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Disorganizing and Reorganizing the front lines of community policing:
institutional aspects of the Japanese Koban System in São Paulo

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Abstract

This article explores some of the disorganizations and reorganizations occurring within the organizational culture of the PMESP (São Paulo State Military Police), after the adoption of community policing practices based on the Japanese Koban System. The emergence of a new (democratic) order, confronting the old (repressive) one, posed incongruent challenges to officers' self-perceptions and daily routines. Many started responding by means of personal effort, performing social service activities. However, the idea of being a "social firefighter", searching for the solution of deep social inequalities, seems to contain in itself a promise that many officers, especially sergeants, cannot accomplish. Some cultural traits from the Japanese model propose different angles for observing this dynamic. They suggest that a sense of purpose at the front lines of police work – and group cohesion that emanates from it – represents a strategic concern for the PMESP in its endeavor to become a more responsive institution.

Keywords

Koban System; PMESP; Organizational culture

1. Methodology

Over three years of PhD studies in Tokyo, the author visited São Paulo twice, in 2009 and 2010, for 4 and 3 months respectively, and started to combine a series of interviews with: (a) high-ranking police officers in the PMESP (São Paulo State Military Police), including one colonel, one major and one captain, coordinators in the Human Rights and Community Policing Department (*Departamento de Policia Comunitária e Direitos Humanos - acronym DPCDH*); (b) low-ranking PMESP officers, including a total of eight sergeants, ten corporals and ten privates working in ten different locations throughout São Paulo city, São Paulo Metropolitan area, and Santos (coast), all of them competing for the Citizen Police Award of Sou da Paz Institute (*Prêmio Polícia Cidadã do Instituto Sou da Paz*) (c) Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) officials, including one senior official based in Brasilia, who has followed the cooperation agreements between Brazil and Japan since their inception, and one middle-ranking official based in São Paulo, who had been following closely the evolution of koban-based practices in São Paulo; (d) the coordinator of community policing courses at the National Public Security Secretariat (*Secretaria Nacional de Segurança Pública* – SENASP), and one official from the Brazilian Cooperation Agency

(*Agência Brasileira de Cooperação –ABC),* directly involved with the cooperation process between Japan and Brazil; (e) a delegation of 25 Brazilian officers, from twelve different federative states, during a JICA seminar in Tokyo; (f) two senior Japanese police officers based in Japan, both having spent a period of one and a half years in Brazil conducting the training of Brazilian police officers under the scheme of International Cooperation between the Japan National Police and the Sao Paulo state Military Police (PMESP); (g) six police officers from the Japanese Police Academy, in Fuchu city, west of Tokyo, in order to gather their perceptions on community policing in Japan and compare them with the perceptions in Brazil. This "oral"[1] knowledge allowed the author to discern recent major changes taking place in the PMESP, especially considering the role of the *front line* officers – above all sergeants – in the consolidation of community policing practices. On the second visit to Brazil, the author redirected interviews and started to collect narratives of key people inside the corporation, considering its recent developments in the koban modality. These interviews included: (a) two colonels, one who had been the coordinator of the Human Rights and Community Policing Department (DPCDH) in the previous two years, and the other who was the current coordinator; (b) one major, who was heading the administrative efforts at the DPCDH; (c) low-ranking police

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officers, including three sergeants, based in three different locations in São Paulo state, as well as two corporals and two privates in each of these three locations, totaling six corporals and six privates interviewed. The criterion used was to pick individuals who had actively participated in the process of adapting and implanting the koban model in São Paulo, from its moment of conception until its most recent evaluations. As the author started to understand the PMESP, it was essential to comprehend the development of community policing practices under a holistic approach. The zoom lens concept, suggested by Neuman (2004), was applied beginning broadly on the characteristics of Pre-koban Phase locations (1997 – 2005) and then zooming in on the specific case of a few koban-pilot projects that entered a Koban Phase (2005 – today). Rather than focusing on the "community voice", this study focuses on the "internal voices" of the PMESP. Because community policing proposes the re-construction of officers' self-perceptions, it was important to grant them the time and space for free speech. The techniques of individual and simple group interviews were used, aiming to understand how koban-based practices relate to the organizational life of the PMESP. In both cases, because this is an exploratory study, open-ended interviews were used. Usually the author started with an open question and allowed the individual (or individuals) to spontaneously express their points of view.

