

State Police and the Intelligence Center: A Study of Intelligence Flow To and From the Street

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Abstract

Intelligence and fusion centers are now the lynchpin of criminal intelligence and information-sharing coordination between federal agencies and officers at local levels of American policing. This article conducts survey and interview research to examine state trooper communications between themselves and the state intelligence center. The purpose is to explore the volume and frequency of information to and from the center to identify potential avenues for improved information sharing. The article undertakes primary research through a survey of just over 50 troopers, reported through descriptive findings, followed up with semi-structured interviews. The interviews were structured to address themes that emerged from the original survey instrument, and were targeted to better understand the reasons for, and impediments to, information sharing with the state intelligence center. Tables indicate descriptive data, and numerous anonymous direct quotes illustrate the qualitative responses. Generally, troopers engaged in a relatively passive relationship with the intelligence center. They neither sent much information to the center, nor did they actively seek intelligence. Most intelligence was passively received through a generic intelligence bulletin that was distributed to all troopers across the state electronically. Requests for information from the fusion center far outweighed the volume of intelligence sent to the center, a decidedly lopsided arrangement. The research suggests that fusion centers could improve their communication balance by better educating troopers about information handling rules and policies, geographically tailoring the daily bulletin for different parts of the state, and being more selective about what was included in the bulletin. Fusion centers could also better educate officers on how and what to send to the center. There was little evidence of strategic intelligence influence in local decision-making, further adding to the need for fusion centers to better communicate with troopers.

Keywords: intelligence centers, state police, criminal intelligence, intelligence-led policing, information sharing

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Introduction

State and local police intelligence centers have sprung up across the United States in the last decade. Although state police investigation bureaus have run centralized criminal intelligence programs through Regional Intelligence Centers since at least the 1980s (Carter, 2004), the current development of fusion centers has evolved since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (hereafter 9/11), with initially a prioritization of counter-terrorism over the more traditional criminal intelligence interests of organized crime and drug trafficking. A role expansion is currently underway, with an 'all-crimes, all-hazards' mandate cementing many fusion centers into a central role as the state information and intelligence clearing house for assessments across a range of domestic threats, both man-made and natural (Department of Homeland Security [DHS]/Department of Justice [DOJ], 2009). While the development of fusion centers has been largely haphazard and on an uncoordinated state-by-state basis (Rollins, 2008), a number of key assumptions underpin the fusion center philosophy across the country. Central to these is the lesson (widely accepted as a truism from 9/11) that information sharing within and between agencies is the key to prevention and risk management of future disasters, and criminal and terrorist activities. Indeed the notion of information sharing and collaboration is fundamental to definitions of fusion centers as "a collaborative effort of two or more agencies that provide resources, expertise, and/or information to the center with the goal of maximizing the ability to detect, prevent, apprehend, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity" (DOJ, 2005, p.3). Many fusion centers are run by state police entities both on behalf of local jurisdictions, with the center acting as a liaison between federal, state, local and tribal agencies, as well as a central hub for their own intelligence needs. As Sheptycki (2004) points out, there are a number of common organizational pathologies that inhibit information flow 'to the center' within the police organization and as a result our "pictures' of crime problems based purely (or even principally) on police intelligence are likely to be distorted in ways that have yet to be well understood" (2004, p. 309).

The current article has a simple aim: to contribute to the understanding of this problem within one organization with a study of the information flow to and from the center and the state troopers within one state. Examining the intelligence relationship between state troopers and their intelligence center allows us to explore fundamental relationships in information and intelligence management and culture without the mist of inter-organizational rivalries, technological incompatibilities, or dissimilar mission statements. From an operational perspective, the challenges of ensuring adequate information flow from the officers of one organization are significant, because as Docobo notes,

"Most local law enforcement officers have never been in the intelligence business and therefore may not know precisely what information they should look at as indicative of terrorist activity or that may have value within a larger intelligence context. These signs are not necessarily obvious, but rather subtle, and would not be discernible to a regular patrol officer or detective without proper training. Officers or detectives may have valuable information without even knowing it and may not know to share the information because they have never had adequate terrorism intelligence training." (Docobo, 2005, p. 5)

These problems extend beyond counter-terrorism and are relevant to the broader policing/intelligence interface. Indeed as the police mission continues to change and evolve, the role of the patrol officer is continually redefined, seeking a balance between the traditional role of crime prevention and the emerging role of security delivery (Innes, 2004). Most recently change has been manifest as a result of a shift from the community policing era to the intelligence-led epoch (Deukmedjian & de Lint, 2007), a shift that has redefined the role on the front-line from community liaison with a social work function, to that of information gatherer and proactive enforcer. Recent literature suggests a further revision to a blended approach, with the phrase 'community intelligence' appearing in the professional discourse (Innes, 2006; Innes *et al.*, 2009). In this environment, the role of the officer at the interface between the community and the intelligence system that forms the hub of strategic and tactical decision-making remains paramount. Thus even within a single organization, the relationship between street cops and the analytical arm that is tasked with the tasking and coordination of resource allocation across the police service is a vital connection. This article reports on semi-structured individual interviews held with 52 individuals at two troop barracks of a state police agency in the north-east United States. The interviews focused on the frequency and understanding of the role of local troopers and investigators in the provision of information and intelligence to the state's intelligence center, and explored the perceived value of intelligence flow back to the operational arm of the organization. We begin by examining, in greater depth, the origins and purposes of intelligence centers, before describing the study and its findings.

