

Effective Command Structure for Bristol Township Police Department

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Class #277

Philadelphia, PA

Effective Command Structure for the Bristol Township Police Department

Problem:

Bristol Township Police Department is the primary law enforcement agency for the Township Of Bristol. Bristol Township is comprised of 73,000 residents and covers an area of 17 square miles. The department is staffed by 76 full time sworn personnel and 12 civilian personnel.

The department's current organizational structure is comprised of a chief of police, four lieutenants and seven sergeants. The schedule of the department is a rather unique 4-day rotation with each workday consisting of 8.5 hours. This translates into each sergeant supervising a shift of as many as 14 officers. This exceeds most accepted measures of ideal span of control.

The flat organizational model of the Bristol Township Police Department creates a void in strategic planning and progressive innovation. This is evidenced by outdated and outmoded policies and a lack of internal reinforcement of policies and procedures. This staff study will explore the problems with the current organizational structure and present alternatives to improve overall supervision and further departmental advancement.

Assumptions:

1. The Bristol Township Police Department is currently staffed with 76 sworn officers and this amount will not increase substantially in the future
2. The department has a total payroll budget of \$5.3 million and will not increase substantially in the future (except negotiated contractual increases)
3. Current civilian staffing level of ten will not increase.
4. Current specializations within the department will need to be maintained
5. Para military rank structure is currently present. This is due to Township charter and civil service regulations and will be need to be retained.

Facts:

1. Bristol Township Civil Service regulations allow for the ranks of chief, captain, lieutenant, sergeant, detective and officer
2. The department currently has active ranks of chief, lieutenant, sergeant, detective and officer (see *Annex A* for current organizational diagram).
3. The department currently has four divisions each led by a lieutenant. They are patrol, administration, investigations and special investigations.
4. Departmental policy dates back to 1968 and is significantly outdated and obsolete
5. Bristol Township has no internal personnel/human resources department. These functions fall onto sworn police personnel.
6. The department expends approximately 1 million dollars in sworn personnel overtime

Discussion:

Police departments are as diverse as the communities they serve. A “one size fits all” approach to organizational structure is impractical. Each department needs to critically examine not only how efficiently they are achieving their mission, but how effectively as well. While the results of a poorly organized police department may not be immediately apparent, departments who blindly follow the latest trends and fads in departmental structure will find that a lack of effective structure can be crippling in the future (Swanson, Territo and Taylor, 2005). It is therefore helpful to consider the multiple models in police organization and management over the past decades when examining organizational design. By doing such, one can recognize the evolution of police organizational structure and recognize the strengths and weaknesses of each model.

The trend of the past decade concerning police department organizational structure is the *flat* model. In a flat organization, command staff is minimal and relies on empowering line officers and first level supervisors (Roberg and Bonn, 2004). In the flat model, departments will frequently have only one or two levels between the line officers and the chief executive of the department. The amount of supervisory personnel is entirely dependant on the size of the organization and the complexity of the tasks being performed. Moving to a flat model of organization dramatically increases span of control (Swanson, Territo and Taylor, 2005).

There are many reasons why the flat organizational model took hold in so many police departments. One such reason was the trend towards the community-policing concept. In community policing, a large portion of the decision-making authority is moved down to the line officers. Many departments took this philosophy as a death knell for the traditional multi-level bureaucratic structure that dominated the policing field (Kelikowske, 2004). While there is undisputed value in allowing broad officer discretion in problem solving opportunities, such transference does not negate the need for adequate command and supervision staffing.

Another trend that has affected many organizations’ structure was the professionalization of the police field. It was rationalized that newer officers are better educated and more diverse than previous generations of officers. It was believed that these college educated officers would be better equipped to make decisions and would require less supervision and less restrictive policies. In addition, police administrators had observed a similar flattening of organizations in the private sector and recognized the apparent reduced costs and more streamlined communication processes (Roberg and Bonn, 2004).

As previously noted, many government administrators and police executives gravitated towards the flat model believing that it would result in a cost savings from a reduction in higher salary ranks. This is a sound premise at first glance; reduced salaries translate into reduced pension and retirement benefits. There was also the averment that reducing administrative, command and supervisory ranks would result in more line officers on patrol. The flat model is quantitatively focused and can be very effective for those departments with a strong personnel support structure and excellent pre-established policies and procedures (Swanson, Territo and Taylor, 2005). For departments lacking in such elements, the increased span of control (projects

and people) can overburden the first line supervisors and cause a void in effective policy generation and personnel management.