2. Problem statement

During the 1990s the military police of many Brazilian states launched community-policing programs; this movement seemed to gain momentum in Brazil (FRÜHLING,

2006) and has been wildly reported by the media as an innovation in policing. But can the police in this country overcome strong social inequalities – poverty, income distribution, unemployment, among others – through the adoption of community-policing programs? A common institutional response by the São Paulo state Military Police (or PMESP – *Polícia Militar do Estado de São Paulo*) has been the adoption of incongruent community policing practices, as an approach to respond to urgent social demands. However, the adoption of practices from the Japanese koban system (neighborhood police-based system) seemed to help correct some of these incongruences.

This paper discusses the lessons learned from a few koban pilot-projects implemented in São Paulo since 2005, under the heading of the Community Base of Safety[2] (BCS, or *Base Comunitária de Segurança*) and focuses on how community policing (and the koban) affected the ways in which police officers perceive their roles in Brazil. This is important because one underlying problem, since the first practices started, has been the definition and scope of policing activities, especially at the operational levels, as expresses a sergeant in São Paulo: "*Sometimes I feel that the police assume [way] too many responsibilities. At the police post it is common for our team to start a policing task and end up performing a social service, such as driving a pregnant woman to a hospital*" (personal interview, 2009). His words indicate an abiding problem: for many police forces, not only in Brazil but also in other Latin American countries, community policing means tackling deeper issues of social inequality, often stemming from entrenched poverty.

Police forces reproduce inequality inside their own organizational structure, in multidimensional ways – income, race, gender and birthplace - and this affects the institution's culture as well as its ability to translate community policing into egalitarian and responsive practices. In São Paulo, deeper social inequalities impose a range of demands on the police, re-shaping the self-perceptions of the PMESP and how it relates to the society in which it operates. A common institutional stance, especially before the introduction of the koban system, has been the enforcement of social-service-related activities. The idea is that solving social problems such as poverty, education, and unemployment, for example, will eventually reduce crime rates. Nevertheless, multidimensional features of inequality in Brazil hide contradictions within policing as they keep social perceptions at the Community Base of Safety – the front lines – incomplete or "misrecognized" (BOURDIEU, 1977). Police officers are expected to overcome systemic social problems by means of personal effort. As a result, frustration is apparent and widespread among officers, since they can tackle some but not all societal problems. They start responding to the demands of other institutional fields, such as public health or education, which are not the scope of policing (FERRAGI, 2010; 2011). And this creates multiple problems.

The Japanese koban organization would seem to provide solutions to some of the problems above, by re-directing PMESP policies towards concrete locally based actions to prevent crime. It essentially proposes a situational (not social) crime prevention approach.[3] The idea is that offenders and victims meet when there is a "situation" that allows crime to happen. If these situations are avoided, or put under surveillance, the chances of victimization considerably decrease. This shift clarifies the role of officers, as they start prioritizing actual community policing practices instead of a variety of social demands. This is important for countries in the Global South, where community policing is challenged by deep social inequalities. It must be thought of not only as a tool for fighting crime, but also as a model for the improvement of police-community relations and the treatment of basic human rights. It proposes a joint effort among police and local organizations to help them look after their own risk management.[4] This method substitutes frustration and arbitrary use of force by transparency and the responsive application of law, contributing, as a result, to the development of more democratic society. But would this work in Brazil?

This question is difficult to answer. The Japanese koban system seems to empower officers to become involved with community related institutions. In institutional terms, as a means to justify their role and existence in the modern democratic Brazilian society, the internal dynamics and processes the PMESP seem to have transitioned towards a more open, accountable and competent organization in the task of performing neighborhood police-based practices. In other words, the PMESP has become more *outward looking*, a movement that represents "a further dimension of performance" (OECD, 2006:9). Such *responsive moves* are affecting the daily organizational life of the PMESP, in which there is a "general

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acceptance of greater empowerment of clients, rather than having all key decisions made by the supplier" (OECD, 2006:16). In our case, the *clients* are the citizens living close to koban-pilot locations, and the *suppliers* are the police, above all the front-line low-ranking officers working in such places: privates, corporals and sergeants. During his fieldwork, the author observed that community policing represents one of the responses of the PMESP to the new order imposed by democratization. However, the community-policing program is still not the main program of this police organization. Many PMESP officers recognize the koban model as a positive influence. But this question was still answered: Why are Brazilian officers proclaiming satisfaction within daily koban-based activities?