The Growth of Intelligence Centers in America

The development of fusion centers as the central intelligence hubs for the majority of US police departments comes in the middle of a paradigm shift across policing in Westernized democracies, visible in the US as a progression from isolated agencies maintaining hegemonic status within their fiefdom to recognition of the need for greater collaboration and intelligence-driven business planning. In fact, the roots of the fusion center movement within the US can be traced to an earlier time, when the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals argued that every agency should develop the capacity to collect and disseminate information on offenders, and that every police agency with 75 or more sworn officers should develop an intelligence capacity. Furthermore, they argued for improved strategic planning and the necessity to quantify performance measures (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration [LEAA], 1973). From these early beginnings arose the Regional Information Sharing Systems (RISS) network, arguably precursors of the fusion center².

Since the 1960s, a range of socio-economic and technological forces have been driving the police service from a loose collection of lone wolves into more coherent and integrated entities. The demand gap between the availability of public police resources and the demands for police service grew considerably since the 1960s and 1970s in both the US and in Britain, fueling calls for police to become more efficient with existing resources (Ratcliffe, 2008). The same period saw a rapid evolution in the complexity and reach of organized crime, quickly outstripping the capacity of local law enforcement to contain organized crime's spread into drug trafficking and an ever-

² Carter (2004) provides a concise but illuminating summary of criminal intelligence development within the US dating back to the 1920s.

widening range of illegal enterprises (Carter 2004). The combined driving forces of the demand gap, the spread of organized crime, greater managerial accountability and the ability to harness the technological revolution have worked to push the police towards an intelligence-led model of policing (McGarrell *et al.*, 2007; Ratcliffe, 2003; Ratcliffe, 2008).

Information-sharing has been at the center of attempts to remodel policing for the new century. In the UK, for example, the National Intelligence Model established three levels of operation specifically to address problems with the flow of information from the national arena to and from local policing (Flood & Gaspar, 2009; National Centre for Policing Excellence [NCPE], 2005a; NCPE, 2005b). In the aftermath of 9/11, similar concerns about the lack of information sharing at all levels of government saw President George W. Bush call for the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to consolidate a variety of protective and emergency response services within one administrative structure. The establishment of this agency was argued as necessary to improve the exchange of criminal intelligence data between national agencies for a better approach to intelligence analysis and dissemination. These improvements were seen as critical changes to law enforcement and other emergency agencies to better protect the American public against all acts that threaten their safety (International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 2002). Beyond the development of DHS, there have been attempts to reform the FBI, and numerous calls on local policing to develop global partnerships for data and information sharing, and for police to work more closely with other agencies (McGarrell *et al.*, 2007).

Cooperative intelligence centers are an emergent outcome of a fundamental weakness in the traditional organization of law enforcement in America. While local political control of municipal law enforcement agencies in the US is sometimes argued as a foundation for greater accountability and community liaison, it is a technical and cultural roadblock to collaboration and information sharing (Ratcliffe, 2008). With dozens of federal law enforcement agencies and approximately 18,000 state and local agencies each compiling their own reports about people and events in their jurisdictions, it was clear in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 that important information was not evaluated holistically or shared with those who needed it. Fusion centers, now in existence in most states in the country, are the federally-mandated response to the problem of information sharing vertically between federal, state and local police, and horizontally between peer agencies within each region.

Numerous commentators have argued that rather than being unpreventable due to a lack of raw information, the Al-Qaeda attacks of 9/11 exploited the failure of law enforcement and the security services' ability to communicate effectively between information silos (see 9-11 Commission, 2004; Guidetti, 2009; Rollins & Connors, 2007). This subsequent realization provides impetus to the notion that law enforcement is moving away from the traditional Hobbesian notion of the single state monopoly over crime control, and instead in the midst of a shift towards a 'nodal governance' process (Wood & Shearing, 2007). In this nodal environment where many actors—state and private, governmental and non-governmental—all have a role in the provision of security, the need for collaborative information sharing is paramount and increasingly a core function of government as a hub of a more decentralized, horizontal and networked security environment (Dupont, 2004). One could argue that in times of fiscal constraint and a shrinking public purse, police are emerging as a central player in the delivery of strategic community safety and harm reduction, not necessarily

by wielding just their own dwindling resources, but by leveraging their information and intelligence holdings to influence the crime reduction priorities of other government and private entities. In this way, they are able to remain central to the crime reduction and prevention agenda even when the public increasingly seeks non-traditional enforcement remedies to social disorder. For example, evidence of this can be found in the range of non-enforcement solutions proposed by advocates of problem-oriented policing (see www.popcenter.org) and in the wide distribution lists of fusion center intelligence products, disseminating products beyond the immediate catchment of traditional police departments.

