LEADERSHIP STYLES OF POLICE CHIEFS AND THEIR IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

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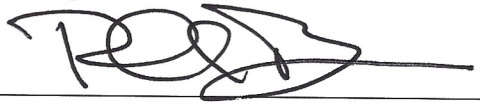

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the impact that the leadership styles of police chiefs have on the culture of their organization as well as officer recruitment and retention. A purposive convenience sample of North Texas chiefs of police was selected for in-depth qualitative interviews. Semi-structured Zoom interviews of thirteen (13) current North Texas chiefs of police were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. The aim of this study was to add to the body of research by examining themes on this topic from a diverse group of chiefs from small to large agencies that operate in rural, suburban, and urban settings. The research found that the leadership styles of chiefs have evolved over time, the influence a chief has on the culture of an

agency is dependent on agency size, and the leadership style of the chief and the organizational culture impact recruitment and retention. The research also found that impediments to changing organizational culture also differed with agency size. Finally, chiefs discussed how they changed the organizational culture within their organizations. With recruiting and retention being priorities for every chief of police and the organizational culture playing a significant role in these, the leadership lessons learned from this study should be evaluated further and potentially shared with all chiefs of police.

INTRODUCTION

The policing profession faces a workforce crisis unlike anything it has ever seen before (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). With fewer qualified applicants, greater numbers of officers leaving the profession within their first five years, and a significant proportion of officers becoming eligible to retire, the pressure on chiefs of police to hire and retain their staff has never been greater (Wojslawowicz et al., 2023). While much has been written about the negative impact of police subculture on the organization and how difficult it is to overcome (Woody, 2005), organizational culture is unique to each department and is significantly influenced by the actions and leadership style of the chief of police (Ingram et al., 2022). Furthermore, many structural and process similarities exist across agencies; however, a unique organizational culture is a differentiating factor that impacts agency morale, retention, and recruiting (Casper & Buffardi, 2004).

To examine leadership in policing, it is important to first establish the definitions used in this study. Policing is limited to official government-sponsored agencies at the local, state, and federal levels, which work in communities across the United States to enforce laws, maintain peace and order, and prevent and investigate crime (Newburn, 2008; Pearson-Goff & Herrington, 2013). Leadership, in this context, is defined as competencies, abilities, traits, and characteristics possessed by individuals in positions of authority, including their actions and behaviors that positively influence followership and achievement of organizational goals and objectives (Bass & Bass, 2008; Pearson-Goff & Herrington, 2013).

Effective police leaders foster an environment that attracts applicants and retains current employees. Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2013) found in their study of police leadership that there is an agreed-upon standard for identifying effective police leaders. Furthermore, the authors found that chiefs typically employ similar activities as part of their leadership strategies,

including creating organizational commitment, caring for team members, and creating a shared vision (Pearson-Goff & Herrington, 2013). Research suggests that the saying "people do not quit jobs, they quit bosses" is still relevant (Wilson et al., 2023). Leadership is consistently one of the most significant contributing factors to attrition (Parsons et al., 2011). Unfair or abusive supervision is positively correlated with attrition, while organization support and focus on officer wellness are negatively correlated with attrition (Hilal & Litsey, 2020). Furthermore, trust in management (Gächter et al., 2013) and transparency in agency processes were also common reasons people stay in their jobs (Hilal & Litsey, 2020). Not only is leadership critical to recruiting and retaining police officers, but Stojkovic, Kalinich, and Klofas (2003) argue that good leadership is directly related to organizational efficiency and is a key factor in enabling the organization to adapt to an ever-changing landscape.

What seems to be missing in the literature is research that examines the impact that police chiefs have on organizational culture and, by extension, police recruiting and retention. At least one study suggests that each police department has specific organizational characteristics that define it and may influence the number and types of potential applicants interested in joining an agency (Nowacki et al., 2020). However, there is a gap in the literature that examines recruiting and retention issues among local police departments in the United States. Furthermore, very little research examines the role a chief of police plays in creating a culture desirable from both the inside and the outside.

This study aims to connect these disparate pieces of research by directly interviewing a diverse cadre of Texas police chiefs to explore how their leadership style impacts their departments and find out what they are doing in their agencies to impact culture, recruiting, and retention. Lessons learned from this research should be shared with other chiefs throughout the

country and possibly incorporated into the New Chief Development curriculum at Sam Houston State University's Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Never before has the impact of police leadership on organizational culture and employee recruitment and retention been so critical (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Police work is inherently challenging in every context, and retaining experienced officers is crucial to ensure that the organization functions well and efficiently (Gächter et al., 2013). With the profession facing the most significant workforce crisis in recent history, police chiefs can use their influence to create an organizational culture that attracts qualified candidates, even in the most difficult of times, while also creating a culture that employees do not want to leave. This study examines how leadership styles may impact organizational culture and how that culture may impact employee recruitment and retention.

Police Leadership Styles

Leadership, in this context, is defined as competencies, abilities, traits, and characteristics possessed by individuals in positions of authority, including their actions and behaviors that positively influence followership and achievement of organizational goals and objectives (Bass & Bass, 2008; Pearson-Goff & Herrington, 2013). An individual's leadership style is an approach that combines traits and behaviors that influence followers to achieve organizational outcomes (Alsarrani et al., 2021). A review of the current literature on police leadership styles reveals that most scholars have coalesced around several major styles found in the profession: transformational, transactional, authoritative, passive (Laissez-Faire), and servant (Sarver & Miller, 2014; Kim, 2020; Vito et al., 2010).

The most prevalent leadership style has also changed as the profession has evolved. Historically, most police chiefs identified with the authoritarian leadership style as police

organizations were paramilitary, hierarchical structures, and this style was most effective (Batts et al., 2014; Sarver & Miller, 2014). In recent years, as departments have embraced community policing, there has been a shift toward a transformational style of leadership among chiefs as employees were no longer responding to an authoritarian approach to management and preferred a more democratic style of leadership (Cockcroft, 2014; Sarver & Miller, 2014). Transformational leadership has been described as one that inspires other to develop themselves and achieve more than they ever thought possible. A transformational leader will also challenge the status quo.

In a recent study, Kim (2020) found that servant leadership is emerging in popularity in bureaucratic organizations, has effectively promoted a collaborative organizational culture, and has positively impacted employees' commitment to the organization. Servant leadership is defined by the leader prioritizing the needs of others as their highest priority. Leaders are stewards of all they are given responsibility for, and are there to serve others in ways that help them grow and achieve. While there are only a few studies on servant leadership in policing (see Kim, 2020; Sun et al., 2019), Vito et al. (2010) found that servant leadership was the preferred leadership style of police managers. Furthermore, servant leadership classes have gained popularity in law enforcement in recent years, and articles highlighting their effectiveness with the newest generation of police officers are being published in industry periodicals (Oxendine, 2020). Similarly, Schafer (2010) found in his research that the most effective leadership styles of police chiefs most closely aligned with Transformational or Servant Leadership philosophies.

Schafer (2010) found that the most important characteristic of an effective leader was that they possessed honesty and integrity. Other characteristics ranked in the top five included caring for employees' needs, strong communication skills, a strong work ethic, and being approachable and easy to talk to. Consistent with these characteristics are Transformational and Servant

Leadership styles, which focus on providing for, inspiring, and serving the team. Further, Schafer (2010) also found that ineffective leadership characteristics were ineffective communication, neglecting the needs of workers, and questionable ethics or integrity.

Other research suggests that police chiefs can employ specific themes of activities that align with effective police leadership (Pearson-Goff & Herrington, 2013). Demonstrating that police chiefs can impact the culture of their organizations may have important implications for recruiting and retaining police department personnel.

