

Institution of Police Station needs to win trust of the people under its jurisdiction

The Boston Police department was tipped by a boat owner that, when he lifted the tarp on the boat he saw a 'man covered in blood'. It moved the robots, thermal imaging helicopters and the tactical team to apprehend the second Boston bombing suspect. In the '90s, when militants got holed in the Hazratbal Shrine, holding people inside as hostages, what led to a peaceful surrender, was negotiations by local police and administration, not the battalions of paramilitary forces outside. May it be terrorism, a criminal case, a law and order situation, the world over, notwithstanding technology, notwithstanding sophistication, it is the basic relationship between the police and the people that help clinch the day or help keep peace.

Basically, our sentinel should inspire- Trust, faith, security. The one, we arm with laws and weapons, should make civilized life possible. An institution dealing with cardinals-'life' and 'liberty' cannot but be keenly vigilant, professionally alert and competent. Its iron fist should know, being guided by a clear head and a humane heart, when to clamp down and when to guide. Police Station- a common man's access to the sentinel should be enthused with high principles of justice. It should be a cut above the society, standing for truth and impartiality, and yet be a part of the rhythm of its jurisdiction being involved and closely woven with its people.

And yet we see distraught fathers of missing girls either being asked to cough up money to have the child's photograph published or being offered money to keep quiet in a case of rape. We see foot soldiers of police stations marauding their jurisdiction for 'chauth'. And then, one feels that somewhere things have gone wrong. We see instances of people being pitted against men in khaki. The reasons may extend to those beyond policing. But there is no denying that a trust deficit exists in cases. And this is both a challenge to the functioning of police and also a failure of its delivery system. Herein, lies today, the greatest paradox of policing- making the police stations responsive, efficient, professional at the ground level.