While federal agencies appear to be intellectually investing in fusion centers to a degree, it has been argued that domestic police intelligence structures are struggling to implement the concept of more integrated operations (Guidetti, 2009). Given that information and intelligence sharing has emerged as a key element in law enforcement strategies to prevent terrorist incidents and control organized crime, the relationship between the intelligence center and officers on the street is a core connection essential to the flow of good information to the center, and in the provision of relevant intelligence to street officers—the Torrance, California case being a pertinent example. In 2005, two men were arrested by officers in Torrance, CA for a number of gas station robberies. A search of one suspect's apartment uncovered evidence of a militant Islamic plan to attack military facilities and synagogues across Los Angeles County. In testimony to Congress, LAPD chief William Bratton argued that without previous training as a terrorism liaison officer, one of the investigating detectives might have ignored disturbing evidence of jihadist literature and target address lists in the apartment, evidence that ultimately led to the indictment of four men on terrorism charges (Bratton, 2007).

Intelligence centers (such as fusion centers and their functional predecessors or equivalents in the US and other countries) are sometimes described as 'black holes', where information goes in but no relevant intelligence emerges (Ratcliffe & Sheptycki, 2009). This perceived problem is but one of many organizational pathologies³ exacerbated by cultural and organizational difficulties within the policing domain. If police departments that are the central player in a fusion center are to resolve issues with interagency collaboration, a good starting point may be to ensure that their own house is in order.

The situation is complicated by the high degree of discretion that officers have with regard to internal communications. State troopers in the area under examination have a standing order to monitor, collect, and disseminate intelligence information to and from the intelligence center. Notwithstanding this mandate, it is unclear how effective rule-bound directives are at initiating street-level activity. To take an example from a campaign to prevent driving while intoxicated, Mastrofski and colleagues (1987) showed that administrative and organizational priorities did not necessarily translate into front-line activity in an environment where officers had the freedom to exercise considerable individual discretion.

Generally, there is a lack of police behavior research on non-coercive and largely discretionary activities, such as completing field interview reports and reading intelligence bulletins. As Sun *et al* (2008) note, for four decades the majority of research on police behavior has focused on coercive

³ For others see Sheptycki (2004)

actions of the police, such as arrests and use of force. The few studies of non-coercive activities have still focused on police-citizen interactions (such as with domestic conflict, see Dai & Nation, 2009) rather than willingness to adhere and contribute to intra-organizational procedures, goals and outcomes. In other words, the literature on police behavior has exclusively focused on the police-community relationship, and provides little illumination regarding internal mechanisms. The field of social psychology has, however, suggested that sense-making (Weick, 1993, 1995) and its correlate sense-giving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) may be relevant in understanding occupational compliance in discretionary situations. These ideas argue that people seek to create the reality around them by making sense of their situation within a context-specific environment (sense-making) and this is influenced by the attempts of management and the organizational leadership to explain reality to the workforce (sense-giving). Therefore the role of the intelligence center in creating a 'reality' that communication with the center is important, cannot be ignored within the existing study. This study is an exploration of the relationship between a state intelligence center and the street officers from the same organization, with a focus on perceptions of the intelligence center, the quantity of communication in both directions, and an interpretation of the intelligence center's main product. We hope to illuminate ways that fusion centers can increase the volume and quantity of inbound information, and provide a better service to a core client group. The next section of the article describes the intelligence center and the study area in detail.

The Study Environment

The intelligence center in question is the state fusion center for a region in the north-east United States, and is a collaboration between the state police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with the state police taking the lead in function and operation. It was set up within two years of 9/11 as a single, statewide point of contact for all information needs and, like all fusion centers, to act as "an effective and efficient mechanism to exchange information and intelligence, maximize resources, streamline operations, and improve the ability to fight crime and terrorism by merging data from a variety of sources" (DOJ, 2005, p. 3). This collaborative role aside, it remains the central clearinghouse for all internal intelligence matters within the state police.

The intelligence center is funded by both state and federal (DHS) grants. It employs approximately 40 people (sworn and unsworn), more than half of whom are analysts performing tactical, strategic and operational duties. Qualified personnel and law enforcement in the state have access to numerous criminal information databases and systems such as the Multistate Anti-Terrorism Information Exchange (MATRIX), El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), certain statewide justice system resources, the Middle Atlantic-Great Lakes Organized Crime Law Enforcement Network (MAGLOCLN), Joint Regional Information Exchange System (JRIES), information regarding a local High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and the state police internal intelligence database. The center receives information from a variety of sources, including terrorism tip line calls, municipal officer incident reports, incident reports from state troopers, requests for information from other agencies, and processed intelligence reports from other government agencies (international, federal, state, and local). Intelligence products are disseminated in the form of intelligence summaries, intelligence briefs, intelligence alerts, and subject specific reports and assignments. If applicable, biographical backgrounds are completed on subjects of criminal investigations which arise from tip line calls or other leads.