Prior to the 1980s, many departments had a *tall* organizational structure with multiple layers of command. See *Annex B* for a sample of such an organization. In the traditional policing model, the department is organized by categorizing major functions such as patrol operations, administration and investigations. These models were bureaucratic in nature and decisions were kept in the middle to upper management levels. The line officer had little decision making ability was largely directed from ranks above. The tall structure, when functioning properly, afforded adequate personnel for policy formation and enforcement. It also provided the resources to advance the department in terms of project management, as upper level police administrators were not occupied with line level functions (Swanson, Territo and Taylor, 2005).

An examination of similarly situated police departments can provide some insight into effective organizational models. Bristol Township is the second largest police department in Bucks County with 76 sworn personnel. It is essential to make viable comparisons when examining other departments. The following departments were chosen primarily based on the amount of their sworn personnel as well as demographics of the communities they serve:

Evesham Police Department- Evesham, NJ- Evesham police employ 78 sworn personnel. They are currently structured with a chief, a deputy chief, two captains, four lieutenants and eight sergeants. Evesham follows the trend of many New Jersey police departments; they stress adequate command staff. (W. Miller, Personal Communication, March 22, 2009)

Upper Merion Police Department- Montgomery County, PA- Upper Merion employs 62 sworn personnel and 28 civilian personnel. It is structured as follows: chief, captain, three lieutenants, eight sergeants and four corporals. With this organization, Upper Merion has provided adequate command while stressing line level supervision with both the ranks of sergeants and corporals. (Upper Merion Twp., 2009)

Bensalem Police Department- Bucks County, PA- While Bensalem employs 100 officers and 32 civilian personnel, they are a reasonably comparable department due to its close proximity and similar crime statistics. They have a director, assistant director, five lieutenants, thirteen sergeants and 8 corporals. (F. Harran, Personal Communication, March 3, 2009)

The aforementioned departments are all currently accredited under the Pennsylvania Law Enforcement Accreditation Committee (P.L.E.A.C). This is a critical to consider when one examines the shortfalls of a flat organization. With their contemporary policies and procedures established, these departments may be able to flatten out somewhat and still prove to be efficient and effective law enforcement agencies. Bristol Township has not had a significant revision of the disciplinary code since 1968 (Bristol Township Police Duty Manual, 1968). An overwhelming majority of the Bristol Township policy dates in the early 1980s (Bristol Township General Orders, 2009). The lack of command level personnel has caused a void in strategic planning and policy revision. This shortage of key personnel coupled with a relatively small amount of civilian

support personnel cause workload strain across the command and supervisory ranks. This workload strain is evidenced not only in the lack of policy advancement and enforcement but it also apparent in personnel overtime. A sergeant in the Bristol Township Police Department earns, on average, 30% of their gross salary in overtime compensation. This is attributable to the multitude of job functions performed by the sergeant. Many of the functions were passed down the ranks as the command staff dwindled.

Alternatives:

There are multiple approaches that may be employed to better manage and supervise the Bristol Township Police. One such approach would be to conduct a workload analysis for each of the sergeant positions. This may identify those non-critical tasks which can be reassigned to lower ranks or assigned to civilian support staff. The addition of officer ranks or civilian staff may prove to be more cost effective than the addition of ranks within the structure of the department. This alternative would afford greater supervision by relieving the sergeant of non-supervisory obligations.

The addition of more sergeants would assist in the reduction of current sergeant workload and if properly deployed, this would cause a significant reduction in supplemental supervisor overtime. While there is an expense of approximately \$5500.00 per promotion from officer to sergeant, this cost would easily be offset by the savings in overtime and the increased efficiency realized by additional supervision. This scenario also provides for clear chain of command and encourages team building as one sergeant would work along side of the same four personnel each shift.

Another option that is noteworthy would be the reinstitution of currently inactive ranks. This could include the ranks of corporal and/or captain. Both of these ranks have provisions set forth in civil service rules and regulations but would need to be negotiated with the bargaining unit. The yearly increment between officer and corporal would likely be approximately \$2500.00 per promotion. Likewise, the yearly increment between the ranks of lieutenant and captain would be approximately \$2500.00. Corporals would act as scene supervisors while taking on some lower level tasks from the sergeants. This would provide greater supervision but may dilute the rank of sergeant and cause some role confusion due to dual supervisory ranks on the individual squads. The addition of two to three captains, strategically placed in charge of each major division would provide additional policy generation and implementation. This would allow the lieutenants to return to the squad level and supplement the sergeants. The sergeant could be relieved of higher level tasks which could be transferred to the lieutenant. This measure would increase street level supervision and improve the quality of service.