Police Organizational Culture

Research on police culture has traditionally centered on a single, commonly shared police culture that is widely consistent across law enforcement in the United States (Chan, 1996; Paoline, 2003). This culture was born out of the stress and perceived danger associated with the job of a police officer and produces an officer who is described as socially isolated, suspicious in nature, distrustful, and has a desire to maintain control of situations by using their authority due to their inherent danger (Paoline & Gau, 2018). Recent literature on police organizational culture reveals a significant body of work focused on a police culture that many describe as monolithic (Paoline, 2003; Paoline & Gau, 2018; Schafer, 2010). Police culture has also been described as a label for a range of negative values and behavioral norms exhibited by police officers that obstruct police reforms instituted by law enforcement leadership (Chan, 1996; Paoline & Gau, 2018). However, Chan (1996) first posited that there were likely multiple subcultures within policing rather than monolithic culture. Paoline (2003) further states that the original concept of a single, monolithic occupational culture in policing may have been wrong. There has long been a culture clash between line officers and supervisors. Reuss-Ianni (1982) observed that after studying two precincts in the New York City Police Department that there are two distinct cultures at play within policing: a street cop culture and a management cop culture. The street

cops believe that social and political forces have created a new management culture in the upper ranks of policing, driven by management processes focused on efficiency, productivity, and accountability. The management cops were described as having values more typically aligned with the political leadership than their fellow street cops. Street cops were suspicious of management and described as having values that often antithetical to those in management. Street cops resist change and long for "the good old days", while the management cops look to incorporate modern management practices and technology to improve services to their constituents. The implications of the observations from both Chan and Reuss-Ianni are that subcultures may be more easily changed and influenced than a single occupational culture across the entire policing profession.

More recent research suggests that the increase in minorities, women, and college-educated police officers may have eroded the negative monolithic police culture (Haarr, 1997; Paoline, 2003; Paoline et al., 2000). Paoline and Gau (2018) contrast the monolithic culture theory with a multilayered model of organizational culture introduced by Edgar Schein, which acknowledges the existence of a unique culture specific to each organization within an occupation. In the Schein model, police chiefs would theoretically have a more significant influence on the culture of their organizations. Additional research confirms that the chief has a significant influence on the organization and essentially sets the culture of the police department (Cohen et al., 2019).

Gutschmidt and Vera (2021) developed and validated a model that includes four categories of police culture: conservative-male culture, institutional pride culture, team culture, and diligence culture. Conservative-male culture can be described as elevating the values of strength, bravery, masculinity, and the suppression of emotion. Institutional pride culture can be described as elevating values of institutional loyalty, honor, obedience, and secrecy. Team

culture can be described as one that elevates the values of collaboration, identity, solidarity, conformity, and humor. Finally, diligence culture can be described as one that elevates the values of responsibility, justice, and citizen focus (Gutschmidt & Vera, 2021).

It is clear from the literature that the concept of police organizational culture has evolved over time just as the leadership styles of chiefs of police have evolved. Once conceived as monolithic and resistant to change, recent research suggests that police culture is multifaceted, complex, and susceptible to influences from various factors, including organizational diversity, leadership philosophy, community makeup, and policing philosophy (Paoline, 2003).

Police Recruitment and Retention

Police departments have faced a significant challenge in recruiting and retaining police officers in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to budget cuts in departments and changes in hiring practices, which had an adverse impact on police officer recruitment and retention (Police Executive Research Forum, 2021). Police morale plummeted, and several large agencies experienced record numbers of officer resignations and retirements following the George Floyd incident in 2020 (Mourtgos et al., 2021). Police are leaving the profession in historic numbers due to increased public scrutiny, negative media attention, dissatisfaction with the job, and calls to defund the police (Den Houter et al., 2022) and college students are apprehensive about joining the ranks for the same reasons (McLean et al., 2022; Morrow et al., 2019; Todak, 2017). Furthermore, community expectations of police officers are greater than ever. They are demanding increased diversity in police hiring, improved ability to safely deal with an increasing mentally ill population, and enhanced training of officers to de-escalate potentially violent encounters (McClean et al., 2022). Thus, communities are finding their police departments are both short-staffed and ill-equipped (McClean et al., 2022).

Only a few peer-reviewed articles have been published on police recruitment and retention since the industry experienced this most recent staffing crisis. Since 2018, only three peer-reviewed articles have been published on police recruiting, which also examined the impact of the chief of police on recruiting efforts. Only one of those studies examined the issues of local police recruiting, and it focused on recruiting in a post-George Floyd era and how chiefs perceived the changes in the profession (del Pozo et al., 2024). Ten additional peer-reviewed articles discussed leadership and police recruitment; however, no articles have been published that specifically addressed the influence of leadership on police recruitment.

Several additional peer-reviewed articles that addressed police recruiting more broadly were also examined. One study found that it is not just low salaries impacting the number of job applicants; fewer young people are considering a career as a police officer (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Another recent study of college students' views on policing revealed that recruitment materials highlighting traditional policing messages, such as salary, job stability, and career advancement opportunities, had little to no impact on their desire to become an officer (McClean et al., 2022; Schuck, 2021). Concerns about social injustice made these same students less likely to want to become a police officer, whereas recruiting messages that emphasized police officers' ability to change the world and make a difference in their communities increased student interest in becoming an officer (McLean et al., 2022; Schuck, 2021). Many agencies continue to produce action-packed videos featuring SWAT teams and physically challenging situations, which research suggests have little positive impact on recruiting (Simpson, 2023). Therefore, agencies should focus recruiting messages on how officers can make a difference in their community, rather than highlighting the potential for danger and action (Simpson, 2023). While it is clear the chief would likely influence how recruiting is done in an agency as well as the messages utilized, the existing research did not examine this issue.

In their recent systematic review of police retention literature, Wilson et al. (2023) found 82 peer-reviewed articles published between 1973 and 2022. Half of those articles targeted U.S. organizations, with only 15 explicitly focused on local police agencies. Since the "defund the police" movement, agencies have faced growing attrition and a dwindling applicant pool, resulting in a prioritization of recruitment and retention strategies by agencies large and small (Wilson et al., 2023). Most studies on police retention have been published within the last ten (10) years due to the current workforce crisis facing law enforcement (Wilson et al., 2023). The research provides several reasons for officers leaving the profession, including lack of prestige in the profession, low morale, lack of funding for equipment and training, low salary and benefits, abusive supervision, and poor leadership (Saleem et al., 2018; Skaggs et al., 2022; Wilson et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2023).

Several articles provided insight into what may positively impact retention in policing. Examples include increased support from department leadership (Skaggs et al., 2022), increased trust in management (Gächter et al., 2013), and an organizational focus on wellness (Hilal & Litsey, 2020). Furthermore, Hilal and Litsey (2020) identified job satisfaction and organizational commitment as key predictors of employee retention. Their research found that working under a poorly trained supervisor is one of the main factors impacting job satisfaction and organizational commitment. There is no shortage of leadership training that agencies can take advantage of, which could enable their supervisors to develop their supervisory skills and provide them with tools to perform their jobs more effectively (Hilal & Litsey, 2020).

Research Gaps

Police leadership and organizational culture are complex and historically challenging topics. Furthermore, researchers face difficulties finding willing police departments and police chiefs to partner with in research (Pearson-Goff & Herrington, 2013). Much of the research on

police leadership focuses on perceptions of effective leadership without quantitative analysis of the impact of leadership styles on organizational outcomes (Pearson-Goff & Herrington, 2013). What constitutes effective leadership in policing is still very subjective, as no concrete measures exist.

There is significant research on police occupational culture, but very little research focused on police organizational culture. Furthermore, there is very little research on the role of police chiefs in shaping the culture within their organizations. Some research suggests that organizational culture drives leadership styles; however, the subjects of these studies are mid-level managers rather than chief executives. It is clear that chiefs of police have a significant influence on the organizations they serve, but there is a gap in quantitative and qualitative research on this topic.