Within the state police, intelligence information is defined as “information concerning the habits, practices, characteristics, possessions, associations, or financial status of any individual compiled in an effort to anticipate, prevent, monitor, investigate, or prosecute criminal activity”. This conjoining of two items that are normally defined separately (information and intelligence) within the intelligence community will be discussed later, but for now we defer to the local definition for convenience. State troopers have a standing order to monitor, collect, and disseminate intelligence information to and from the intelligence center. Notwithstanding this mandate, as explained earlier, it is unclear across various policing areas how effective rule-bound directives are at initiating street-level activity.

The current research involves semi-structured interviews with 52 individuals at two state police locations. The participants in this study included troopers, corporals, sergeants, and a few commanding officers from one state police troop (for purposes of anonymity and simplicity, all participants will be referred to as ‘trooper’ or ‘troopers’). These individuals included troopers from patrol, administration, vice, and detective units. All individuals were stationed at one of two barracks within the troop area. One location is in a mid-size city in a regional farming area, while the other barracks is located in a major conurbation. At both locations, troopers engage in road policing and criminal investigative work. Although a number of locations within the troop area maintain their own police department, a number of regions within the troop area are unincorporated and in these areas troopers provide a general duty, full service, police function.

Methodology

Troopers with less than six months’ experience with the state police were not asked to participate because of their limited exposure to, and knowledge of, the intelligence center and its function. Other troopers not asked to participate in the study included those people whose position (usually administrative) did not have any requirement or expectation for regular contact with the intelligence center. An interview consent form, describing the purpose and uses of the information gathered during the interview session, was read and signed by all participants prior to the beginning of all interviews. Interviewees were informed that the study concerned the degree and quality of interaction between troopers and the criminal intelligence services provided by the intelligence center. Prior to the study, the commanding officer from the troop was informed of the nature of the study and the details of the research. The commanding officer distributed an e-mail to all troopers informing them that the study was approved by the commanding officer, but also stressing the voluntary nature of the research and that participants were welcome to contribute to the research or not. This might be seen in some qualitative research circumstances as implied pressure to participate, but within a policing domain there is an important organizational consideration. Within an organization that functions along a military-hierarchical structure, understanding that there is organizational support for a research project from leaders within the institution becomes an important factor if participants’ consent is to be truly informed. That being said, we are confident that there was no troop-wide pressure to participate given that a number of individuals declined to participate.

Among 111 troopers nominally available on the barracks’ rosters, 52 agreed to participate in the research, though only 46 provided qualitative material for the analysis. Among the 59 participants

who were not included, only four troopers declined to participate in the study, 12 had not been employed for at least six months and so were excluded from the study, and the other 43 were not available to meet because of scheduling conflicts, transfers, or military leave, or were excluded due to their largely administrative role.

Creswell (2008, p. 4) summarizes (under the mantle of qualitative research) the research approach conducted here as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data”. As has been pointed out, the purpose of interviews is not necessarily to arrive at an answer to a question but rather to better understand the interviewee’s experience of the environment (Seidman, 2006). We adopted a semi-structured interview approach, using quantitative questions as an initial prompt to elicit more qualitative feedback on the underlying reasons for varying levels of interaction with the intelligence center. In this way we are able to report descriptive data, along with thematic influences that underpin the descriptions. From this combined descriptive approach with interview follow-up, we sought to identify various themes that convey multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2008) on the relationship between the intelligence center and the front line officers, and use illustrative quotes to capture thematic settings, rather than recording or transcribing interviews verbatim.

Our research is designed as a case study, using semi-structured interviews to gather information. It can be argued that semi-structured interviews may provide false information, unintended extra information, or may be too time consuming. These, and other issues with qualitative research based on semi-structured issues are well known (May, 2001); however, this is an exploratory study where false information can be minimized by ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the subjects involved. Furthermore, in early interviews it became clear that there was, in many cases, little investment in the relationship between troopers and the intelligence center and as such no shortage of apparent willingness to express a view that did not necessarily conform to organizational expectations.

Results

In the results that follow, we follow the script-based quantitative results with quotes from troopers. In the tables, the number of responses is shown as frequencies (f) and percentages. Interview respondents are coded alphanumerically to preserve anonymity. Like many intelligence centers, the one in question has a unique local name. To prevent identification, this has been replaced throughout this paper with the generic title fusion center.

Table 1 shows that in response to being asked to estimate how often the trooper has sent intelligence information to the fusion center in the last six months, nearly half had not communicated with the fusion center at all, and only five (9.6%) had communicated with the fusion center at least once a month. Frequencies and percentages are shown.

A number of troopers who sent information to the fusion center, did so with the hope that doing so would aid their investigation, with troopers sending information about *“something he could not get any leads on”* (respondent A23), *“when I can’t find the information on Lexis Nexis myself”* (A14) or when *“if I feel another department can assist in my investigation”* (A15). Some troopers sent information for more altruistic purposes, *“if I think other departments may benefit from it, or may have similar incidents”* (A12), and *“if I think there might be a pattern, if it is useful to other police departments”* (A6). Other reasons for sending information related to police wellbeing, *“if I feel information is important to disseminate to the department, especially officer safety information”* (A39). One trooper explained using the fusion center as a last resort, *“when all other capabilities are exhausted”* (A2).