Conclusion:

While many departments may find themselves operating efficiently with a flat organizational structure, the Bristol Township Police has experienced a deficiency in policy generation and supervision with its current flat structure. There is a need for additional personnel in upper management as well as first line supervision. This will ensure that personnel are operating efficiently and effectively. If done properly, the department should realize a decrease in

total personnel expenses even with the addition of new ranks. This decrease will be realized in overtime reduction and increased operational efficiency.

Recommendation:

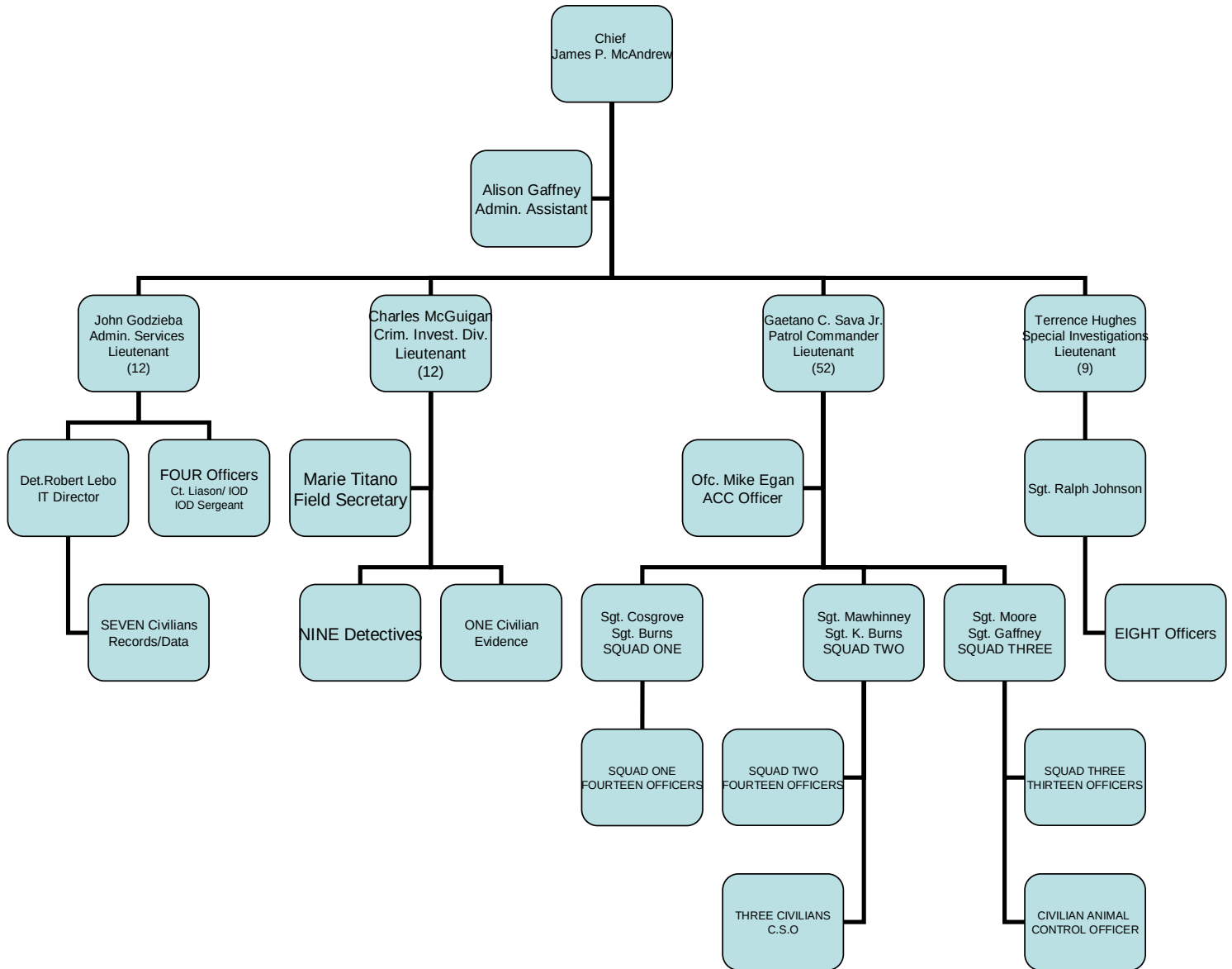
Bristol Township Police should add a minimum of three captain positions and promote an additional three sergeants from existing officer positions. This will allow overlapping supervisory coverage and reduce workloads on currently overburdened management. These changes will total approximately \$18,000 in base pay salary. This additional expenditure will easily be offset by reductions in supervisory overtime. See *Annex C* for proposed organizational diagram of the Bristol Township Police Department.