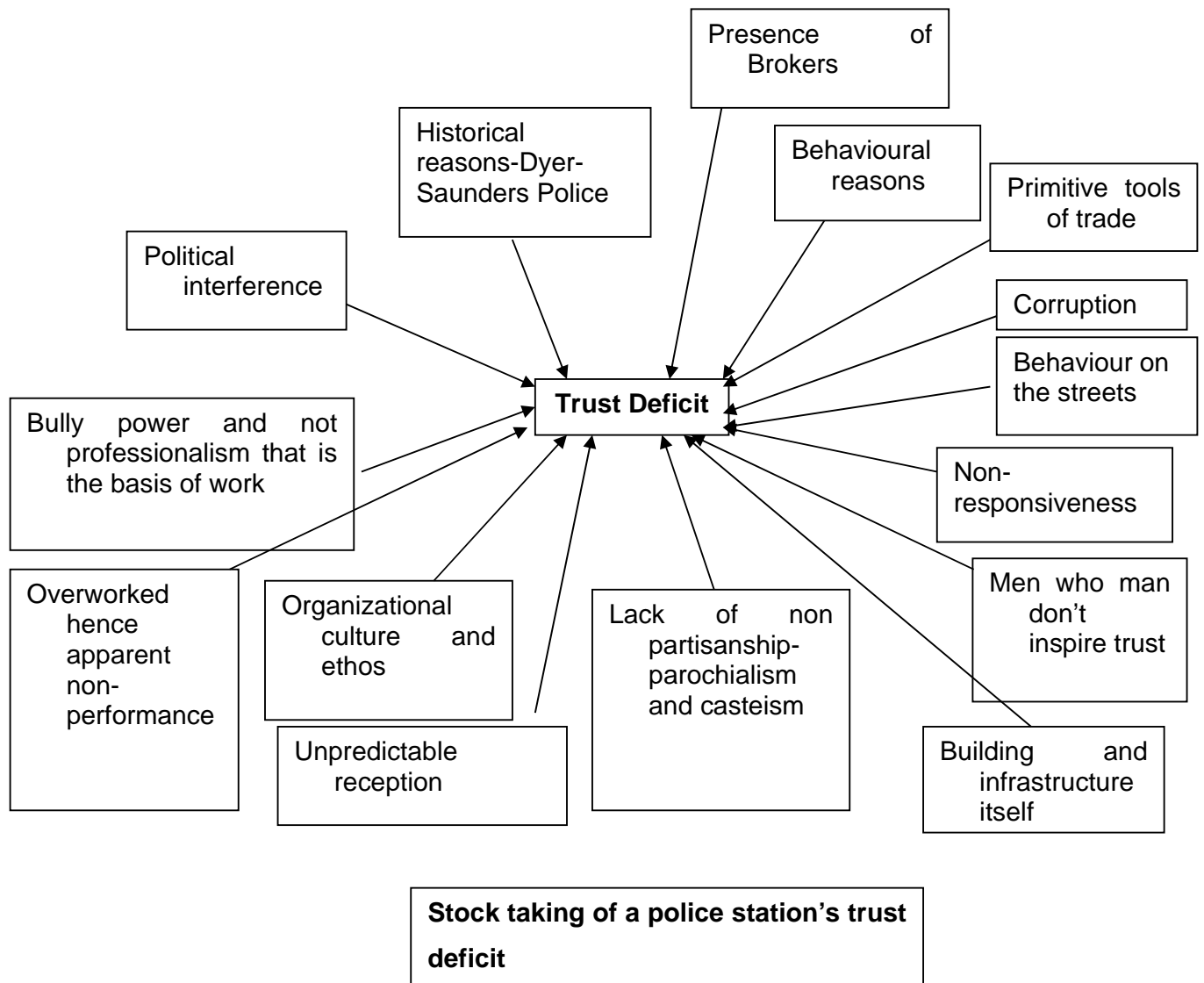
Need for trust

Why is trust between the police station and people under its jurisdiction important?

1. Since that relationship alone will ensure, smooth operation of police functioning that require -
 - Forthcoming Intelligence
 - Law and order being managed well- credibility of officers and men speaks in moments of crises. Seething discontent against the system bursts open in times of stress and friction.
 - Violence and agitations against the system being pre-empt or addressed-India is characterized by what has been stated as

‘revolution of rising frustrations’ and ‘agitational politics.’ When one deals with them on the ground besides the issue itself, it is the faith in the system that placates matters.

2. Above all else, as Robert Peel, conscious to the importance of accountability and trust, stated "The police are the public and the public are the police."
3. Argued around, why else do the police stations exist if the people under its jurisdiction have no trust in them? The raison d'être or the mere existence of police is premised on this.
4. Collaboration is required to ward off crimogenic social conditions.
5. Active participation of an equal footing and vigilance by community is an antidote to corruption.



Analysis of Trust Deficit

Trust does not happen in times of crisis. Many factors, not just behavior, but structure, orientation, character of the organization go in to determine faith in the system. The end result is belief as to how one will be treated and what one can expect.