3. The Pre-koban and Koban Phases

The notion of the *evolution* of the PMESP will be considered in this paper because it clarifies not only the organization's character but also that of the larger social system under construction in Brazil. An organization's "inner dynamics" are "the expression, in a quite matter-of-the-fact way, of a built-in push toward determinate change, a source of directionality in history – without prejudice to the idea that much change is a result of "external influences" (NONET & SELZNICK, 2001:20-21). The brief history and turning points of the PMESP indicate external influences that significantly affected the police's internal dynamics and progressively pushed in the institutional movement for the adoption of community policing. In order to clarify the

influence of koban-based practices on the institutionalization of community policing practices in São Paulo, this paper identifies the following time frames on PMESP's recent historical narrative, focusing on the last two:

    a. Repressive phase: pre-1988 until the 1988 New Federal Constitution and its impact

    b. Transitional phase: 1988 to 1997 – The Beginning of Community Policing

    c. Pre-koban phase: 1997 to 2005 – The adoption of Community Policing programs

    d. Koban phase: 2005 until today – The adoption of Koban practices in some locations

Before the koban system, the so-called "*philosophy of community policing*" was "orbiting" around São Paulo state (Pre-koban phase, 1997 – 2005). Community-policing posts were implemented without a clear and concrete set of practices. They lacked defined procedures, being limited by theoretical discussions and debates. Although many police officers underwent training in community policing, and a few others acknowledged that it was an important "new way" of framing police work, the most commonly-observed results were resistance to change, lack of understanding and misunderstanding, especially at the local level – sergeants, corporals and privates (UCHIDA, 2007). Sergeants, who are the leaders among the lowest-ranking officials, remarkably, did not understand what community policing was. As a consequence, their subordinates – corporals and privates – were not empowered with practical standards of conducting daily policing.

Inside the PMESP hierarchy the Community Base of Safety, or BCS, represents

the smallest unit and has the lowest-ranking officials. On average there are 12 privates and corporals – not distributed equally, usually including more privates than corporals – and one sergeant in each BCS, in increasing order of hierarchy. A central point of this article focuses on the key figure of sergeants. They are the leaders inside the lowest ranking structure, and represent a *bridge* between the *front-line voices* and the higher (middle- and top-ranking) levels of the PMESP. Because sergeants connect the voices between the top and the bottom of the institution, they are also the ones who absorb the contradictions between them, acting as a pillow or a "cushion" that softens the impact between these two worlds (UCHIDA, 2007:156).

After the Transitional Phase (1988 – 1997) and before the koban system was adopted, the philosophy of community policing circulated mostly among the upper echelons of the organization, although not all top-ranking officials were convinced, and neither were middle- or low-ranking ones. However, the main problem is that sergeants, who represent this dialogue between the top and the bottom of the institution, were completely lost; they lacked a clear understanding of community policing. This happened, in part, because São Paulo's advance on community policing offered a structure for the search for new strategies that *could* function and it would be seen through trial and error whether they would *actually* function (MASTROFSKI & UCHIDA, 1993). Mastrofski (1994) suggests that this problem should be tackled by a substantial increase in the production

of information and the police's processing capacity.[5] A significant problem for the institutionalization of community policing has been the absence of descriptive data about daily operational processes, which characterized the organizational life at BCSs in the Pre-koban phase.

In a rigid militaristic hierarchy, many sergeants prefer to merely pass down orders received from above, even if they are not fully understood, which eventually generates conflict with their immediate subordinates and undermines their role as *institutional interpreters*. This still represents a challenge. In following orders from above, instructions considered absurd by them are often eventually imposed on corporals and privates. This generated tensions and an environment of mistrust among corporals and privates, who would consider sergeants as mere reproducers of orders. Sergeants, therefore, were confronted with the possibilities of being considered either *loose* or *tight,* depending on how they acted with their subordinates. Because they occupy a bridging position, they are part of the corporation's two worlds and, at the same time, they do not have their own space (UCHIDA, 2007). This factor has adversely affected the development process of their role and distinctiveness throughout the institutionalization process of community policing.