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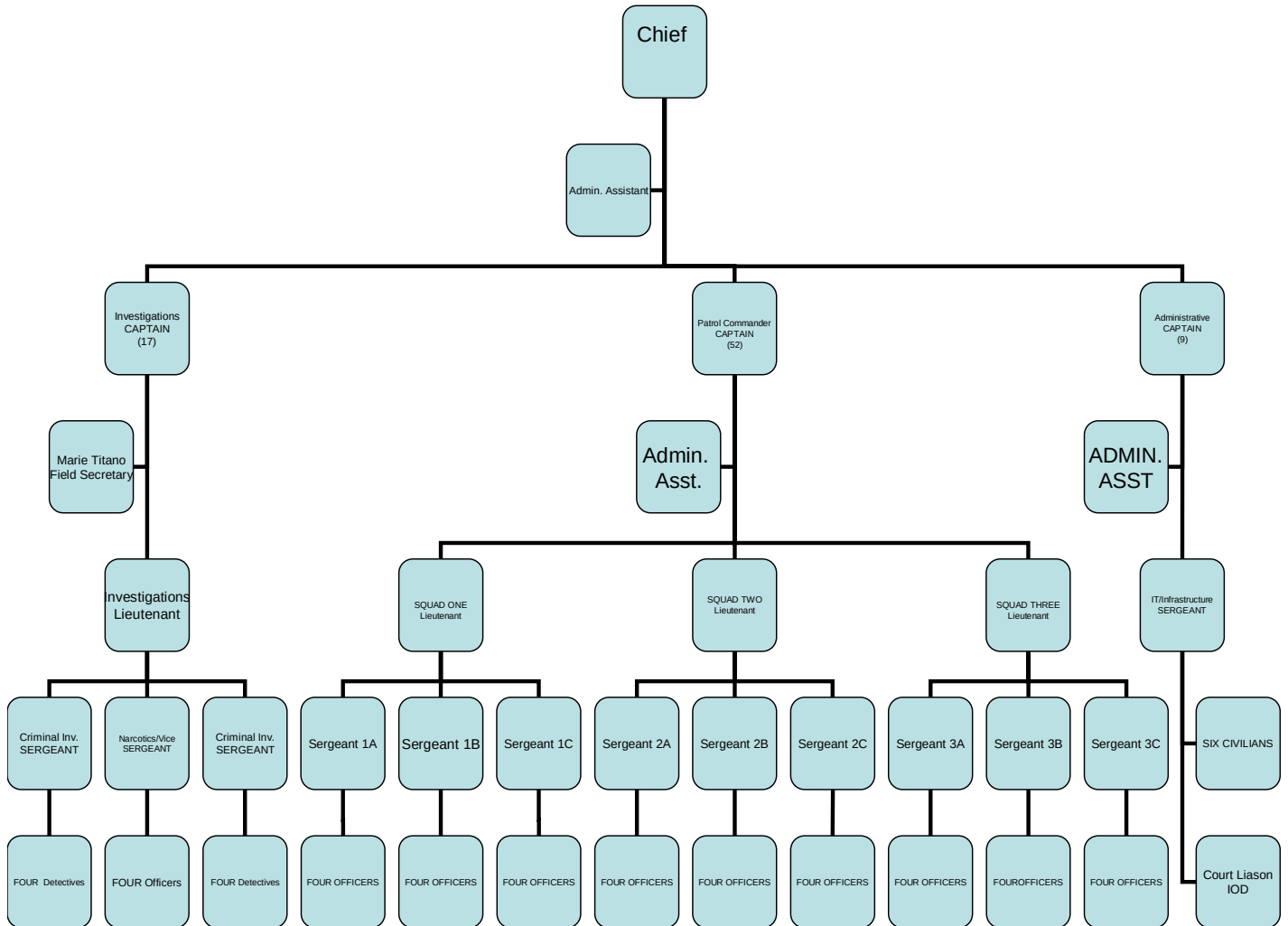
Annex A

