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WHITE PAPER

COMPETENCY-BASED POLICING IN CANADA:

AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT FOR TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE POLICING

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The Canadian police community strongly supports greater integration of competency-based practice and more nationally consistent policing standards to support efficient, effective, and sustainable policing in Canada. The Police Sector Council's Competency-based Management Framework (CBMF) is recognized as an essential tool in that process.

The Competency-based Management Steering Committee, which represents key police organizations, was formed to champion and advance this work on behalf of the sector. Modernizing the CBMF forms a critical component of the Committee's action plan. However, the community does not have the necessary capacity to carry out this work on its own. The Committee seeks Public Safety Canada's support to help the sector to move forward.

This paper outlines the general history of competency-based management (CBM) and the CBMF in Canadian policing, why they are relevant in the context of current demands for police reform, how they can support policing operations into the future, and factors that must be considered as the Canadian police community explores next steps.

INTRODUCTION

The call for police reform in Canada and around the world has increased dramatically in recent months. The *Black Lives Matter* and *Defund the Police* movements are placing an entirely new level of public scrutiny on policing and creating new urgent demands for change. At the same time, adjusting to the operational challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic—and its inevitable economic consequences—puts yet further pressure on police services that, in many cases, are already working with stretched and overburdened resources.

The Canadian police community has asserted that arbitrary and reactionary proposals to “defund” the police and redirect funds to social services and other community supports without an evidence-based plan of action are misguided. The community does support capacity building for social services and the integration of more focused approaches to deal with addiction, homelessness, mental health, and other social issues that overtax the ability of police and can lead to harmful outcomes for marginalized people. But it also recognizes this must be done in concert with other sector-based mechanisms to build a flexible and sustainable model that will hold up to diverse and shifting operational demands.

Competency-based Management and Police Reform

Police reform is a long-standing topic of conversation, research, and deliberation within the police community, and national standards and competency-based practice are core elements of that dialogue.

CBM—managing human resources by focusing on the skills, knowledge, or other attributes that contribute to successful performance in specific roles—is a globally-recognized evidence-based good practice in both public and private sectors. Over the past two decades, there has been significant research and investment in CBM in policing, primarily in the development of the CBMF. Initially released by the Police Sector Council (PSC) in 2013, the CBMF classifies the core behavioural, technical, and

leadership/management competencies associated with general duty, investigative, and command roles in Canadian policing. However, despite the tremendous effort of the police community to create the CBMF, CBM implementation among police services has been neither consistent nor coordinated. This is largely due to jurisdictional complexities, regional differences, capacity/resource discrepancies among police services, as well as the absence of a sector-based entity to guide the process.

The Foundation to Better Police Operations

The challenges notwithstanding, the Canadian police community recognizes that finding better ways to police in increasingly complex social, political, and economic landscapes is an imperative. There is no doubt within the community that enhanced CBM (using a modernized CBMF) and a more nationally consistent standards framework are key components of the solution that will ensure Canadian police services can effectively respond and adapt to a progressively demanding role in society. These will play an essential role in:

- fulfilling the public's expectation that regardless province or community, all police are trained to a consistent and appropriate level of knowledge and skills;
- enabling police services to employ resources more effectively and efficiently;
- identifying gaps or deficiencies in policing performance and providing benchmarks by which police services can build capacity, improve decision making, and strategically adapt to the specific needs of their communities;
- ensuring officers have the skills and knowledge to effectively carry out their duties, including those difficult situations that often fall well outside the traditional boundaries of police work;
- providing measurable improvements in performance;
- decreasing organizational and officer risk, particularly in high-risk environments;
- improving employee morale and well-being (i.e., increase confidence, reduce workplace stress, and provide clear path for career advancement);
- strengthening overall policing and public safety outcomes;
- reducing the duplication of effort (and cost) among individual police services that are designing and employing CBM models;
- improving transparency, accountability, and public trust in policing; and
- identifying opportunities to partner with social and health organizations to enhance the overall approach to community safety and wellbeing.

These measures strongly align to the federal government's commitment to effective, trackable, adaptable, resilient, and transparent programs and services for all Canadians. Moreover, broader incorporation of competency-based practice will enhance the ability of police to respond to more specific public safety priorities, including ongoing work to improve relationships with (and policing within) Indigenous and other marginalized communities; countering radicalization, gender-based violence, and narcotics trafficking; and supporting mental wellness of frontline public safety personnel.

While current events may exacerbate an already challenging operational environment, they also add vigor to the police community’s own sense of urgency to leverage existing competency resources, tools, experience, and knowledge—as well as other models such as Character-based Leadership—as a means to navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain future. There will never be a more relevant or critical time for action.

Competency-based Management Steering Committee

As part of ongoing efforts to advance the CBM agenda, a national Competency-based Management Steering Committee has been established. This committee of experts from police and public safety organizations across Canada will:

- serve as champions for CBM at local, regional, provincial, and national levels;
- guide efforts to formalize a collaborative working environment within the community; and
- devise strategies to address “one size does not fit all” implementation challenges.