When the so-called koban system arrived in a few locations, Koban Phase (2005 – until today), it transformed this aspect for the better, because it had a positive effect on sergeants' understanding of community policing. This

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is a crucial point in the internal dynamics of the work of the PMESP. From this moment onward, sergeants at some koban pilot projects started to feel empowered, because they understood better how to coordinate BCS activities. Because they received institutional support – a clear detailed list of activities to accomplish, a schedule to be planned, and periodic visits from Japanese and PMESP experts, for example – they became leaders who started empowering their subordinates. At the operational level, at least, the adoption of the koban seemed to encouraged new ways of looking at the nature and substance of community policing programs, and of considering their rationale inside the organizational life of the PMESP. As a consequence, it drove strategic issues into the open; it led koban-like locations to 'reinvent' themselves, bringing bottom-up initiatives to the table and summing up this great reservoir of energy represented by sergeants and their subordinates. As a consequence, knowledge about community policing at the lower levels of the PMESP has increased greatly.[6]

Beyond suggesting that koban represents *the right model* for attempts by the PMESP to become more responsive, this paper proposes different angles for analyzing the organization's contradictions, raising questions and posing reflections about the benefits and challenges of adopting the Japanese model. It is only in a framework of trust that knowledge of risk can be adequately understood and form the basis of effective community policing (ERICSON & HAGGERTY, 1997). Privacy, trust, surveillance, and risk supervision go hand in hand with

monitoring the probabilities and possibilities of action by community policing practices in Brazil.

In community policing locations, as for PMESP work in general, two particular cases of needing to balance the requests of different stakeholders frequently arise – where the *government* may be perceived as a client and where *citizens* may also be perceived as clients. The former case is usually associated with the commitment of the PMESP to law enforcement, performing within the logic of the old (repressive) order: the police exist to reprimand crime, arrest thieves and protect the "good citizen". The latter coincides with the emergence of a new (democratic) order, in which officers respond to the democratic regime by providing "user-friendly" services, with accurate risk information flows, and assuming that citizens are honest until proven otherwise. In real life, an officer will probably recognize both the government and citizens as clients, but where he or she places the balance between them will determine the organizational culture of the PMESP. In practice, this organizational culture is constantly changing, defined by the organization's legislative mandate, by other specific directions given to it – such as the changes since the 1988 Constitution – and by its own institutional leadership or strategic planning framework (colonels and other high ranking officials). Finding the right balance between the old and new orders, more than a matter of sharply defined choice, represents more a case of balancing priorities to actual circumstances and problems. For the PMESP as a whole, from a more institutional perspective, it means finding the tune that provides satisfaction to internal and external social pressures.

5. Key concept: Towards more responsiveness

The emergence of a new democratic – and responsive – order, within which the movement of community policing is placed, offers the opportunity to confront old perceptions that officers had about themselves, as well as public understandings about police work. Along such lines, this paper explores the contradictions between the old (repressive) and the new (democratic) orders. The former holds the idea of the heroic police officer performing in a dichotomous world – where officers are the "good guys" fighting the "bad guys" supported by a "Manicheistic rhetoric of spiritual warfare" that "is transposed to the police environment and vigorously appropriated to the experience of coercion in police practices" (ALBERNAZ, 2010:539). The latter encompasses the community policing philosophy, in which officers perform in an unstable world with a diverse set of activities: on the same day they might interact with an upper-class citizen, arrest a criminal, talk to a business owner, and so on. Still, if we turn to the internal organizational life of the BCS's, a crucial problem is that such "spiritual warfare" seems to persist. The PMESP seems to translate and perpetuate the figure of the heroic police officer, who now becomes a "social firefighter" battling larger social problems through the performance of social-service-related activities. Concomitantly, officers and communities might identify the old repressive and ostensive modality of policing as a *firm hand* against crime, and community policing as a *too soft* approach to tackle these problems. The confrontation of these rationales represents challenges for the consolidation of community policing, because they substantially affect the execution and *desirability* of less repressive and more responsive actions by the PMESP.