Follow up questions were targeted toward the troopers sending little or no information, and when asked why they had not sought to notify the fusion center, answers included *“I’m not educated enough on what [the fusion center] can do”* (A8), *“I didn’t have any serious incidents that I needed help with”* (A2), and *“I don’t know when to use them, so I don’t use them. I don’t know what they can do for me, so I just try to find the information myself”* (A3). This suggests some confusion as to the role of the intelligence center. Another reason more than one trooper gave for not using the fusion center was because the only thing they remember being taught about the fusion center while in the police academy was the phone number: *“All they taught us was their phone number in the academy”* (A8). Other troopers said that instruction was not given as to when or how often to contact the fusion center regarding incidents, with one trooper saying (on being given an example), *“I didn’t know we were supposed to use it for that”* (B1).

Table 2 shows the response pattern when troopers were asked how often they had called the fusion center for intelligence information in the preceding six months. This time, while again a significant number had not contacted the fusion center, nearly one third (16, 30.7%) had contacted the fusion center seeking intelligence at least once a month on average, and this was predominantly troopers involved in criminal investigations. Most of these inquiries had positive outcomes in that the fusion center was able to provide the intelligence requested. The more than 50 percent of respondents who contacted the fusion center infrequently (twice or less) explained their reticence as *“I don’t use [the fusion center] because I don’t even know what they can do”* (B4), *“I’m not really sure what all [the fusion center] can do, so the only time I contact them is to put something in the daily bulletin”* (B5), and *“I*

Table 1
Frequency of Information Flow to the Fusion Center (n=52)

Estimate how often you have sent intelligence information to [the fusion center] in the last six months	f	%
0	25	48.1
1	6	11.5
2	11	21.2
3	3	5.8
4	1	1.9
5-9	3	5.8
10 or more	3	5.8

Table 2
Frequency of Specific Information Requests from the Fusion Center (n=52)

Estimate how often you have called [the fusion center] for intelligence information in the last six months	f	%
0	13	25.0
1	6	11.5
2	8	15.4
3	2	3.8
4	4	7.7
5-9	11	21.2
10 or more	8	15.4

don't really know what [the fusion center] can do. I only send information when the crime room tells me to" (A9).

Follow up questions revealed that only 11 of the troopers interviewed were aware of the databases the fusion center is able to search for information. No other trooper interviewed was aware of what they could do, which was one reason they did not contact them to get information. Beyond criminal investigations, if troopers contacted the fusion center for any other instances, only ten stated that they will contact the fusion center on a routine traffic stop for suspicion of drug, gang, or motorcycle gang activity.

Table 3 summarizes the survey results from asking troopers to estimate how often they have used intelligence information disseminated by [the fusion center] in the last six months. More than half (58.8%) reported not using any information disseminated by the fusion center, with only four troopers (8%) reporting usage of fusion center intelligence at least once a month.

The fusion center electronically distributes a daily bulletin to all troopers in the state. Although 30 troopers claim not to have used fusion center intelligence (Table 3), only five said they do not read the daily bulletin disseminated by e-mail: *"I read every bulletin for information about a wanted person or stolen license plates, or stuff like that. Just the stuff in our region...I read everything in detail that is local and scan the stuff from other states or other parts of [the state]"* (A22).

The daily bulletin is the primary formal output that troopers can access. It is distributed daily and consists of roughly two to four pages of intelligence and information relating to officer safety, as well as current local, state, and national investigations. The primary mechanism for dissemination is via secure e-mail. The aim is to provide officers with the most current situational awareness information of local/state, regional, national/ domestic and international concern, with situational awareness defined as the knowledge of those factors which influence a given environment. This full color report is distributed electronically and posted on roll call location boards. Much of the readership is not seeking criminal intelligence, but rather officer safety information: *"I scan the bulletin for local information or for areas that I may be traveling to. Other than that, I read all of the officer safety information and the things I think look interesting"* (B27). More than half of the respondents mentioned limited attention to the daily bulletin, blaming information overload, a lack of relevance to their location or role, or consigning (either mentally or literally) the bulletin to their junk mail (a phrase repeated often). For example, troopers complained, *"I don't read the bulletin because we have so much junk e-mailed to us. I just delete everything. If something was important, I'll find out from someone else"* (A7), *"I sometimes read it one time a week—too much junk mail"* (A29), and another *"I rely on someone else to ask about a report in the bulletin. It's information overload. I don't care what's going on in [a distant part of the state]... how does that affect here?"* (A16). This issue of direct relevance to the officer in question was

Table 3
Frequency of Fusion Center Intelligence Usage (n=51)

Estimate how often you have used intelligence information disseminated by [the fusion center] in the last six months	n	%
0	30	58.8
1	7	13.7
2	3	5.9
3	2	3.9
4	2	3.9
5-9	4	7.8
10 or more	3	5.9

a recurring theme. One trooper referenced a recent bulletin referencing information from the war in Iraq saying, *“I don’t care about Iraq – how does that affect here? Analyze it and tell me how!”* (A9). Colleagues and other officers were seen as the most reliable sources of intelligence, as evidenced by one comment: *“In reference to the newsletter [bulletin], you could probably hear more information just from listening to everyone talk. The [fusion center] doesn’t always have info that affects me. We’re not close to [a distant location in state] – nothing out there has affected me... yet anyway”* (A27).