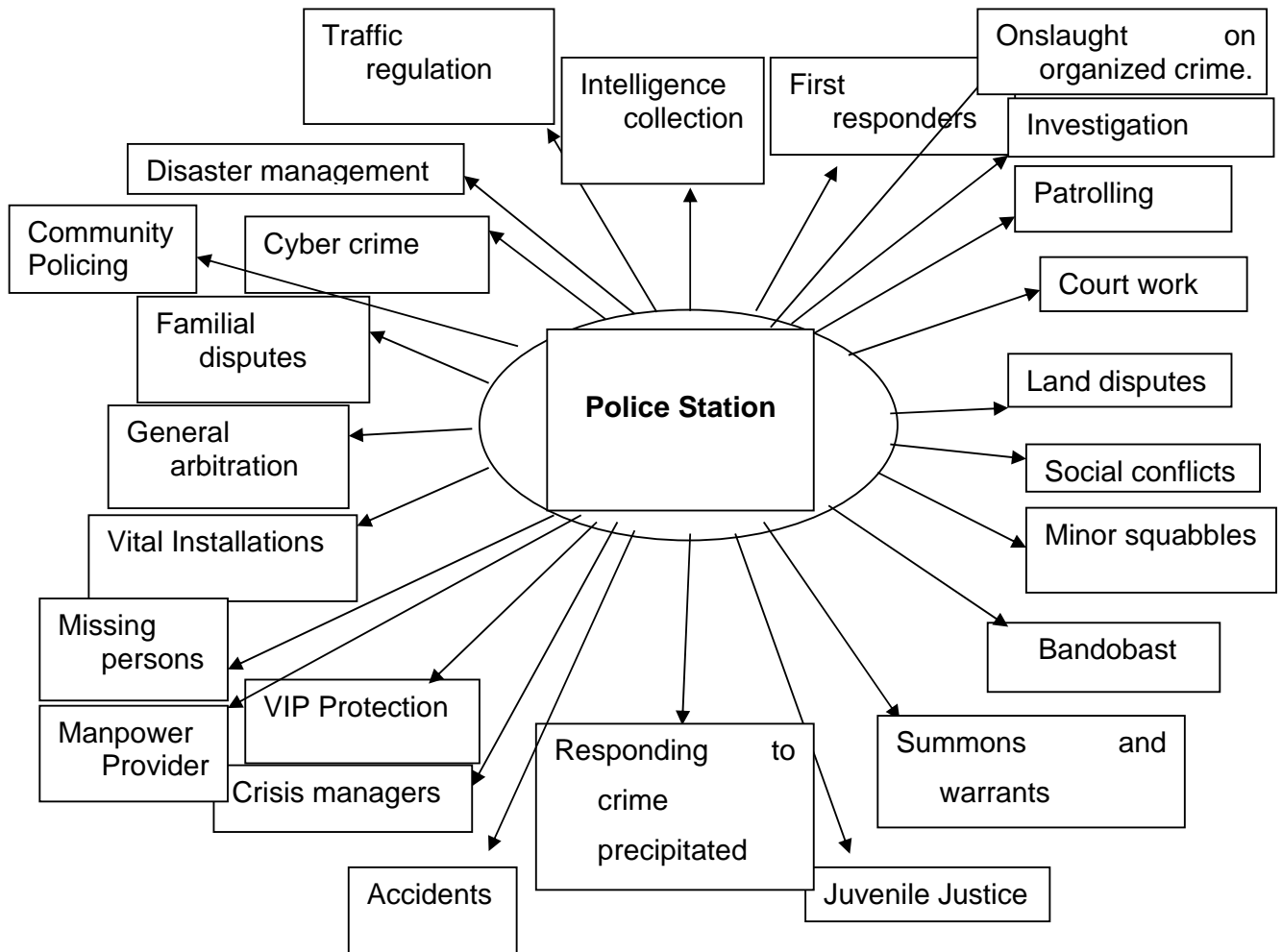
A station caught up in parochialism and speaking for powers that be; a station running on protection money, where it turns blind eye to nefarious activities for a consideration; a police that works on bully power of pushing its weight through, on the basis of punitive powers it can exercise; cannot earn trust.

Many factors have compounded to result in this trust deficit between the Police Stations and the people-

Historical reasons- Police has always been seen as a handmaiden of the powerful. Previously zamindars with local retainers and chowkidars provided for safety and security. Lord Cornwallis introduced thanas headed by ranked darogas under the SP in the year 1791. Changes kept occurring, but the system remained largely what Lord Bentinck described as “the shepherd” being “a more ravenous beast of prey than the wolf”. Despite improvement in pay and standing of Darogas by Lord Auckland, the system remained dismal. The 1902-03 commission saw high degrees of corruption esp. at the level of Station House Officers. The whole freedom struggle saw the police pitted against the nationalist aspirations- brutal lathi charges, arrests, firings, anti- nationalist movement intelligence.

Functional reasons- The police station is overworked. And it is not able to fulfil its ever increasing mandate. It is akin to the ‘god that has failed’. Police station is like an emergency station where constant action, promptness and eagerness are required. Police fails because of the monumental nature of demands and the availability of Stone Age tools to take on the cyber and the space world. While its eyes are required to be vigilant to global events, its ears are to be alive to the local issues.

Add to that, residual functions. As a public office, open 24 hours a day 365 days a year, any issue that cannot be addressed anywhere else is reported here.



'The God that Failed'

Most of the work it does may not even be registration of cases but, arbitration, mediation, conciliation. Its good offices are used for many a job that will always go unsung. Every new act e.g. Information Technology Act, Domestic Violence Act throws up new crimes or arenas to be acted upon. Today manpower may be required for removal of encroachment in forests tomorrow for the same in an urban space.