Ultimately, a significant gap exists in research on police recruitment and retention. Only a handful of studies, most of which are recent, focus on recruitment and retention in local police agencies (Wilson et al., 2023). There is almost no research on the impact a chief of police has on creating an attractive culture both inside and outside the organization that positively influences recruiting and retention.

The Purpose of This Study

Current research exists on police leadership, police culture, and police retention as separate topics. Some research examines a particular leadership style and its impact on culture, but not necessarily in policing. Accessing chiefs of police can be challenging enough for researchers, but persuading them to participate in the research personally is even more difficult. Furthermore, limited attention has been devoted to the leadership styles of police chiefs and how they lead their organizations in ways that impact organizational culture and, ultimately, officer retention. To address this gap, the current study purposively selected a group of Texas police

chiefs to undergo a qualitative interview. The study identified the most prominent leadership styles of law enforcement leaders, learned what they did to influence their own organizational culture, and addressed issues related to police officer recruitment and retention.

METHOD

The aim of this study was to understand the current leadership styles of chiefs of police and explore their influence on organizational culture, recruitment, and retention. This involved gathering information directly from chiefs of police. The data for this study were collected through qualitative face-to-face interviews with a diverse sample of thirteen (n=13) current North Texas police chiefs personally known by the researcher. The thirteen chiefs represent a convenience sample of practicing police executives whose agencies operate in rural, suburban, and urban communities, encompassing small, mid-sized, and large agencies. Semi-structured interview questions were used to logically guide the conversation, but this methodology also allowed the researcher to probe into areas that might add value to this study. The questions were all asked in the same order, and the interviewer could explore thought and topical trends independently by participant since the questions were open-ended. This allowed for the interviews to appear more conversational and ultimately provided additional unanticipated detail and nuance to the research that could not have been obtained through a survey or other methods. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to gain context and achieve a much deeper understanding of a subject matter than a statistically-based quantitative approach (Tewksbury, 2009).

While the sample size for this study is relatively small, police chiefs are an excellent source of information regarding their organizational culture, recruitment, and retention. However, they are a challenging demographic to access for several reasons (Maher, 2008). Chiefs are busy individuals who are traditionally difficult to get access to and may be reluctant to

share information with individuals they do not know and trust. As a current chief of police, I have a network of friends and colleagues who are serving as chiefs of police around the nation. The cadre of chiefs serving in the North Texas area are very collaborative and active in our local chiefs of police organization – the North Texas Police Chiefs Association (NTPCA).

Getting access to them and scheduling time on their calendars was no problem since I work with these individuals regularly and consider them friends. Additionally, given the personal nature of the relationship, the chiefs in the sample would likely feel free to be open and honest with their answers. Care was taken to minimize participant bias by emphasizing anonymity, asking open-ended questions, avoiding leading questions, and utilizing active listening while refraining from interjecting any personal opinions. A convenience sample of police chiefs from the NTPCA was developed for this study, and ultimately, fourteen were selected due to my desire to have a diverse sample for interviews. The participants were initially contacted in person or via text to determine their willingness to participate in the research. All selected participants agreed to participate in the research. After the research project was approved by the Texas Christian University (TCU) Institutional Review Board (IRB), the participants were sent the project details and required informed consent forms via email, and a one-hour Zoom meeting was scheduled for each participant. One chief resigned from their department and accepted another job in a city outside the area before the interviews were completed, so the final sample consisted of thirteen.

Convenience sampling is a great methodology for collecting data in situations where the target population is difficult for the researcher to access (Golzar et al., 2022). It essentially involves using a population that is convenient for the researcher to access or interview (Golzar et al., 2022). In this case, convenience sampling provided the most efficient method for conducting research in this study. The benefits of convenience sampling include the ability for the research

to be conducted in a relatively short amount of time, and the cost of conducting the research is minimized (Golzar et al., 2022). One of the drawbacks of using this methodology is the possibility of introducing sampling biases (Golzar et al., 2022). Since the researcher chose the sample, selection bias is a concern and fair criticism. In an attempt to control for selection bias, the researcher attempted to improve the sample's representativeness by including diversity in as many demographic categories as possible to include gender, race, chief experience, population served, department size, city location (urban, suburban, rural), and whether they were an internal or external candidate for chief.

Table 1 depicts important demographic information from all of the chiefs in the sample, including gender, race, experience, and whether they were hired internally or from outside the department. The chiefs in the sample have between 21 and 50 years of experience in law enforcement and have served as a chief of police between 3.5 and 21.5 years. Table 2 depicts the demographic information of the agencies led by the chiefs in the sample.

Table 1: Demographics of Chief Sample

	Gender	Race	Total Years in LE	Year as Chief in Current Dept.	Total Years as Chief	Hired from Inside / Outside
Chief 1	M	W	35	10.0	10.0	Inside
Chief 2	M	W	27	7.0	7.0	Outside
Chief 3	M	W	28	9.0	9.0	Inside
Chief 4	M	W	50	20.0	21.5	Inside
Chief 5	M	W	24	3.5	3.5	Inside
Chief 6	M	B	31	2.5	7.0	Outside
Chief 7	M	W	40	1.0	13.0	Outside
Chief 8	M	W	29	4.5	4.5	Outside
Chief 9	M	W	41	7.0	7.0	Outside
Chief 10	M	W	21	6.0	6.0	Inside
Chief 11	M	W	24.5	3.5	3.5	Inside
Chief 12	M	W	28	9.0	9.0	Inside
Chief 13	F	W	30	6.5	6.5	Outside

Table 2: Demographics of Agency Sample

	Authorized Sworn	Officers per 1000 Pop	Agency Demographic Category	Agency Size Category
Agency 1	111	1.41	Suburban	Midsize (50-400)
Agency 2	70	1.84	Rural	Midsize (50-400)
Agency 3	73	2.34	Suburban	Midsize (50-400)
Agency 4	96	1.61	Suburban	Midsize (50-400)
Agency 5	31	3.87	Rural	Small (1-49)
Agency 6	403	1.58	Urban	Large (>401)
Agency 7	153	1.37	Suburban	Midsize (50-400)
Agency 8	55	1.19	Suburban	Midsize (50-400)
Agency 9	113	2.22	Suburban	Midsize (50-400)
Agency 10	40	3.70	Suburban	Small (1-49)
Agency 11	1894	1.94	Urban	Large (>401)
Agency 12	20	3.07	Rural	Small (1-49)
Agency 13	28	3.36	Suburban	Small (1-49)

The size of organizations in the sample ranged from 20 officers to nearly 2000 officers, serving populations ranging from 6500 to 1 million. Approximately half (54%) of the chiefs were selected from inside the organization, and the other 46% were hired from outside the department. The majority of the chiefs had served as department heads for only one agency. However, two chiefs had served in two agencies, and one chief served as chief in three agencies. All thirteen chiefs work in the same county in Texas. Diversity in department size and community demographics was important to understand whether these factors impacted the chief's ability to influence organizational culture, recruitment, and retention. Furthermore, diversity in the gender and race of the chief's sample was also important. However, the options were more limited due to the overwhelming number of white male chiefs of police serving in North Texas.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to provide the greatest depth of information and insight. Semi-structured interview questions were delivered via recorded Zoom sessions, each

lasting approximately one hour. Zoom provided recorded video interviews and written transcripts for each interview, which allowed the researcher to review and analyze themes, narratives, and shared ideas. The transcripts were verified with the videos to ensure the accuracy of the information where transcripts were used. Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, which allowed the researcher to identify key themes organically (Braun & Clark, 2006). No coding software was used in the process, as the sample size was relatively small.

Interviews and transcripts were reviewed, and prominent themes were manually highlighted by category. These were then reviewed to identify the priority themes that best aligned with the original research questions.