Table 4 describes the main sources of intelligence seen as most reliable by troopers. Colleagues and other police officers from other departments were seen as the most reliable source, with the fusion center taking second place with about one fifth of troopers citing the fusion center as their most reliable source. As one trooper noted, *“it depends what information I’m looking for, but troopers are always reliable because they know the people in the community and they are always around... they’re right here”* (A29).

A final series of questions revolved around defining criminal intelligence and the role of intelligence/information in reports and evidence. While many troopers were able to approximate a reasonable, if broad, definition of criminal intelligence, it became clear that there was much confusion regarding how to report intelligence from the fusion center in any reports. There were two main camps (with some confusion in the center). One group of troopers was vocal about using intelligence originating from the fusion center in their reports: *“Yes, we are allowed to use [fusion center intelligence] in reports”* (B9), *“Yes, we can use and mention [the fusion center] in reports—the corporals encourage it. I try to use it as much as possible”* (B4). Conversely, a more cautious view was mentioned by a number of respondents: *“I don’t even mention [the fusion center] in my own reports, but as long as my name isn’t used in your paper I’ll talk to you about it because I trust you”* (A7), *“We may not mention [the fusion center] but I will put that I got the info [somehow], unless it was directly as a result of the fusion center”* (B7) and *“We are not even allowed to mention [the fusion center] in our own reports. Even when we get information from them. They don’t want people knowing their capabilities, and they are afraid that if it’s mentioned in a report they’ll end up having to open up the rest of their ‘intel’ reports to the public”* (A40).

Discussion

The National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan was created in 2002 as a direct result of the attacks on 9/11. Its key themes included the need to overcome the “long-standing and substantial barriers that hinder intelligence sharing” and to use the plan as a “mechanism to promote intelligence-led policing” (Global Intelligence Working Group [GIWG], 2003, p. iv). This article has examined perceptions of information sharing from the front-line of policing in a localized environment through the state fusion center. It should be recognized at the outset that this article has a limited scope, given that interviews were conducted with troopers at two conterminous barracks of a single agency, and as such the capacity to extrapolate any conclusions to the wider policing field or to the operations of other state police agencies or even other parts of the state examined may be limited.

Table 4
Perceived Most Reliable Intelligence Sources (n=43)

Which source of intelligence do you look upon as the most reliable?	n	%
Troopers and other police officers	25	49.0
The fusion center	11	21.6
Witnesses and informants	5	9.8
Defendants and suspects	1	2.0
Computer records	1	2.0

Secondly, we have not expanded the paper to include the views of the staff from the intelligence center in question. As stated earlier, the purpose has been to examine the view from the street and the perceptions of troopers working remotely from the intelligence center. This is therefore a decidedly and deliberately one-sided view of the intelligence sharing process. A third consideration is the idiosyncrasy of the local definition of the material to be shared. By having a single intelligence information classification, the state in question contradicts much of the existing intelligence doctrine that these two items are not the same. For example, IALEIA (2004, p. 32) defines criminal intelligence as ‘Information compiled, analyzed, and/or disseminated in an effort to anticipate, prevent, or monitor criminal activity’, and later in the definition of intelligence, ‘Intelligence is information that has been analyzed to determine its meaning and relevance’. Thus IALEIA clearly establishes a distinction between information and intelligence (also see Chapter 5 of Ratcliffe, 2008). It is unclear what role, if any, this dissimilarity with the broader intelligence field plays in the research. With these caveats in place, and if the findings from this study are indicative of the wider environment of intelligence/fusion centers, then some interesting themes emerge.

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY MAY NOT COME

It is clear that troopers perceive, at best, a one-way information transfer mechanism with their intelligence center. There is a reticence to pass information to the intelligence apparatus, and indeed to communicate with the center generally. Many officers appear to feel that the role of the intelligence center was to help them with individual investigations and to distribute a daily bulletin, and there was not a sense that the troopers had a responsibility to pass relevant information to the center for broader organizational intelligence purposes. In other words there was a sense in the interviews that, too many officers at least, the intelligence center played a case-specific investigative role but not a wider strategic capacity to inform and influence operational work and resource allocation decisions.