Members of the national Competency-based Management Steering Committee represent:

- Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police
- Canadian Police Association
- Canadian Association of Police Governance
- RCMP
- Medicine Hat Police Service
- Ottawa Police Service
- Barrie Police Service
- Canadian Police College
- Justice Institute of British Columbia
- École nationale de police du Québec
- Canadian Police Knowledge Network

BACKGROUND

Nearly 20 years ago, in response to the growing demands being placed on police, the PSC initiated a series of research and consultation initiatives with policing services in Canada and internationally to identify challenges and solutions to human resource issues. That work led to clear recommendations and endorsement from the sector to adopt competency-based human resources management and to anchor learning and assessment tools in a shared Competency Dictionary.

The PSC then launched a five-year project that researched and leveraged good practices in Canada and internationally to produce the CBMF. The CBMF provides rigorously developed and nationally validated materials and resources to enhance strategic HR planning and management and to support greater consistency of policing in Canada. It details competency-based processes, profiles, tools, and templates to:

- Create fair, consistent, and defensible HR procedures and processes;
- Provide an ‘authentic’ assessment of skills mastery and performance; and
- Promote a more formalized approach to police professionalization.

However, in 2012, just as police agencies began to incorporate competency-based practices into their evaluation and promotion processes (and had expressed interest in extending it to their training programs), the PSC lost its funding. Without its guiding force, the momentum for widespread implementation was also lost.¹ Integration of competency-based models and the CBMF was further complicated by:

- Jurisdictional challenges of federal, provincial, municipal, and Aboriginal levels of policing
- Regional or cultural differences in policing priorities or concerns (i.e., what is important in one region may not be relevant in another)
- Discrepancies in resources available to individual police services (e.g., the Toronto Police Service has more funding and capacity to implement a CBM system than a smaller agency like Taber Police Service)

Ongoing Efforts

That's not to say the sector lost sight of the need for a more formalized and consistent approach to recruit training, in-service development, and succession planning. There has been ongoing effort to move the CBM agenda forward:

- In 2012, a national dialogue around the Economics of Policing was initiated through Public Safety Canada. It explored the fiscal challenges facing policing, the need to improve efficiency and effectiveness, and the need to develop new models for policing. Competency-based practice, training, and collaboration with non-police sector partners such as health and community-based organizations were all recognized as key issues in the future of policing.
- In 2014, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security held extensive hearings on the issue of the Economics of Policing and among other things, recommended "...governments responsible for the administration of policing to work together to seek consensus in defining the core policing duties in Canada..."².
- In 2015, the CBMF and all associated intellectual property was transferred to the Canadian Police Knowledge Network (CPKN) to safeguard CBMF intellectual property and to provide secure access to police and law enforcement organizations.
- In 2016, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) put forward Resolution #2016-01 - *Support for a Competency-based Human Resources Framework for Canadian Police Services* that called upon Public Safety Canada to provide the necessary funding to update PSC's CBM work and to make it accessible to police services across Canada.³

¹ Houlahan, N. (2018). Evaluation of a Competency-based education framework for police recruit training in British Columbia. (Doctoral thesis).

² ECONOMICS OF POLICING: Report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. May 2014. 41st PARLIAMENT, SECOND SESSION. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/41-2/SECU/report-4/>

³ CACP Resolutions Status Report, June 2017.

- In 2018, CPKN conducted a national survey of police services and hosted a workshop with representatives from the police and public safety sectors to assess CBM usage, how it was being applied in different police organizations, and what would be needed to ensure the framework and tools remained accessible, valid, and of value.
- In 2020, in response to recommendations from the 2018 workshop, CPKN, the Canadian Police College, and the CACP (funded in part by Public Safety Canada) engaged the Community Safety Knowledge Alliance to conduct further research on current trends in policing leadership and CBM, re-calibrate executive and senior leadership competencies, and identify next steps to ensure the expanded use and sustainability of CBM in the years ahead.

Sector Support for the CBMF

Based on work to date, it has been determined that:

- There is broad-based support in the police community for CBM and the benefits it provides;
- Many organizations are developing/using CBM processes and resources but are working in silos, independent of each other;
- Many organizations use the PSC's CBMF as the foundation for CBM but adapt it to meet their specific needs; and
- The community wants to collaborate to update and improve the CBMF to ensure it remains valid, flexible, and can be easily adapted to the specific needs of organizations.

“ This cannot be only an HR exercise. We are facing a burning platform with respect to recruiting, hiring, performance management, and ultimately trust and confidence in policing. Effective CBM is the foundation to better police operations.

- National Workshop Participant, 2018

CBM IN POLICING - CURRENT USE AND TRENDS

Properly designed, competencies translate the strategic vision and goals of an organization (or sector) into behavior or actions employees must display for the organization to be successful.⁴ This not only improves clarity for employers and employees, but also transparency and accountability within the broader public sphere.