The research questions are summarized below:

1. Is there a dominant leadership style possessed by North Texas chiefs of police?
2. Does that leadership style impact the culture of the agency, and if so, how does that leadership style impact agency culture?
3. Does the size of the agency play any role in the ability of the chief to influence the organizational culture of the department?
4. Does the organizational culture of the agency impact police officer recruitment and retention?
5. Does the leadership style of the chief of police impact police officer recruitment and retention?

A qualitative research approach was selected for this study primarily because the topics of leadership and organizational culture tend to be nebulous and nuanced, making quantitative analysis difficult (Lakshman et al., 2000). The benefits of qualitative research methods are that they can provide deeper context and a more complete understanding of topics that cannot be obtained from quantitative research (Tewksbury, 2009). Further, in the case of leadership styles

and organizational culture descriptions, a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of what the chiefs meant when they used specific terminology or jargon, rather than simply selecting one from a list of possible leadership styles. Due to the limited scope and sample size, this study does not intend to generalize the findings to all police agencies, as is typical in quantitative approaches (Tewksbury, 2009).

Once the interviews were conducted, the Zoom videos and transcripts were inductively analyzed utilizing a grounded theory approach, which allows for the development of concepts, themes, and categories derived from the qualitative data (Tie et al., 2019). Grounded theory is especially helpful in studying complex and nuanced topics like those of this study, where there is limited existing research and understanding of a particular phenomenon (Tie et al., 2019). The data were coded and reanalyzed, and natural themes and findings emerged from the data that were consistent with the theory. Given the limited scope and sample size of this study, it should be considered exploratory research with the intent of generating further in-depth research that is beyond the scope of this master's thesis (Tewksbury, 2009).

FINDINGS

Leadership Styles

The leadership styles of chiefs of police have evolved over time. Historically, most police chiefs identified with the authoritarian leadership style as police organizations were paramilitary, hierarchical structures, and this style was most effective (Sarver & Miller, 2014). This was consistent with the description of the longest-serving chief in the sample, who entered the profession in 1975 and has served 50 years. He described the leadership style of his first chief as "autocratic" and "old school." He said it was always "his way or the highway." One of his first interactions with this chief, as a new 19-year-old police officer, was when the chief called him into his office for a 3-minute conversation. The interviewee said when he entered the chief's

office he started banging his finger on the table and said “If you get out there on the side of a road and a man calls you a son of bitch, you whoop his ass and you put him in jail. And if you get out there and a man jumps on a policeman, you put him in the hospital, or I will fire your ass! You got me?” He responded, “Yes sir!” and went back to work.

Another chief who has served in law enforcement for 40 years described the leadership team of his department early in his career this way:

> The organization was stagnant, and we lost some good people due to bad leadership. People were quitting their bosses. The leadership at the top of the organization was unengaged and too autocratic. They had been there too long and had forgotten that leadership of an organization actually works for the rank and file and not vice versa.

One experienced chief described the first time he learned about community policing in a training class in the 80s. He knew this was the way forward and could not wait to tell his Captain about what he had learned. When he briefed his Captain on this his response was, "We do not do that shit around here. The public does not tell us what to do, we tell them what we are going to do. Now get that shit out of my office!” Almost all chiefs interviewed for this study said that their leadership style was shaped as much by negative examples of leaders they worked for throughout their careers as by positive leaders and mentors.

In recent years, as law enforcement has professionalized and departments have embraced community policing, there has been a shift away from an autocratic or authoritarian leadership style as employees were no longer responding to an authoritarian approach to management and preferred a more democratic style of leadership (Sarver & Miller, 2014). One of the first questions asked in the sample's interviews was to describe their leadership style. Interestingly, the longer-serving chiefs tended to identify with a single leadership style, while the newer chiefs tended to describe their style as a mix of two or more. Consistent with the research that

leadership styles have evolved, eight (8) mentioned that their leadership style could be described as "servant leadership." One described their style as "I come to work every day realizing that my job is to serve those in my organization and out of that sprouts a desire to lead." "You have to lead from your heart and die to your own ego and to treat people as people and not as pawns to help you achieve your own end." One chief who admires the work of author Simon Sinek quoted him by saying a servant leader "takes care of the needs of the troops first…..chiefs always eat last." Finally, one chief said, "We must model the desired behaviors of servant leadership within the organization to our own employees. How we treat those inside the organization is highly reflected in how they will treat the public."

Five (5) chiefs described their style as "situational," which was defined to mean that their style could move from autocratic to servant leadership and anywhere in between, depending on the situation. One chief said, "Everyone is receptive to different forms of leadership, and they respond differently to different styles. It is incumbent upon the leader to learn what each employee is most receptive to." This same chief added that their style was also "personable and to be physically present, but not autocratic. I would say I am collaborative and want to give others in the department a voice, and I value their perspective and input. I do not like making all the decisions."

One chief in the sample described themselves as a "transformational leader with servant leader sprinkled in." This chief said:

> As a transformation leader, I am intentional about building relationships inside and outside the organization that can help people accomplish goals and work toward the same mission. A servant leader is also intentional and humble about their approach. Seeking input by serving, building relationships, and understanding their goals. I am always

> looking for ways to serve them and not ask them to do something that I am not willing to do.

Finally, one chief who said they were not a fan of labels coined their own leadership style they called "positive" leadership. This chief described their style as, "I think I have a lot of transformational qualities…at the same time I have authentic qualities…at the same time servant qualities…and there are certainly times, especially in my blind spots, that I am very transactional in nature." They noted:

> Really it is just doing the kind of things that creates conditions in an organization for members to thrive and flourish rather than having a label or fitting into a category. In our profession, when individuals begin to thrive and flourish, your organization begins to thrive and flourish, and when we serve the public like we do, then the community has opportunities to thrive and flourish.

It is clear that leadership styles of chiefs have evolved over time as no one in the sample described their default leadership style as authoritarian or autocratic. If mentioned at all, it was in the context of an emergent situation where the chief would need to give a direct order in a life-or-death situation. All of the chiefs interviewed noted the importance of communication and giving their employees a voice in major decisions. Furthermore, their description of their own leadership styles had more similar characteristics across the sample than differences, and they all were very different from the leadership styles of chiefs from decades ago.

Agency Size as a Factor of Influence

Research clearly shows that a chief of police has a significant impact and influence on organizational culture. All chiefs described the changes they have seen in their organizations since taking over. However, the research suggests that the level of influence a chief has on

organizational culture and their ability to effect change in that culture is dependent on the size of the agency.

In describing their organization's culture and the changes to the culture since they became the chief, they shared programs, policies, and decisions that positively impacted their organizational culture. They all felt that their influence on the organization had made positive changes in the culture. The chiefs of small to midsize departments generally described their current organizational culture as professional, positive, healthy, collaborative, mission-focused, service-oriented, and family-oriented. "People are happy to come to work and know the city supports them." Another chief described their culture as "family oriented with a deep and profound sense of caring." "Good, trying to become better." "Positive." "A very healthy culture." The chiefs from larger agencies were more guarded in their descriptions of their culture. For example, one chief said, "I would say our culture has improved over the years. It is not perfect, for sure. There is a historic lack of trust between the administration and the officers. Culture change takes time. You cannot turn the Titanic on a dime." Another larger city chief said, "We are stuck in a warrior or military mindset. Still very old school." This chief added that, "while it was still a very blue collar culture, it was very family oriented. Officers take care of one another."

While the sample size for this study was small, there was a discernable difference in the way large agency chiefs answered this question compared to their colleagues in small to midsize agencies. Also of note is that the larger agency chiefs in the sample described their leadership styles similarly to the small to midsized agency chiefs. Therefore, it would appear that the difference in agency cultures in this sample may not be as correlated with the leadership style of the chief as they are agency size. Furthermore, while it could be that large agency chiefs are just more realistic in their perceptions of culture, it likely speaks to the fact that there are more

impediments to changing culture in a large agency, and thus, effecting culture change is more difficult for a chief in a larger agency. In other words, it is possible that large city chiefs have less impact on organizational culture than their peers in smaller agencies.