Some troopers appeared to be unclear on their relationship with the intelligence center. There was an apparent need for more information on what the intelligence center does, its role in day-to-day policing support, and the procedures for contacting and tasking the center. There was even some confusion about how to get information into the daily bulletin; as one trooper asked the interviewer, “*are there standards and parameters for what [the fusion center] looks into and includes in the newsletter?*” (A36). Equally, there was confusion regarding the ways to handle intelligence provided by the center. Officers were generally unsure or shared contradictory views about how to use intelligence details in their written reports. It is possible that some confusion stems from a lack of clarity regarding definitions of criminal intelligence. As one trooper inaccurately described it, “*Intelligence information is anything not known to the general public, that you can’t tell anyone who isn’t in law enforcement about*” (A11). Varying definitions of intelligence that describe it in structural terms of a covert or secret nature rather than thinking about intelligence as analyzed information that can drive decision-making go some way to sowing the seeds of confusion about how to handle intelligence.

Of some concern was evidence that local mid-level commanders (corporals and sergeants) exerted considerable influence over perceptions of criminal intelligence value and handling procedures, inadvertently increasing the confusion with either contradictory instruction to their officers, or through a general absence of guidance.

THE INTELLIGENCE CENTER IS THEIR PRODUCT

Troopers accessed center intelligence more often than they contributed to it. In their defense, numerous troopers did not think that they had information of value, or did not know how to communicate with the fusion center, so their reluctance is more benign than malignant. In reality, it is certainly possible that officers may genuinely have come across little in a road policing capacity that might be useful to the intelligence center, and thus correctly adopted a position of not sending little of value. When they accessed intelligence sourced from the intelligence center, they did not actively seek intelligence from the fusion center, but rather dipped into what is passively provided through the daily bulletin. Communication with the fusion center is thus for most troopers a passive connection, with officers rarely contributing to the information holdings but equally demanding little in return except the option to briefly scan a generic bulletin. The daily bulletin therefore becomes the local manifestation of the intelligence center, and how the bulletin is perceived goes the field's perception of the center.

Local colleagues are still seen as the most reliable information and intelligence source, a curious paradox given that the intelligence center products are the result of analyzed information from colleagues around the state and beyond (albeit combined with additional database findings). Given that colleagues locally are perceived to be a trustworthy source of good information, it is unfortunate that little of that local flavor appears to be communicated to the intelligence center. On a positive note, the intelligence center does score more highly on trust than any other source except other police officers.

LITTLE USE OF REAL-TIME CAPACITY

Real-time access to intelligence holdings are an increasingly important fusion center activity. As Kelling and Bratton (2006, p. 7) noted,

“When you rent a car today at many airports, an attendant will come out with a handheld device that enables him to gather all the information he needs on you and the car, send it wirelessly to a main database, and bill your credit card, all within a matter of few seconds. Just imagine what might have happened if the Maryland state trooper who had stopped 9/11 hijacker Ziad S. Jarrah for speeding on September 9, 2001, had had access to that type of technology and had discovered that Jarrah was on the CIA's terrorist watch list”.

The evidence from the current research would suggest, unfortunately, that even though the technology is available through the databases at the state fusion center, only ten of the troopers surveyed would contact the fusion center at a traffic stop. Some of the reasons given for this included expediency of contacting them during a traffic stop, but also because of a lack of knowledge of the capabilities of the fusion center to provide real-time assistance. This demonstrates the disconnect between nationwide efforts to increase the breadth and speed of database access and the realities of front-line policing. Law enforcement agencies seeking a fully-integrated technology solution to intelligence management may have to spend as much time and effort changing patrol culture and behavior if they are to realize their goals.

LITTLE USE OF INTELLIGENCE BEYOND INVESTIGATIVE SUPPORT

Finally, throughout the surveys and interviews, there was no evidence that intelligence was influencing operational decision-making. The state police troopers still perceived intelligence as a tactical and investigative aid rather than as a mechanism to prioritize resources and drive the business of the organization. It may be that the state police in question remain a largely tactical organization, or that more recent moves towards intelligence-led policing as a “business model and managerial philosophy where data analysis and crime intelligence are pivotal to an objective, decision-making framework” (Ratcliffe, 2008, p. 89) have yet to filter into the training and professional development routines of the agency. The lack of intelligence influencing troopers may, however, relate to a failure of the intelligence center to articulate clearly the role of the center within the mission of the ‘reality’ (to use a sensemaking term) of the troopers. Referring to the earlier discussion in the article, the center has a role in conveying an image of reality in a dynamic work environment and creating a context where it becomes an accepted practice to adopt intelligence from the center and move information back there in return. The lack of a relationship between troopers and the center may also indicate the limitations of official dictates and managerial policies if not supported by local mid-level commanders. As table 4 showed, while 22 percent of troopers felt that the intelligence center was the most reliable source of intelligence, nearly half of the troopers felt that fellow officers were a more reliable intelligence source. This certainly suggests that the intelligence center has an uphill struggle ahead if it is to carve a more central role in the tasking and coordination of trooper activities.