In the context of service delivery, *quality* in the provision of policing comprises several components, such as "timeliness, accuracy, accessibility and appropriateness", (OECD, 1996:17). One problem is that values differ between Japan and Brazil, due to differences in historical, political and cultural backgrounds, and to a certain extent express part of the relationship between the police (supplier) and the communities (client) they serve. In Japan, social arrangements express participation, harmony and equality as constant variables within police work, and are a reminder of the good police-community relations built up over many years. In contrast, the military legacy and deep social inequalities impose a different logic on police-community relations in Brazil. First, following a military legacy, Brazilian police reproduce mostly a top-down flow, with something of a back and forth process between the levels; but basically it has been top-down. If officers follow orders, fine. But, indeed, just as a better car can be produced if a worker on the conveyor belt brings his or her suggestions to the big boss, in Japan police work has much more of this kind of interaction, mostly through internal meetings. Second, entrenched poverty generates a need to respond to a variety of social demands. In part, these factors explain why social service activities in Brazil have acquired a prominent role along community policing practices: for lower-ranking officers, above all sergeants, the *move* towards "responsiveness" has meant responding to larger social problems, as well

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as to the incongruent logic imposed by the higher echelons of the military police.

Social scientists have observed that the police present a considerable ability to act according to their own judgments, independently of hierarchical controls (LIPSKI, 1980; MUIR, 1977; REISS, 1971). Mastrofski (1994) recognizes this, and outlines that community-policing proponents try to restructure the police organization in order to make practitioners act in accordance with their leaders' "values" (MASTROFSKI, 1994; in BRODEUR, 2002:211). In the case of the PMESP, this means that the low ranks must possess more liberty to make decisions and, at the same time, the support and ability to make better choices. Community policing requires a significant *cultural change* in the very way the PMESP operates. As such "it requires capacity for change and time to achieve" (OECD, 1996:18). In any case, it is an ongoing process and therefore requires acceptance of and understanding by police officers at all hierarchical levels. Officers must receive appropriate training, signals and incentives. As observed in koban-like locations, it seems that the *front-line staff* – or those having direct contact with citizens - privates, corporals and sergeants – are one of the keys for the successful development of community policing. Especially sergeants, even if trying hard to attain a certain normality, may not find the correct means in which to balance the pressures posed by society, on the one hand, and the higher and lower hierarchical levels of the police, on the other. Their skills and status require upgrading to improve how they perform as a group, as explored next.

6. Cultural Aspects from the Japanese Koban

It is interesting to analyze how aspects of the Japanese culture, reflected in the koban organization, have affected the ways in which some BCS's perform as a group. Throughout the implementation of community policing, low-ranking officers are usually confronted with situational influences that create the identity of "heroes," or "*social firefighters*" as expressed by an officer (personal interview, 2009). But why should Brazilian officers consider themselves to be social heroes?

Observers might identify "altruistic" features in sergeants, corporals and privates, without taking into consideration that altruism is a less extreme version of heroism: it does not involve that much risk or cost. For instance, providing a consultation service to an old lady is not like extinguishing a fire inside a *favela* (slum) or, in a rigid hierarchical organizational culture such as the PMESP, standing up against unjust authority when sergeants could lose their jobs. This is what makes some sergeants, in their perceptions, "social firefighters". They feel they have become heroes for the society, and, to a certain extent, heroes fighting the evil inside the corporation.

Since the Transitional Phase, from the early 1990's, the *professionalization* of officers has gained space among advocates of police reform in Brazil, and until today continues to reverberate within and outside the PMESP. However, one element promoting professionalization remains effectively

underdeveloped: more autonomy for low-ranking officers on the front lines of policing – especially sergeants. In these lines, the koban organization seems to soften the blow of contradictions between the old and new orders, making it easier for sergeants to cope with the difficult task of implementing community policing and adapting to the new order.

Picture I: An officer extinguishing a fire, responding to an incident that happened during a patrol. *Jardim Ângela* neighborhood, south side of São Paulo city.
Source: Author (2010)

There is *cultural* support for Japanese officers to interact with citizens (AMES, 1981; McCARGO, 2004). What is unique about the Japanese koban is a combination of deep-rooted cultural values, a collective culture that includes aspects of Buddhism and Shinto religious rituals at large – which are not the focus of this paper.[7] And officers in Japan perform within this rationale: cultural values imply a devotion to a real communal culture at the local level, which means closer interactions with community members and fellow officers. They are integrated within a pro-social mentality, an ambience where the heart is directed toward the other. As a matter of fact, the symbol for human being (人間 or *Ningen*, in Japanese) is made up of two characters – 人, hito, and 間 or *aida* – which signifies *between people*. In the Japanese rationale, it seems difficult to exist as a human being without taking into consideration the existence of others. As an example, an ordinary Japanese citizen would not wear a protective

facial mask – commonly noticeable in the big cities – simply to avoid getting a cold, or because "it is safer" to do so. They do it because they are concerned about not spreading the disease to others. Or, mostly important, in their rationale "it feels better" this way. In the same way, officers reproduce such values when doing their jobs.