While large city chiefs may have more difficulty effecting culture change, it is clear from the interviews in this sample that even they have success in improving organizational culture since becoming chief. One chief said, "I think there is a bit more trust in the administration. I try very hard to ensure my words match my deeds." He added, "Our previous old school chiefs thought they were big time…not at all approachable…I am much more down to earth and approachable." As one large city chief described the culture change as seen in the behaviors of the rank and file officers:

> I have seen more positive interactions and communications with the command staff. I am seeing patience and compassion from our officers on bodycam. They will spend time on calls to de-escalate situations that could have immediately gone to a use of force. Just because you can use force does not mean you should.

One remarkable difference that came out of the interviews was a chief's ability to develop deep and meaningful relationships with their employees and how much this also depended on agency size. All chiefs in the sample recognized that spending time with their team members was important to establishing a positive culture in an agency and a boost to employee morale; however, those who lead larger organizations are at a disadvantage just due to size and scale.

One smaller, rural agency chief said that during an all-employee meeting one time, one of their employees said, "Chief, we know you are busy with City Hall and Assistant City Manager stuff, but we love spending time with you and would love to see you more often." In this chief's case, they were able to accommodate this request as it was possible to spend time with all of

their employees every day. A large city chief also described a similar problem: “One of most complaints I gets the most is they do not see the chief. But I only have so many hours in the day and cannot be everywhere at one time.” This same chief described being limited by the number of conversations they can have in a day while still balancing the work that has to get done. “It is a scale issue,” he said. Another large city chief stated:

> Every day, I have an officer or one of their family members who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness or something similar. That is tough to deal with because you want to be there for all of them, but the reality is that you cannot be there as much as you want to be for any of them. That is if you even know about the illness in the first place. So you just do the very best that you possibly can.

It was clear that it weighed heavily on these large city chiefs who wanted to be there for and support their employees but just could not.

Impacts on Recruitment and Retention

The chiefs were asked a series of questions to ascertain their perspective and experience as to whether their leadership style and organizational culture impact recruitment and retention. These questions were asked separately to elicit specific observations from chiefs on each topic, however, they all answered affirmatively to all of the separate questions. Additionally, it seemed difficult for the chiefs to decouple the leadership style of the chief and the organizational culture of the department, which is further evidence of a direct relationship. One chief remarked, “Yes, it is one in the same. Chiefs drive organizational culture, and it is the culture that drives satisfaction or disenfranchisement.” Another chief said, “It is all related. It is a package…it has to be one big harmonious package.”

All chiefs interviewed agreed that the leadership style of the chief impacted both recruitment and retention. One chief from a large agency said, “I have been told by recruits that

they saw me at a recruiting event or at a press conference and decided this is where they want to work based on what I said or how I said it. So, being visible as a chief is important for recruiting." Another chief said, "People gravitate to the leaders they respect." A chief from a midsize agency said, "The chief, as the formal leader of the organization, drives the culture which ultimately impacts all of the employees. Our employees are our best recruiters." Another midsize agency chief added social media into his answer: "Our officers are our best recruiters. Applicants also say they like our social media, and it was a big reason they applied here. Obviously, some of our officers are in our posts on social media. It definitely has an impact on the younger generation….it also has an impact on retention as well."

All chiefs also agreed that the organizational culture has an impact on recruitment and retention. One midsize agency chief remarked, "Your organizational culture impacts your ability to recruit. Our line officers are the recruiters, and they are selling the agency all day long." Another chief talked about how culture is developed and said, "Are your actions aligned with the mission and values of the organization? It is about authenticity." One rural small agency chief said, "Employees are selling your organization with every interaction. Our job is to intentionally go after the hearts of employees to ensure we retain them." Negative organizational culture can also be a reason that people leave their agency. One midsize agency chief said they have hired several officers away from a large DFW agency with their own pension system, and the new officers described a similar interaction with a senior supervisor: "Inevitably, you will have some senior Sergeant come up to you at around 3 years in and tell you that you need to get out of here before you get too deep." He says the sergeant would say something like, "I have been here 17 years, and I am stuck. I cannot leave this place, and it is horrible. They do not care about us. Go somewhere else while you still can."

In some agencies retention can be affected by salary. While all chiefs recognized the impact of both the leadership style of the chief and the organizational culture on recruitment and retention, one chief had a perspective that no one else mentioned during the interviews. One small agency chief opined, "All of these things are important, but this generation is not loyal and will jump ship for $1000. People can be perfectly happy here but will leave for more money." This chief's department is unable to pay as much as many DFW area agencies because of the size and tax base of the city. However, this chief has worked in much larger, better-paying agencies over their career, and I think their opinion deserves consideration. Specifically, this chief said, "I think there has been a shift in values in this new generation of police officers. Culture may not matter as much if you can pay the most." These comments were interesting, and the profession would benefit from additional research in this area.

Impediments to Changing Organizational Culture

One key finding from the chief interviews was that impediments to changing organizational culture differ by the size of the agency. One midsize agency chief remarked, "I am not a victim of anything. If there is an impediment, I will remove it." However, they were the outlier in the group. Most chiefs faced some impediments in changing culture, however larger agencies reported a greater number of impediments, and they appeared more complex in nature. There were some impediments that were common across agencies of all sizes, but others that were only specific to agencies on the larger size.

When asked this question during the interviews, many of the chiefs quote a common saying that I have heard for much of my career: "Police officers do not like two things – the way things are and change." A common theme across agencies of all sizes was the desire to keep the status quo. Many chiefs felt that officers resisted any change because they were comfortable with the way things had always been done. One chief described that they had "entrenched individuals

who just did not want to change." Another described the issue as "entrenched adverse logic. It is an attitude of I do not want to change. We have done it this way for 20 years. Just leave me alone." One chief said he went on a ride along with an entrenched individual not long after being appointed and said he was told by the officer: "You are my fourth chief since I have been here. There will be a fifth before I leave this agency." These impediments are likely common across all industries and are not necessarily unique to policing. They are typical of human nature.

Chiefs in the small to midsize agencies talked about an initial lack of trust between the employees and the new chief. One chief said, "Their first assumption is that I may not last that long as chief, and they will just wait me out." Those agencies that had active police associations described more adversarial relationships with the associations. One chief said, "They fought everything we wanted to do. Some association members were negative about every new suggestion for about a year." And finally, another common theme among small to midsize agencies was that while they can implement change reasonably quickly for the most part, the organizations can suffer from change fatigue if too many things change too quickly. One small rural agency chief noted, "about 8 months in, the employees just seemed to hit a wall. We had to slow down, go back, and reengage to get things back on track." While chiefs of small to midsize agencies reported impediments to changing their culture, they all described their current organizational culture very positively. Additionally, all but one chief described a very different culture under the previous chief. Therefore, they have all had some success in changing their organizational culture to one they desired since becoming the chief.

The larger agencies in the sample seemed to have some success getting the associations on board with the chief's vision from the beginning. This could have been a strategic area of focus initially for the new chiefs as the associations have significant power and influence, and ignoring them would have been extremely problematic. One chief said, "We got the associations

on board fairly quickly, and they were glad I was committed to changing the leadership culture." Another said, "The associations have been nothing but supportive because they have a seat at the table. They get read-in on disciplinary issues, and I arm them with information so that we minimize rumor and innuendo as much as possible." Chiefs in larger agencies also described the difficulty of having so many different stakeholders and competing interests. As one chief described the issue: "There are so many competing interests – communities, city leaders, associations, etc. – and everyone wants something different. I have had to accept that it is impossible to make everyone happy."