Police station is to be a superman without super abilities. And its quiver is full of tardy arrows.

Managerial Reasons-The unstructured hours of work, constant eruption of emergencies, the lack of holidays, makes working in a Thana a very difficult task. Moreover there exists the vulnerability to be picked up for any failure. One is

required to work round the clock as well as have a strategic vision to plan for the future responsibilities.

Political reasons-Various Commissions have pointed out the lack of neutrality in the functioning of the police. The Srikrishna Commission on Mumbai riots had noted-'inbuilt bias against the Muslims' especially at junior level. Rangnath Mishra Commission on anti- Sikh riots in '84, also emphasized, 'The riots occurred broadly on account of the total passivity, callousness and indifference of the police in the matter of controlling the situation and protecting the people of the Sikh community'. Hence the record of police has been far from respectable. Also the local police is seen to carry out its investigations, frame its charge sheets, drop and include names in cases, carry or avoid arrests, execute warrants and collect intelligence in a manner to serve political masters, factional groups or the powered.

Organizational Cultural and behavioural reasons- Despite sensitivity trainings, increasing educational qualifications of those who join the force, citizen's charters, oversight by human rights organizations and multitude of 'ayogs', it is seen, that instead of bringing a fresh vision, those who enter the system get co-opted. So thanas remain, untouched by customer orientation. There continues to exist an impression that policing requires ruthlessness and fear inspiring behaviour. The effort in policing remains - instil fear of uniform than fear of law.

Corruption-Police corruption is legendary. Almost everyone has a story to tell. As Mollen commission had noted that today's corrupt officers 'don't just bump into opportunities but rather aggressively seek opportunities.'

Protection money is a bane. Thana may virtually be serviced by money coming from illegal mining, bootlegging, prostitution or any other nefarious activity within its jurisdiction. People see a Thana tolerating these and hence the apathy.

Culture of poverty- The needs of a Police station goes unaddressed. Normal day to day working of a police station require Xeroxes, payment of generator bill, stationary, petrol demands, contingencies involved in investigation, dead body disposal expenses. All those are to be billed. But, these get overlooked.

Moreover the infrastructure at the Police station remains weak. Its own staff does not have space or furniture to sit on while it is expected to extend all hospitality to those who come to the PS.

Primitive Tools of trade - Scientific rigour that is required of any investigation is lacking. BPRD has conducted studies which speak of investigative teams. In various countries proper SOPs exist for constituting teams and setting up a Situation Command Room for grave crimes. The passion to seek out truth in investigation with forensics and impeccable standards of impartial analysis and prosecution alone can bring the agency the respect due to it. But incidentally, no one minds 'cave-man' tools of third degree if their own body or property is involved. Rather, hesitation to use it may be seen as lack of interest on part of

the police. Moreover, a certain leeway in investigation helps to give discretionary power to those eager to oblige.

Statistical evaluation-Where performance is measured by numbers, there is scope for dressing of figures. Vacuous action under Minor Acts may be played up and actual crimes played down. Where complaints don't get registered and the aggrieved is avoided – a human good, misplaced for a larger statistical good- the ultimate purpose of the police station is far from achieved.

The Options

If we were not to concentrate on developing a positive relationship between the community and the police, and look for solutions elsewhere, we can see below as what our options could possibly be-

S	Suggestion	Strengths	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats	Remarks
1	Reliance on paramilitary forces as against police station	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh approach as old suspicions against PS exist Law and order issues and agitations can be better dealt with Less amenable to political pressures Internal security issues which are increasing, better taken care of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of personal touch Not good for conciliation and mediation Lack of accessibility Credibility of forces erodes if used over sustained period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police will get better trained in field craft and tactics and riot control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It will only widen gap between people and the police 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paramilitary is good for a surgical not a sustained approach Even in disturbed areas only a temporary solution 'Shriveled up PS', the jurisdictions of which get confined, due to disturbances in the area, are part of the problem of growing distrust between people and the police. The limited manpower gets further spread over paramilitary solution
2	Outsourcing of Non Core functions- Making police station lean and mean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historical suspicion of PS is taken care of Private agencies and private partnerships can ensure greater 'professionalism' and 'specialization' Overwork issues are rationalized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What may look as a core function to one may be non- core to another Issues of security involved e.g. if surveillance, escorting and production of prisoners are privatized. Difficult to extricate the two completely because of cross-linkages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialization of police ensured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security concerns Frauds and misuse in private hands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proper application of mind required to distinguish core from non- core.
3	Specialized Agencies; more of 'core competence agencies' are created at	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police will be able to deal with complex issues with global ramifications in a professional manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People's contact is not there 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialized skills in policing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will lead to a Hydra headed organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While such agencies are a requirement they should supplement the working of the