MOVING FORWARD

Many of the above themes emerging from the survey work will be familiar to intelligence officers and analysts working in the field. Indeed there may be little here that is perceived as new to some, though we believe there is significant value in using primary research to demonstrate the depth of the issue rather than basing a view of the information sharing environment on hunches. Given that the daily bulletin is the primary means by which the fusion center communicates with troopers across the state, it would appear that there are some ways in which the bulletin can achieve greater traction. A less generic and more targeted document could improve readership. For example, a number of troopers pointed out they had little interest in news from far-flung corners of the state and there may be value in filtering intelligence by geographic location where possible. A second filtering process may prevent the fusion center from including information of limited value, fueling the impression that the bulletin includes information for its own sake. As one trooper noted with regard to the bulletin, *“it seems like sometimes they include ridiculous information, like a stolen lawnmower—who cares?”* (A36).

Other organizational factors impact on access to the bulletin. At least 10 percent of respondents did not read the bulletin regularly or at all as they complained of too much junk e-mail and consigned the bulletin to the trash. The organization may find value keeping other state-wide missives to a minimum and in doing so provide more time and a greater incentive to read the bulletin. Given the fusion center is remotely located to the troop barracks, minimizing unnecessary local e-mail traffic that could be communicated in more personal ways could assist. Quality rather than quantity should be the rule for intelligence bulletins.

Intelligence centers should recognize and actively plan for the necessity to maintain an ongoing education function regarding their role. As with strategic intelligence products, it is essential to appreciate the decision-maker perspective and recognize the need to educate the user as to the role and potential of intelligence products (Evans, 2009; Nicholl, 2004). Simply sending out electronic missives to whoever might deign to open their e-mail is not a recipe for success in the police intelligence business. It is essential to forge a relationship with the user community, a relationship that has to combine client-specific intelligence with the knowledge and education necessary to help them use and contribute to intelligence products. This education function should never be tacitly assumed, but rather should be the result of a structured plan of ongoing tutoring.

One component of a wider education role might include selective dissemination of strategic products. Although troopers at barracks remote from headquarters may have little need for strategic intelligence, their availability may advertise the wider role of the intelligence center beyond the daily bulletin and provide a richer context and background to the work of the troopers. In this way, allowing officers to selectively dip into other components of the intelligence world might initiate in some troopers a more active role in reporting information back to the center. It may also improve the quality of that information. Wider dissemination of key works could also work to slowly change the local culture and perception of the fusion center.

Furthermore, a program of intelligence staff from the center visiting remote locations, and personnel from remote sites being temporarily posted to the center may increase the quality and quantity of intelligence transmission by enabling both sides of the relationship to understand better the needs and roles of the other. Intelligence officers have sometimes had a tendency to assume the fault lies with policy and decision-makers failing to understand the nature of intelligence, but as Nicholl (2009) points out, irrespective of the veracity of the statement, this vision is flawed with the end result of poor decision-making and policy. If fusion and intelligence centers are to overcome some of the fundamental problems with information sharing, a more explicit adoption of education around intelligence issues, supported with research to determine successful practices, will be essential.

Conclusions

Intelligence and fusion centers have grown to be the primary mechanism to communicate intelligence between the front line and federal agencies (Johnson & Dorn, 2008). Communication between officers on the streets and the fusion center is therefore an important mechanism, both for moving information up to state and national agencies on trends and patterns emerging across the country, but also in terms of providing officers with the best intelligence to interdict criminal behavior. The relationship is a keystone of the federal government's approach to not only counter-terrorism, but also the reduction and mitigation of various crimes and threats.

On the evidence found here, albeit limited in geography and agency scope, there is some optimism for the future but also much work still to be done. Improvements in information technology mean that troopers are able to access a regular intelligence product from the fusion center on a daily basis, and the evidence would suggest that limiting other distractions and volume e-mails, and geographically tailoring the specific product would likely increase readership further. Unfortunately, there does not yet appear to be a connection with improved reception of criminal intelligence findings and a

willingness to communicate the necessary raw information back to the center. Analysts sometimes complain of 'noise', a problem of too much low grade information that has to be filtered out before key information can be analyzed (Ratcliffe, 2008; Sheptycki, 2004); however, much of the value of information from the street is not in its inherent direct worth, but rather in how it contributes to the bigger picture. Dealing with noise is one of the challenges of the intelligence field, but as the volume of information increases so too does the possibility of a more complete and holistic picture of the criminal environment with the capacity to influence decision-making and resource allocation, a central theme of intelligence-led policing.

It appears clear that if this study is indicative of a wider trend, intelligence centers will have to engage in an ongoing program of education to ensure that officers are familiar with the aims of the centers, how to contact them, what are key information needs, and how officers can use and share what they receive from the intelligence center. On the evidence here, the daily bulletin is not fulfilling that need. Fusion centers are becoming a keystone of our criminal intelligence future, and their relationship with officers at all levels of policing will be fundamental to safer communities tomorrow. In that tomorrow, it appears necessary for an ongoing program of sense-giving to intelligence customers to create the reality in their minds that their input and collaboration is essential to create a robust and valuable intelligence product for the whole organization. Explicitly adopting an educational role to explain and develop the intelligence function across all levels of the police service may not be in the job descriptions of intelligence managers and analysts, but the evidence suggests that it has to be if the goal of an intelligence-led policing environment is to be achieved.

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