The koban organization seems to have developed under a cooperative construction of trust, operating within a rationality that focuses on progress and social distribution of risks, similar to what happens in a big family (*Ie*). In 2009 the author interviewed 6 officers at the Japanese Police Academy, in Fuchu city, west of Tokyo. They commented that one of the most common activities at the koban was to instruct drunken people to leave their bicycles and take a train or taxi home. These officers were not only concerned about following the law, or about the individual's safety. There seems to be something more, a certain desire to tune people's attitudes with societal harmony. Inside the organizational life of a koban, such values are constantly present, even if officers fail to perceive this. They reflect a model of social arrangements that is quite distinctive: Japanese officers are not heroes, but partners sharing risk management responsibilities with the community.

Observing the Tama Police Station, in Kanagawa Prefecture, the author noticed that each morning low-ranking officers meet daily at the police station, before heading to their local police boxes. It is much more the idea that *we are all here together,* whether someone is an ordinary officer or the police chief. At least, this mentality is part of the philosophy permeating police work. Concurrently, it seems to be one of the ideas that the koban system has brought to Brazil. To some extent, it is empowering the small police officer to assume his or her responsibility for his or her part of the town, of the community, and respond to people's needs.

This happens because, in the front lines of the PMESP, low-ranking officers are critically affected by the BCS internal dynamics and culture, which emanate from fellow officers – sergeants, being the leaders, are crucial in this process – and also middle- and top-ranking officials, who would either support or undermine the implementation of community policing activities. Essentially, officers perform routine activities by interacting with their counterparts, in the belief that they are doing the right thing. The confrontation of the old (repressive) and new (democratic) orders, certainly, affected their perceptions of this "right thing". What is interesting about the recent history of the PMESP, is that it has undergone important *disorganizations* and *reorganizations*. Throughout this process, as the organizational culture progressively changes to incorporate democratic values, officers naturally review their own principles and roles inside the group. For low-ranking officers at pilot locations this movement – or change – is expressed through the performance of koban-related activities, such as visits to residences and commerce, meetings inside the police post, and the publication of monthly journals that supplied officers with "*practical tools*" or "*concrete actions necessary to play in the real game of daily life*" (personal interview, 2009; 2010).

But the most important point is that the koban organization seems to have introduced the feeling of belonging to a group, providing a sense of *purpose*.[8] The characteristic function of the BCS, or in other words, its *core spirit*, has moved towards more openness in relation to their team, or "inside world". Because a sense of cohesion increases within the BCS, officers become afraid to let their colleagues down. As a result, sergeants, corporals and privates have developed the *audacity* to confront "the outside world".

Since the PMESP started implementing community policing, from late 1990's, one of the problems is that, in the organizational life of the BCS's, the "outside world" has been posing deep-rooted social inequalities. Such imbalances – poverty, unemployment, and drug addiction, among others – have been tackled by the delivery of social service activities, often incorporating social demands from other fields, such as health or education (FERRAGI, 2010; 2011). Because the front-liners are expected to do battle with these intractable problems by their own means, one of their perceptions is that community policing is risky and unrealistic. In the group's imagination, the interactions between the internal and external world require a "heroic" status. It extrapolates the idea of mere altruism; they become heroes, or *social firefighters*, responsible for eradicating societal problems. And one obstacle is that not all officers have the courage, or audacity, to face this challenge.

Concomitantly, this feeling is accentuated because the PMESP has two internal worlds – the commissioned world and the non-

commissioned world. For the microcosm of a BCS, therefore, the "outside world" also includes the commissioned world (middle- and top-ranking officers). They impose incongruent policies, "popping up" from administrative and academic pathways that are removed from the reality of the streets. In part it explains why sergeants feel unhappy and demotivated when their companies' commanders are not aware and supportive of koban-related BCS efforts. This was the case at most locations during the Pre-Koban phase. The BCS *Ranieri* (greatly affected by the koban), on the contrary, represents a case where such contradictions have been decreased by intense information flows between the different hierarchical levels. Such considerations are vital for the PMESP, as they are still searching for the right tunes to balance hierarchy and decentralized decisive power along the institution.