⁴ Competency-based management - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Competency-based_management#:~:text=Competency%2Dbased%20management%20\(CBM\),business%20goals%20of%20the%20organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Competency-based_management#:~:text=Competency%2Dbased%20management%20(CBM),business%20goals%20of%20the%20organization)

Competency-based management and education models are used extensively in both public and private sectors across Canada, including many police organizations. A 2018 survey of 26 Canadian police organizations identified the extent to which CBM is being used in the community and how police organizations are using it to support HR operations:

- CBM is used to support a range of HR activities including recruitment, selection, and promotion; performance management; executive selection; and leadership development
- 48% of organizations are well along in the implementation process; 41% have fully implemented a CBM model; and 10% are just beginning
- 68% have been using CBM for five or more years
- 44% are using the national CBMF; 38% are using an in-house model; 17% are primarily using a combined approach
- 72% believe competencies improve HR management and provide value to the police community

NOW OR NEVER: MODERNIZING THE CBMF

The call to modernize the CBMF to support greater integration of competency-based practice and to implement more nationally consistent policing standards is not a reaction to current demands for police reform; it has been a consistent theme within the sector for the past decade. However, without a guiding organization like the PSC, the sector has been unable to spare the capacity and resources to carry this forward in a collaborative way.

But this issue is not going away, and the sense of urgency is only growing. As recently as March 2020 the Community Safety Knowledge Alliance’s research around police leadership competencies concluded:

... the complex and dynamic environments in which policing occurs are outpacing the adaptive capacity of most agencies. This pace of change will continue—and will likely accelerate—as community safety issues intensify and the consequences of failing to adequately address them fall back on police. Senior police leaders, policy-makers, police commissions, and [frontline police personnel] recognize the need for a robust, evidence-based framework to ensure validity and consistency across all areas of talent acquisition, development, and reward.⁵

⁵ Community Safety Knowledge Alliance. (2020). *Modernizing Police Leadership Competencies. Summary Proceedings of National Workshop to Calibrate Competencies.*

A collaborative, sector-based approach is the best—if not only—path forward to establish a comprehensive framework that facilitates consistency in policing practice but is flexible enough to be adapted to the unique needs of any police service. Looking ahead, there are both challenges and opportunities that must be considered:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CBMF is a robust foundation for re-launching a national CBM effort. • The Canadian police community recognizes the need for a coordinated approach and greater national consistency. • Localized efforts have demonstrated that the CBMF can provide the flexibility needed to adapt to the unique requirements of any police service. • A modernized CBMF and nationally consistent standards framework, combined with enhanced community engagement and community-based approaches, can improve public trust and confidence in policing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CBMF is out-of-date; significant time, money, and other resources will be required to update, implement, and maintain the Framework. • With the failure to implement the CBMF nationally (as originally intended), many police agencies have developed their own CBM systems; gaining consensus on standards criteria and the language used around those standards going forward will now be more challenging. • The current CBMF lacks consistent application of the term "competency" (vs skills or behaviour) which complicates the task of competency mapping to specific roles or training opportunities. • Recent research indicates that a holistic analysis, which considers both competencies and character, supports a more complete framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective implementation of CBM can support the public's expectation for a common standard of policing across the country, improve transparency and accountability, and build and maintain confidence in the sector. • A national standard can improve the mobility and skills compatibility of police officers across jurisdictions. • CBM can support police officers in an increasingly complex policing environment, improve wellness, address serious mental health challenges, and enhance the defensibility of HR decisions. • CBM can improve organizational performance and reduce operational costs across the sector—this will be particularly relevant in the inevitable economic fallout from COVID-19 pandemic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to implement a more efficient and synchronized approach to policing may lead to further erosion of public confidence and trust in the police. • Failure to obtain buy-in from police organizations to utilize/link to the new CBMF will create further disparity across policing.

CONCLUSION

Unceasing demands on police, the realities that have fueled a global movement for police reform, and the impacts of COVID -19 have only reinforced the urgency around an already pressing need to modernize the CBMF so the sector can enhance its use of CBM and build greater consistency in policing standards.

The rationale is solid. This work will introduce practical and progressive change that will enhance policing at all levels, from front-line patrol to the boardroom. It will capitalize on existing investment, knowledge, and infrastructure to improve legitimacy, transparency, and accountability. It will ensure police are more adaptable to the specific needs and priorities of their local communities and broader society. And it will contribute to a model that can support policing—and the public’s expectation for policing—into the future.

The Canadian police community can no longer afford to simply agree that action is needed—it needs to move forward. In keeping with the input provided by police practitioners and the broader policing community, the Competency-based Management Steering Committee will work to identify incremental and collaborative activities to engage champions, secure funding and resources, foster a community of practice, and to push ahead in priority areas.

But this work cannot be achieved by the police community on its own. The Committee and the Canadian policing sector seek the federal government’s support, through Public Safety Canada, to champion and collaborate in this work on behalf of all Canadians.

team strategy
reliability
experience
service performance
professionalism
ability
knowledge
creativity
competence
responsibility
flexibility

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