While trust issues were mentioned as an impediment from small and midsize agencies, the issues are more complex in larger organizations. Chiefs in the larger organizations said that there were not just issues of trust between the chief and the rank and file, but one chief described their trust issues as "a lack of trust between sergeants and lieutenants, between lieutenants and deputy chiefs, and between deputy chiefs and assistant chiefs. There are just so many layers of trust issues present." Another larger city chief described the difficulty of managing an organization where there was constant internal fighting and stated that several employees had even filed lawsuits against them personally. "All of this impacts trust across the agency, " they said. Finally, a common theme in larger agencies was the impediments caused by the civil service system. Some chiefs said that the civil service promotional process was less rigorous and responsible for promoting personnel who were not great leaders or managers. A chief from a civil service agency said, "The system only rewards people who were able to perform well in the process." One chief noted, "The civil service system is directly correlated with bad managers, and we are stuck with them." Another chief lamented:

> If you fire an officer for cause and the civil service board disagrees and requires you to rehire that officer, it negatively impacts morale. It means that we cannot effectively deal

> with a bad apple in our agency, and once hired back, the bad apple is actually emboldened.

Finally, the last theme that ran through larger agencies was the amount of bureaucracy they had to deal with and the onerous legal processes required in bigger cities. It appears more difficult to get anything done in the larger cities in the sample compared to the small and midsize cities.

Changing Organizational Culture

Talking about changing the culture of an organization helps, but it was important to understand what chiefs of police actually did that they believe positively impacted their organization. The ideas provided by the chiefs during the interviews fit nicely into four different buckets: implementing organizational changes, invigorating communication, emphasizing people, and procuring infrastructure and resources.

Several chiefs saw a positive impact on their organizational culture by either changing the agency's organizational chart to add new supervisory positions or having the ability to fill vacant positions with employees that were aligned with the chief's vision for the agency. One chief took over at an agency that had six vacant corporal positions and was able to fill them with their own selections relatively quickly after assuming the job. This chief said:

> Being able to promote six at one time was impactful. Promotion creates opportunity and excitement in an organization. All six that I promoted were committed to stopping the toxicity inside the agency. This alone created an immediate change in the culture that had roots.

One smaller agency chief was able to bring in a member of their command staff to provide capabilities and experience that the current team was lacking. This chief said "while bringing in someone from the outside has risks to morale, it was necessary in my case. This has turned out to be a great decision that has positively impacted our agency." One chief talked about their

approach and used an example from Good to Great by Jim Collins (2001): “It is important to get the right people on the bus. We must hire the right people with character and integrity…and we can teach them policing. Then it is important to get the right people in the right seats on the bus.”

Every chief talked about the need to invigorate communication with employees. Most thought it was lacking under the previous chief or in their last department and focused on it when they were promoted to chief. One chief mentioned implementing “no-rank meetings with employees across the agency where everyone could speak freely without concern for rank or position.” Another chief implemented “non-supervisory meetings” where they were able to meet with the rank and file to ensure their messages were making their way down through the levels in the organization. Another chief said it was essential to ensure their “words matched their deeds” and that they were:

> Creating psychological safety for everyone inside the organization. If people have a sense that we are not out to get them and that they are internally safe, they can much better focus on their jobs at hand and provide exceptional services to the community.

Finally, another chief said that they implemented “excessive communication as sometimes people had to hear things more than once. Those things, however, have to be accurate and communicated transparently for them to impact the culture.”

Most chiefs implemented something that showed they valued the people in the organization. “Our people are our greatest asset, and it matters how you treat them,” one chief said. Another chief mentioned that they:

> Changed the promotional ceremony to make it more meaningful. Previously, we just handed them a badge, but now we make it a big deal. We also brought back an annual awards banquet to recognize our top performers. Finding ways to recognize your people every chance you get is low cost and has great impact.

Several chiefs said they enhanced training opportunities for officers and provided for those who met the criteria to attend the premiere leadership development programs in the industry like the FBI National Academy or the Police Executive Research Forum's Senior Management Institute for Policing. Still another chief talked about creating a culture of employee resilience and wellness by implementing a comprehensive wellness program that focused on mental, emotional, financial, and spiritual wellness. Finally, several chiefs discussed having a paid consultant or speaker deliver leadership training or team-building sessions. Three of the smaller to midsize agency chiefs mentioned even having a leadership retreat where they would bring together the supervisors for leadership training, planning, and visioning sessions.

The final theme observed that positively impacted organizational culture is allowing the new chief to procure infrastructure and resources for the department. One chief said, "Well, we just built a new building and a new driving pad. We are building a new simunition shoothouse. You cannot discount the improvement in morale that comes from providing nice, new, state-of-the-art facilities." Another chief said they were able to:

> Upgrade the fleet, standardize equipment and uniforms, provide them outer vest carriers that they wanted, we got a new radar trailer, we are getting a new building. All of these things help improve morale and promote a positive organizational culture.

Finally, one midsized agency chief said:

> We were able to get an increase in pay and benefits, add new equipment, and renovate the police department…which all costs the city. However, we also did things that were free to implement, which the troops were asking for, like allowing beards, tattoos, and cowboy hats. If it is free to implement, why not?

DISCUSSION

This study examined the leadership styles of police chiefs in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex to better understand if common themes or actions impact organizational culture and, ultimately, police officer recruitment and retention. While research exists on police leadership styles, police organizational culture, and police retention and recruiting, little research has focused on all three aspects and the relationships between them. This study found that the leadership styles of chiefs of police have evolved over time as the profession has developed and embraced a community policing model. Those chiefs who had served over 25 years recalled their previous commanders, who embraced the authoritarian style of leadership. Most interviewees in this study acknowledge that their own leadership style was shaped by observing and working under poor leaders. One chief said, "It is amazing how a bad leader can show you what a good leader can do. Just do not do the things he does, and you will be fine." This finding is consistent with existing research on the evolution of police chief leadership styles, as reported in the literature review (Sarver & Miller, 2014).

A second finding from this study suggests that the influence of the chief of police on the organizational culture is dependent on the size of the agency. Police culture has long been regarded as monolithic, negative, and pervasive within law enforcement organizations across the country (Paoline, 2003; Paoline & Gau, 2018; Schafer, 2010). Previously, there was a perspective that regardless of the leadership style or capabilities of the police chief, little could be done to impact the negative police culture. In this study, chiefs in smaller agencies had a more significant influence on their organizational culture, whereas larger agency chiefs improved their culture over time, albeit more slowly and with greater difficulty. While larger agency culture had more similarities to the historical view that police culture was monolithic and similar across the profession (Paoline, 2003; Paoline & Gau, 2018; Schafer, 2010), the ability of small to midsize agency chiefs to effect change in their culture was inconsistent with this research.

Several small to midsize agency chiefs in the sample reported very few impediments to changing their culture and appeared able to impact the culture in their organization as they desired. Research suggests that agencies may overcome the negative monolithic police culture by increasing minorities, women, and college-educated police officers (Haarr, 1997; Paoline, 2003; Paoline et al., 2000). However, it does not appear this is the reason for culture change, at least in the smaller rural agencies in this study. Smaller rural police agencies face greater challenges in attracting diverse and college-educated applicants due to limited pay and the demographics of their local communities.

It seems significant that the organizational cultures described in this study are inconsistent with the negative monolithic cultures described in current research. Furthermore, it appears significant that the chiefs of small to mid-sized agencies had a greater influence and impact on their organizational culture. Further research should explore this topic to determine correlative and causative factors. An additional finding from this study, tangentially related, is that urban police cultures may be more resistant to change than those of suburban or rural agencies. The larger agencies in the sample were categorized as urban and reported similar issues related to cultural change. This was a tertiary finding but could be an area of further study.