Throughout this process, the inner dynamics of the BCS are extremely important. There are many norms and standards that are constantly evolving in the internal world of a BCS. With the introduction of democratic values, more senior officers have become confused as to how to follow the rules, because the core spirit of the organization has been *disorganized*. They feel that others perform in ways that might push them out of the scene, lacking enough discernment to participate in the ongoing *reorganization* process. Indeed, one colonel who was interviewed commented that many officers were disengaged during the transitional and pre-koban phases. Others, the great majority who stayed, had to cope with the heavy burden of "forgetting their past" and what was considered "right". This represents an inner battle, in

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which officers question their individualistic traits. The problem, particularly, is that the focus of institutional change is directed toward *individual* officers. This is true for the PMESP, as for many other social organizations. Officers are the actors, the "malefactors", or judged as *the guilty party who committed the Favela Naval incident in 1997*, for example. This explains why the PMESP reviewed the institution's selection and training processes, looking on forms to "correct" officers' personality traits or thinking styles. Particularly with the introduction of the community policing, PMESP leaders have focused on a new profile of officers, who present leadership skills and "*the will to work with people*" (personal interview, 2010). However, they were seeing the actors alone on the stage, with no spectators, no other players or no uniforms. In fact, officers are always surrounded by an interactive environment. The organizational life of a BCS has different audiences, other actors, and the contradictions emerge from the confluence of the old repressive and the newly democratic order, which essentially imply that low-ranking officers become new people.

To a certain extent, the leaders of the PMESP have turned a deaf ear to the front-line voices of the corporation, especially during the Pre-koban phase. The main focus of what they have been doing up to now, is to try to spread "spores of heroism" around their BCSs and develop explicit social service projects that encourage officers to act heroically. And that is a problem. If we go back to the adoption of the koban, on the one hand it introjected a socially integrating tool, or myth, that fits well into such a shared imagination: *community policing implies the transformation of police egocentrism into socio-centrism*. When placed

in a diverse context such as São Paulo, koban-related practices have intensified this process – for instance, a public library was built adjacent to BCS *Ranieri*, promoting among officers the idea that they are champions of education and literacy promotion. On the other hand - and this is the koban's greatest contribution - it served as a socially compatible tool, inside the organizational life of the PMESP, allowing the development and reinforcement of community policing practices at many hierarchical levels. Above all, it empowered the front lines to work towards a collective construction of trust, as happens in Japan. The Japanese ideals of family (*Ie*) and harmony (*Wa*) seem to be translated into the centrality of the BCS as a community-police-based structure, favoring the decentralization of decisive power.

At koban pilot-project locations, low-ranking officers seem to establish a routine work that empowers them to understand reality and the meanings of risk in everyday communal life. There is an ongoing collective re-construction of their roles as "risk communicators" (ERICSON & HAGGERTY, 1997). Officers start to understand the importance of their physical space – the police post – as a place where risk management happens. Consequently, the BCSs gain much more significance inside the PMESP and inside the communities, because they start to serve as the core base for urban policing, as happens in Japan. Part of the responsibility of responding to societal demands is transferred from the tactical level (call centers) to the operational level, empowering low-ranking officers to observe and understand their localities.

In other words, the cultural features of the koban offer a tool for the reorganization

of the PMESP, demystifying the fight between good and evil. It has provided the idea that officers are partners sharing risk management responsibilities, overcoming the barriers posed by the confrontation of different institutional cultures – the new and the old orders are still present, as much as internal social disparities between the commissioned and non-commissioned tracks. Such cultural attributes seem to be teaching officers *how* to become "partners" with the community and among themselves, without losing or dissipating their energies in the continuum of *heroic* social responses, so that the perception of social firefighters is not built in these small steps.

7. Final Remarks

Observing community-policing locations, low-ranking officers have been struggling to learn the new norms and rules imposed by a new (democratic) order, without completely comprehending its logic and rationale. Essentially, they lack the adaptive capability necessary to endure the changing organizational culture of the PMESP. The survival strategy of sergeants, as mentioned earlier, was (a) to merely reproduce orders from above, as a means of avoiding conflict with higher hierarchical levels, and (b) to perform social-service-related activities, as a means of responding to urgent social demands. This obstacle, set by the confluence of the old and new orders, has also been reflected in the thoughts and attitudes of senior corporals and privates (UCHIDA, 2007). The renovation process of staff is recent and slow, and so are the organizational cultural changes at the lower levels. However, with the advent of the

koban system, throughout the pilot projects, the PMESP has gained by enhancing the role of sergeants as *institutional interpreters*. Indeed, one important lesson from the Koban-phase, since 2005, is that the PMESP must devote considerable effort to educating and training sergeants, empowering them with technical skills and a sense of *purpose* for the completion of their daily activities, otherwise a crucial expertise will be lost in the continuum of policing – and vagueness about community policing will persist. Because of their leadership role inside the BCS microcosm, sergeants, above all, embody acute contradictions and thus represent a strategic consideration for the institutionalization of community policing in São Paulo.

