeastern University Press

Godown, J. (2009, August). The CompStat Process: Four Principles for Managing Crime Reduction. *The Police Chief*. International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Shane, Jon M; (website). CompStat Process: Crime Control Strategy;  
(<http://www.jonmshaneassociates.com/>)

Science Buddies website;  
([http://www.sciencebuddies.org/mentoring/project\\_scientific\\_method.shtml](http://www.sciencebuddies.org/mentoring/project_scientific_method.shtml))

Haley, D. A. (1996). Crime Analysis: Concepts and Issue Paper. Alexandria, VA: IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Centre.

Hodge, Gerald (1991). Planning Canadian Communities: An Introduction to the Principles, Practice, and Participants (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.); Scarborough, ON; Nelson Canada.

Lawrence, A. T. & Weber, J. (2008). Business and Society: Stakeholders, Ethics, Public Policy (12<sup>th</sup> ed.); New York, NY; McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Silverman, Eli B. (2006). CompStat's Innovation. In David Weisburd & Anthony A. Braga (Eds.), Police Innovations: Contrasting Perspectives (pp. 267-283). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Weisburd, D., Mastrofski, S. D., Willis, J. J., Greenspan, R. (2006). Changing Everything so that Everything can Remain the Same: CompStat and American Policing. In David Weisburd & Anthony A. Braga (Eds.), Police Innovations: Contrasting Perspectives (pp. 284-301). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Toch, H. and Grant, J. D., (2005). Police as Problem Solvers (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.); Washington, DC; American Psychological Association.

Wilson, Royce; (2006). The Viability of Employing Private Business Strategies in a Law Enforcement Environment. Florida Department of Law Enforcement website.  
(<http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/getdoc/cedb637a-a083-4825-9b9e-0cea1671fe18/Wilson,-Royce-paper.aspx>)