A third finding from this study was that both the leadership style of the chief of police and the organizational culture of the agency directly impacted recruitment and retention of police officers. One of the emerging leadership styles popular with police chiefs in this study is servant leadership. This leadership style promotes a positive and collaborative organizational culture as the leader seeks ways to serve and equip those in the organization (Kim, 2020). While few empirical studies have examined the impacts of servant leadership on organizational culture or employee retention, there is evidence to suggest that this leadership style is both effective and preferred by police managers (Vito et al., 2010). Furthermore, an organization that is effective

and successfully achieves its mission while empowering employees with the tools and skills needed to excel in their jobs is one that employees are proud to work for and are unlikely to leave.

Eight of the chiefs interviewed described their leadership style as being a servant leader. This aligns very closely with the organizational cultures described by the servant leader chiefs in this study. Several studies provided insight into what may positively impact recruitment and retention in policing. Examples include increased support from department leadership (Skaggs et al., 2022), increased trust in management (Gächter et al., 2013), and an organizational focus on wellness (Hilal & Litsey, 2020). Hilal and Litsey (2020) also identified job satisfaction and organizational commitment as factors that positively impact retention. It is clear from current research that a positive organizational culture and effective leadership create a work environment that attracts new applicants and retains employees (Hilal & Litsey, 2020; Skaggs et al., 2022). The findings in this study confirm the existing body of research that servant and transformational leadership styles produce an organizational culture that is effective in both retaining and recruiting police officers.

A fourth finding of the study was that impediments to changing organizational culture differ by agency size. All but one of the chiefs in the sample described facing impediments to changing their culture. Some impediments were common across agencies of all sizes; however, chiefs from larger agencies discussed more impediments, and those they discussed were more complex. This finding is consistent with their own descriptions of the current organizational culture. They were not as positive as their colleagues in small to midsize agencies, and their characterization was that the culture change was difficult and still in progress. The contrast was striking. Findings from this study suggest that culture change is easier to achieve in smaller agencies than in larger agencies due to impediments that differ by agency size. It is possible that

due to the sample size, the larger agency chiefs in the study had less time in their current role compared to the others. It is also possible that the larger agencies in this study were civil service, which may be a significant factor. More research is warranted to understand the different factors in play and see if this trend is consistent across a larger sample of similar size agencies.

Finally, the researcher and author of this thesis is also a current chief of police in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex and selfishly wanted to learn what his colleagues did to improve their organizational culture and improve recruitment and retention. The interviewees were candid and shared their insights without reservation. There were similarities across agencies, and chiefs, both new and experienced, will likely find them valuable. A full list can be found in Appendix B.

Policy Implications

The findings presented in this thesis have several policy implications. First, the research suggests that certain leadership styles are more effective in policing and more desirable by the rank and file. Municipalities should consider utilizing existing research in this area to inform job requirements and hiring processes for chiefs of police. Furthermore, chiefs of police should consider incorporating this research into their promotional processes for command staff, as well as leadership development opportunities for their supervisory staff, to produce the most effective leaders throughout the organization.

Chiefs of police should also consider utilizing the examples of activities that chiefs of police used to change their organizational cultures, as provided in Appendix B. Additionally, the knowledge that the leadership style of the chief, as well as the organizational culture, impact recruitment and retention may lead agencies to consider more strategic initiatives that improve both.

Directions for Future Research

The findings in this research provide evidence that the leadership style of the chief of police impacts the organizational culture, recruitment, and retention. Police leadership and organizational culture are complex and historically challenging topics. There is very little research on the role of police chiefs in establishing the culture within their organization. Some research suggests that organizational culture influences leadership styles; however, the subjects of these studies are typically mid-level managers, rather than chief executives. It is clear that chiefs of police have a significant influence on the organizations they serve, but there is a gap in quantitative and qualitative research on this topic. While this study contributes to the existing body of literature in this area, additional quantitative and qualitative research is needed to validate the leadership styles of chiefs and accurately describe their respective organizational cultures. There is almost no research on the impact a chief of police has on creating an attractive culture both inside and outside the organization that positively impacts recruiting and retention. Further research should attempt to validate these variables to improve the reliability of any findings.

Another direction for future research would be to focus on longitudinal studies of culture change initiatives to empirically understand those actions and programs that drive change in organizational cultures. Furthermore, the variables that impact recruitment and retention should also be critically studied. While retention and attrition have been studied in many organizations, there is very little research that focuses on the variables affecting the recruitment of police officers. The scope of this thesis merely scratched the surface of these topics.

Limitations

The findings and conclusions presented in this thesis should be viewed in light of the study's limitations. First, the sample size of chiefs of police interviewed as part of this study was

only thirteen and limited to a diverse convenience sample of colleagues personally known and selected by the author. While not intentional, it is possible that the chiefs selected may not represent the entire spectrum of leadership styles found in the profession. Additionally, the sample was limited in geographic distribution to only the Dallas-Fort Worth area. It is possible that a similar sample size from a different geographic area of the United States would yield different results. A larger random sample of chiefs of police across the country would mitigate these limitations and provide greater reliability in the findings.

The information collected for this study through interviews came from a single source: the chief of police of that agency. Answers to questions regarding their individual leadership styles and organizational cultures were self-reported by the chief. The information was not independently validated through interviews or surveys with others in the agency. It is possible that the chiefs in this study provided answers that made them appear to be better leaders or more effective change agents. For the same reasons, the chiefs may have been less than forthcoming in sharing negative aspects of their leadership styles, organizational culture, or overall success in recruiting and retaining employees. Finally, as I am currently serving as a chief of police in a small to midsized agency in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, and it is possible that my service in this capacity may have affected my objectivity. Efforts were made to mitigate all limitations.

CONCLUSION

Law enforcement across the U.S. finds itself in one of the most significant workforce crises it has faced in decades. With dwindling applications from qualified applicants, officers choosing to leave the profession early, and a significant number retiring, police chiefs are under pressure to recruit and retain critical personnel. This study attempted to fill this gap by examining the relationships between the leadership styles of the chief of police, agency organizational culture, and their impact on the recruitment and retention of police officers. This

research confirmed the hypothesis that police chiefs can lead in a way that positively impacts organizational culture and that there is a relationship between organizational culture and employee recruitment and retention. This research highlighted the effective leadership styles of several high-performing chiefs in agencies of differing sizes and has examined their ability to effect culture change in their organizations. Furthermore, it has uncovered impediments to culture change and highlighted tactics, programs, processes, and actions that contributed to positive change in organizational culture. Everything learned through this study ultimately impacts recruitment and retention. This research adds to our collective understanding of these relationships and provides a playbook for chiefs to address this crisis effectively.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How long have you been in law enforcement? How long have you been a Chief of Police? How many agencies have you served as its Chief of Police?
2. How would you describe your leadership style? Has your leadership style changed at all since you first achieved the position of Chief of Police?
3. How would you describe the culture of your agency?
4. How would you describe the change in culture since you took over as Chief of Police?
5. What things have you done to positively impact the culture in your organization?
6. What impediments have you experienced that have negatively impacted your ability to create the culture you desire for the department?
7. Where did you learn the skills and things you listed above that you decided to implement?
8. Throughout your career how has a change in police chiefs impacted the culture?
9. How many authorized positions do you have now and how many vacancies do you currently have? How many vacancies have you had 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 years ago (if you can get the data?
10. Does the leadership style of the Chief have any impact on recruitment? On retention?
11. Does the organizational culture have any impact on recruitment? On retention?
12. What parts of the job concerning leadership are more challenging for you? Some people are really good at the manager aspects and not so much leadership or vice versa.
13. What are the most challenging things you have faced as Chief in your current role?
14. What questions should I have asked on this topic, but didn't?
15. Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Positive Actions Taken to Improve Culture

Implementing Organizational Changes

- Six Corporal spots were not filled / opened up allowing all six new leaders to be selected with traits desired by the new chief. Six promotions at the same time had an immediate impact on the organization and culture.
- Hire people who have character and integrity. You can train them to do the job of a police officer.
- Created a new rank of Corporal to provide more movement and opportunity.
- The agency's policing philosophy was changed to "aggressively responsible policing," allowing the officers to do real police work.
- Raised hiring standards, including physical fitness and work history requirements.
- The City Council and City Manager allowed the Chief to over-hire positions to ensure they did not lose a quality candidate due to timing.
- Changed mission, vision, and values.
- Was able to promote three Lieutenants quickly. Putting the right people into these leadership roles helped accelerate culture changes.