Current Organizational Structure of Bristol Township Police Department

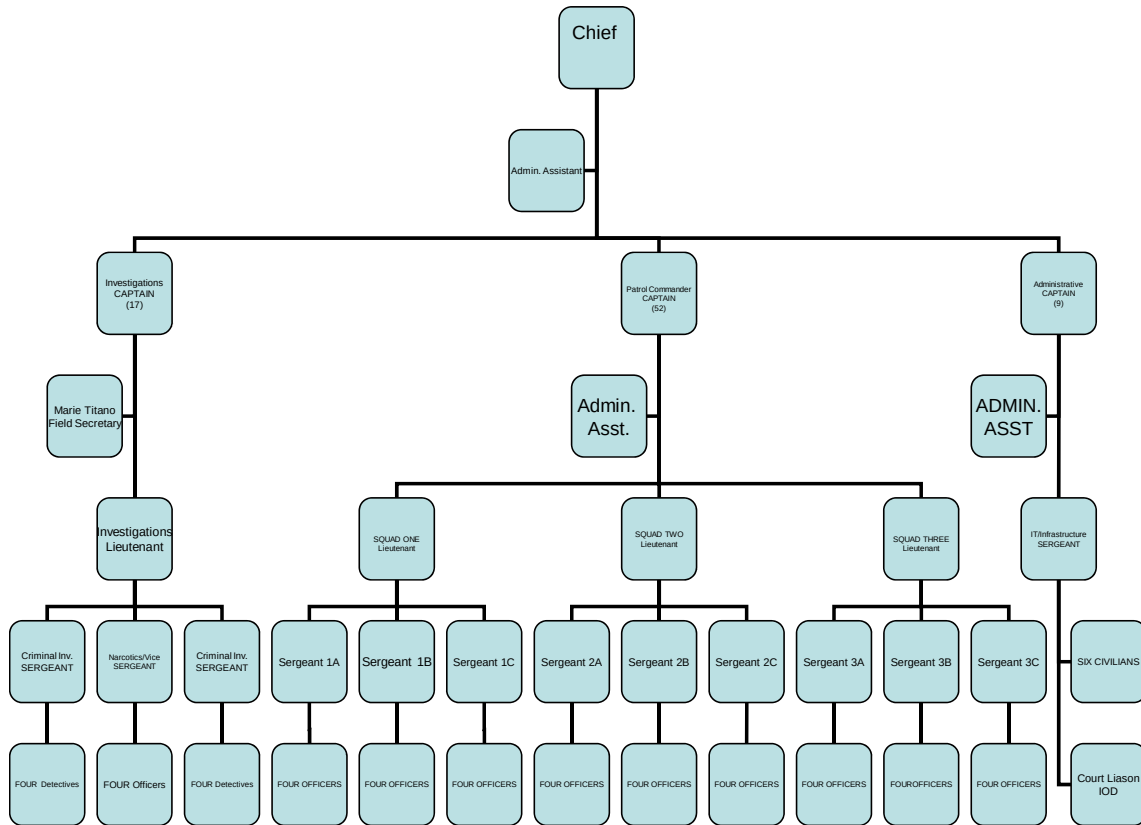


Annex B

Example of a *Tall* Organizational Structure (Under 100 Officers)



Annex C Proposed Organizational Structure



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Possible Solutions:

- Identify non-critical tasks which can be reassigned to civilian support staff. This alternative would afford greater supervision by relieving the sergeant of non-supervisory obligations.
- The addition of more sergeants would assist in the reduction of current sergeant workload and if properly deployed, this would cause a significant reduction in supplemental supervisor overtime.
- Reinstitute currently inactive ranks. This would include the ranks of corporal and/or captain. Corporals would act as scene supervisors while taking on some lower level tasks from the sergeants.
- The addition of two to three captains, strategically placed in charge of each major division would provide additional policy generation and implementation. This would allow the lieutenants to return to the squad level and supplement the sergeants.

Recommendation:

Bristol Township Police should add a minimum of three captain positions and promote an additional three sergeants from existing officer positions. This will allow overlapping supervisory coverage and reduce workloads on currently overburdened management. These changes will total approximately \$18,000 in base pay salary. This additional expenditure will easily be offset by reductions in supervisory overtime..