	federal, state and district levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complex matters like economic crime, cyber issues, money laundering, terrorist attacks can be addressed in a professional a manner • better chances of policing being impartial 			with no local feet	police station, not supplant them.
4	ISO accreditation of Police Stations	Managerial efficiency can strike roots in the PS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lengthy and expensive process • Islands of new process engineering are set up • It deals less with interface with the public. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will improve police functioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does nothing to improve the organizational culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has remained more of a piecemeal measure without changing the character of the police Station.

However, all these are piecemeal and part solutions, and the requirement is to establish trust between police and people within the jurisdiction.

The way out

In essence, adopting the bottom-up approach, we have to start with the Police Station. Mere good behaviour and homilies will not ensure a change of heart. We have to rather address structural, managerial, financial and organizational issues. While nowhere near exhaustive, but some of the issues that should be looked into are-

Structural

Model Police Act-The 1861 Act cannot do in the 21st century when the role, responsibilities and context of policing have changed. Rather than examining just the 'rotten apples' we have to examine the 'rancid' and 'rotting barrel'. The Model Police Act submitted to the Home Ministry by the Soli Sorabjee Committee way back in 2006 requires much more serious consideration and processing.

Separation of Law and order police- Has been emphasized by commission on commission. This needs to be ensured at the PS level itself.

Jurisdictional Issues- Based on crime, population density, urban- rural ratio, a regular assessment regarding constituting new PS should be on.

Financial and Infrastructural

Financial strengthening of the thanas- Fighting shy of spending on police, fearing militarization of society or an Orwellian 'big brother watching' state, is a misplaced argument. So is getting embroiled in 'Bread vs Gun debate'. The subconscious apathy of spending on police, where 80% of the budget goes merely in salaries need to be addressed. Police it should be understood stands

not for loss of liberty, but being part of the Criminal Justice System, for protection of justice. Utilizing funds under the Police Modernization Scheme since 2000 and exploring the 'Plan Funds', have helped raise the police from pathetic penury in terms of resources, but much needs to be done at the brass-tacks level. The bare essentials at this level have to be aggressively taken care of. There is a pressing need to make available also an imprest for investigation at the PS level itself.

Infrastructure- Police stations should be equipped with proper infrastructure, and funds should be earmarked for their maintenance too.

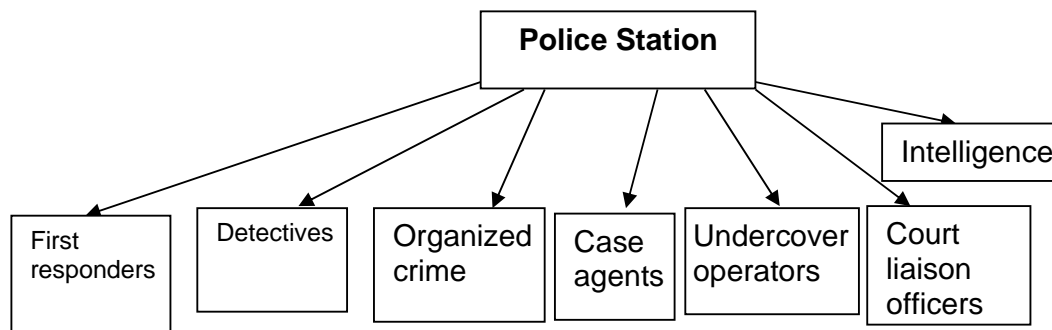
Scientific and technological orientation- Needs to exist for investigation, interrogation. System of e-challans, use of PDAs, and CCTV surveillance at important intersections is the need of the day. Computerized data base and the culture of adopting these in day to day functioning can help to provide a professional base to the police. It is amazing that a country with enviable institutions of higher learning, the largest pool of software professionals is not willing to modernize its force.