Invigorating Communication

- Excessive communication – accurate information and transparency, even in Internal Affairs investigative/disciplinary outcomes. Communication must be authentic and not a sales job.
- Tell people what to expect from you. Set the standard and stick to it.
- Implemented regular non-supervisory meetings with the chief.
- Ensured words of the chief are congruent with their deeds.
- Implemented a one-page Chief's Update that is sent out every Friday to the agency.
- Regularly use video communications so they can see the chief and how he/she communicates the messages.
- Under promise and over deliver.
- Communicate better.
- Talk openly about culture change. Discuss the old culture and the culture we want to create. Model it with every interaction.
- Articulate the agency's true mission so that officers understand it. When they understand and internalize it, they are more fulfilled in their jobs. Productivity increases. Morale increases.
- Hold an annual mission/vision retreat with senior staff and supervisors.
- Changed the culture of the police academy. In the academy, recruits are treated like second-class citizens. The only interaction with drill instructors is yelling, which does not work on the street. Now, we treat them more like professionals, teaching them how to interact, communicate, and have a conversation.
- Management by walking around.
- Starts COMPSTAT meeting by asking each person to give a statement of gratitude that helped contribute to their success this month.

- Decisions are not made in a vacuum. The desire is to get buy-in from everyone.
- When values are ignored or disregarded, you have to take action. Must be fair and consistent.
- Do not bring negativity into the building. Create a light and fun environment where people enjoy spending time. The chief's attitude/mood sets the tone for the agency daily.

Emphasizing People

- Changed promotional process. Previously just handed them a badge. Now it's a ceremony and they make a big deal out of it. Focus on celebrating people and their achievements.
- Started doing an annual police awards banquet to recognize people for their contribution to the team and mission
- Treat people the way you would like to be treated. People are your greatest asset.
- Train your people well and get out of their way. Let them do their jobs.
- Implemented a pay step plan and increased salary and benefits.
- Worked to provide psychological safety to the team through honesty and transparency.
- Try to be present with as much of the team as often as possible.
- Increased hiring standards. Increased physical fitness standards. People want to work where it isn't easy to get hired and where the people are the best.
- Got City Hall buy-in for improved salary and benefits.
- Allowed load-bearing vests.
- Approved cowboy hats as part of the uniform.
- Changed the policy to allow beards and tattoos. These things are free and the troops are asking for them.
- Standardized weapon platform to Glock model 17 9mm handgun. Included red-dot sights and weapon-mounted lights as standard issue.
- Changed most of the department to 10-hour shifts except for patrol.
- Policy can help change culture. How you develop policy can change culture. Allow input. Consider state or national accreditation.
- Commit to leadership development. Spend time having conversations with up-and-coming leaders. Share lessons learned.
- Get the right people on the bus and then get the right people in the right seats on the bus.
- Developed new training guidelines for each rank. Layered in leadership schools. Focused on sending supervisors to LEMIT, the FBI National Academy, and Police Executive Research Forum's Senior Management Institute for Police.
- Developed a wellness program that focuses on mental and emotional wellness.
- Implemented the BlueChip program, where poker chips are distributed around and have a QR code on them that gives you a list of mental health providers and entitles you to a free session.
- Brought in a leadership consultant / academic to facilitate leadership development workshops and training.
- Chief leads a 7 am breakfast study group that meets every 2 weeks, and they discuss leadership books and topics.

- Proactively send team members to LEMIT and ILEA leadership schools.
- Chief spent time with the troops on patrol. Let them know they were appreciated. It's motivational to see the Chief doing real police work alongside them.
- Invested in training and leadership development. Sent folks to ILEA.
- Implemented a Career Development policy to ensure officers received a well-rounded experience as they progressed through the ranks.
- Chief asked the City Manager and Council to keep them at least in the top 3 highest paid agencies to ensure they were most competitive.
- Chief believes they are the "Chief Morale Officer" and is highly focused on morale.
- Show gratitude.
- Celebrate the small things.
- Commendations and compliments, along with comments from the chief and command staff, are posted on a bulletin board for all to see.
- Listen to officers and staff. Give them what they want if it does not have a significant operational or budgetary impact.
- Implemented mandatory mental health checks for all officers, dispatchers, crime scene, etc.
- Implemented Procedural Justice principles. How we treat others inside the organization is how they will treat the community.
- When dealing with personnel issues or communication issues, always assume good intent in your employees.
- With a new on-site shooting range, we now train once a month (most once or twice a year) and have included force-on-force and de-escalation training.
- Dealing with issues head-on, being fair, but holding people accountable.

Procuring Infrastructure and Resources

- New police department building.
- New driving pad.
- New gun range.
- Building a new simunition shoot-house.
- Upgraded the fleet of vehicles.
- Standardized uniforms. Allowed outer vest carriers.
- New radar trailer.
- Renovated the police department to include a new workout room and lockers.
- Found equipment gaps and were able to procure some things that were desired and needed that the previous administration had not. Quick wins.
- Bought professional dress attire for training. Now all have nice polo's and 5.11s to wear. Everyone looks the same and sharp. Gives them pride in the organization.

VITA

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EDUCATION

Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas
Master of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice (Expected May 2025)
Thesis: *Leadership Styles of Chiefs of Police and Their Impact on Organizational Culture, Recruitment, and Retention*
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Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Master in Public Administration (2007)

Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas
Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Science (1994)

PROFESSIONAL OVERVIEW

City of Colleyville Police Department — **May 2018 – Present**
Chief of Police — *Colleyville, Texas*

City of Coral Gables Police Department — **March 2013 – May 2018**
Assistant Chief of Police, Support Services Bureau — *Coral Gables, Florida*

U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Justice Services — **March 2011 – Feb 2013**
Deputy Associate Director, Law Enforcement Operations — *Washington, DC*
On detail from the FBI

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) — **June 2007 – March 2011**
Special Assistant to the Executive Assistant Director (2008-2011)
Criminal, Cyber, Response & Services Branch — *Washington, DC*
Special Advisor to the Assistant Director (2007-2008)
Directorate of Intelligence — *Washington, DC*

Addison Texas Police Department — **Oct 2002 – June 2007**
Police Officer (Reserve) — *Addison, Texas*

Wise County Sheriff's Department — **Aug 1991 – Oct 2002**
Deputy Sheriff (Regular and Reserve) — *Decatur, Texas*

Accenture — **Jan 1995 – June 2007**
Senior Manager, Public Safety; U.S. State & Local Government — *Irving, Texas*

PUBLICATIONS

- "Modernizing Crime Statistics: Report 2: New Systems for Measuring Crime," Panel on Modernizing the Nation's Crime Statistics. *The National Academies Press.* April 2018.
- "Modernizing Crime Statistics: Report 1: Defining and Classifying Crime," Panel on Modernizing the Nation's Crime Statistics. *The National Academies Press.* May 2016.
- "Reducing Crime in Indian Country through Analytics," *U.S. Office of Personnel Management Presentation/Webinar*. Washington, DC, 25 June 2012.
- "No Data and a Weak Signal," *The Dallas Morning News*. 1 March 2007.
- "Cell Phone Legislation Doesn't Ring True," *The Wise County Messenger.* 8 March 2007.