Provision of Canteen- Also for their own staff, it may be a little gesture but will go a long way, if canteen facilities/ Cafeteria are provided within the PS itself. Instead of the staff prowling the roads for a free or a highly discounted bite, this will ensure that, given their unstructured hours of work, their basic needs are met with, with dignity.

Functional

Taking Corruption head-on- Strong system of internal vigilance and strict action against transgressions, reducing opportunities and limited tenure in assignments that make officials susceptible to corruption, should be ensured.

Specialization-



This classification is indicative and in the interests of developing specialized skills. Usually the SHO along with the Head Constable Moharir (HCM) or the 'Writer Constable' allots duties to favourites in an ad hoc manner, leading to frustrations and job dissatisfaction. Even the available staff is not ably utilized.

For ownership and a good assessment of their own responsibilities, some kind of specialization at tehsil PS level is quintessential.

Manpower Audit-In the manpower audit, care should also be taken to outsource the staff functions administrative and reception duties. Also a realistic assessment has to be made to ensure a proper police- public ratio.

Standard Operating procedures- To provide for uniformity, predictability and a well thought of approach to policing and reducing the role of high handedness and discretion, it is important to provide 'Standard Operating Procedures' for situations and processes.

Giving up statistical evaluations- In its internal workings and assessment by society at large measuring the health of the police and effectiveness of its functioning, on the basis of figures should be given up.

Reception centre and help desks- A proper 'reception and guidance centre' with specially trained personnel, provision of self help pamphlets, guidelines, emergency numbers should be provided at PS. It would make the interface between any person arriving at the PS and the police, a predictable and positive one. E.g. freely available pamphlets near the reception centre which guide as to what to do in case a person is a victim of domestic violence, or if one's child has taken to drugs can show a proactive, 'reach out' approach of the police.

Also as far as women and children are concerned, special help desk to entertain their special concerns may be provided.

Expertise and high standards of performance - One trusts a doctor and a surgeon who is the best in the profession. One can't rely on a police and its investigation and redressal system, if it is not guided by proper knowledge and application of law and its processes.

Community involvement-In Australia, in many police stations, there exists the 'Sexual Offence and Child Abuse' centres, which encourage professional community involvement. Herein forensic, medical personnel and trained psychologists are present to provide continued support to victims of crime.

Managerial

Managerial Principles - The PS should be managed on sound management lines. The aims should be-

- Promoting motivation
- Clarity of purpose
- Optimum use of force
- Welfare
- High standard of work performance
- In uniformed forces, there is also a need to promote a higher degree of free and fair communication. Aim should also be to make this possible.

In short one requires, 'internal enrichment' of its personnel for a 'positive external orientation'. An organization cannot be sensitive to the outer world, if it is insensitive to its own men.

HR and promotion prospects- Emphasis on higher educational qualification should be laid down for the constabulary. The constabulary forms the skeleton of the force. And if they exist in a watertight enclave, where their ownership of the department and opportunities of professional growth are denied, there is little positive to be expected of the station's working. Hence speedy avenues of career progression should be provided at all ranks. Dignity and a sense of self worth have to be given to them and their work.

Sensitivity training- the subculture of policing is oriented towards dehumanizing its employees' right from the time of post recruitment-training. While mental and physical toughening is a must, but it does not require promoting the culture of 'conversation by invective.' From time to time personnel should be re-sensitized to developing empathy towards those they seek to work for. They should also be made aware of the professional asymmetries that may unsuspectingly be creeping in.

Strong code of conduct- There needs to exist a strong code of conduct that encourages transparency and discourages corruption.

In short, only a healthy institution will be able to build a healthy rapport with persons of its area. Far from looking for individual heroes who rise when the institutions collapse, we have to engineer healthy institutions.

There is no dearth of suggestions. Courts, commentators and commissions have made enough observations and proffered recommendations. The case is now to implement these in real earnest. For what is required is faith of the people in the 'ability and competence' of their police to handle cases, law and order situations, new emerging crimes professionally, faith that in its performance of duties, it will be impartial and upright. Then alone can they work in partnership for their own safety and security and for the larger cause of justice.

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