Finally, the idea of being a "*social firefighter*", searching for the solution of general problems, seems to contain in itself a promise that many sergeants cannot accomplish. In spite of the institutional significance of the koban as a social integrating tool, the knowledge of, and infrastructure in, community policing of the PMESP are still insufficient to produce the required technical success on a regular basis throughout São Paulo state. Given the small scope of koban pilot projects, a huge challenge to overcome the vagueness and misunderstanding about community policing lies not in sergeants themselves but in the institution's ability to conduct a rigorous evaluation of what works and why it works. If this knowledge is not properly managed, the PMESP will be unable to reorganize its organizational life and search for the better paths that combine *both* technical and institutional improvements.

1. Thompson (1998) states that the oral history of institutions contains significant knowledge of their institutional developments.

2. The koban system in São Paulo indicates the way to realize community policing using koban activities called Base Comunitária de Segurança (BCS) and which Chuzaisho called Base Comunitária de Segurança Distrital (BCSD).

3. While Social Crime Prevention aims to prevent crimes by tackling the social rather than the physical environment (ICPC, 2010), Situational Crime Prevention "seeks to forestall the occurrence of crime, rather than to detect and sanction offenders. It seeks not to eliminate criminal or delinquent tendencies through improvement of society or its institutions, but merely to make criminal action less attractive to offenders" (CLARK, 1997:2). While this paper recognizes that reducing the motivation to offend is important, the author argues that the PMESP has devoted excessive efforts to alter social conditions and patterns of behavior in São Paulo – which generates frustration among officers.

4. In a situational crime prevention approach, the police are not focused on the criminal justice system. Conversely, they moderate "public and private organizations and agencies — schools, hospitals, transit systems, shops and malls, manufacturing businesses and phone companies, local parks and entertainment facilities, pubs and parking lots — whose products, services and operations spawn opportunities for a vast range of different crimes" (CLARK, 1997:2).

5. Indeed, the capacity to examine problems, analyze them, search for alternatives and evaluate the results requires a much deeper commitment to research and development by the PMESP, a challenge also observed in North America (GOLDSTEIN, 1990:161)

6. Some authors might argue that the PMESP started developing a "community or locally-based crime prevention" strategy, which includes all those actions that "change the conditions in neighborhoods that influence crime, victimization, and the resulting insecurity" (ICPC, 2010:2).

7. The Japanese people's sense of community and unity, and well-organized behavior, could especially be observed after the big Tohoku earthquake in March 2011. At that moment of difficulty, the Japanese showed the world their "heart" (Kokoro, in Japanese) and "patience" (Gaman). Kokoro is more than heart, it means that people are aware of others, they stay in line to receive supplies, they share their blankets inside a shelter... it is a spirit or state of mind. And Gaman expresses the endurance and tolerance to deal with harsh times. Moreover, the educational system plays a crucial role, because children are taught in schools from early infancy to act properly in an earthquake. But there is something more, which goes beyond. The Japanese population's kokoro is trained under the ideas of harmony (Wa), patience (Gaman) and family (Ie). It has to do with a sense of conformity to social harmony, to allow space for others while one's own space is being disputed. Heart and patience, in this case, express Japan's strength and sense of organization.

8. To some extent purposiveness facilitates the elaboration of police authority, because it calls for inquiry into (1) substantive outcomes and (2) what is factually needed for effective discharge of institutional responsibilities (NONET & SELZNICK, 2001). In other words, the PMESP has begun to be more result-oriented, thus departing sharply from the classic image of justice blind to consequences.

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Resumen

Desorganizando y reorganizando las líneas del frente de la vigilancia policial comunitaria: aspectos institucionales del Sistema Koban Japonés en Sao Paulo

Este artículo explora algunas de las desorganizaciones y reorganizaciones dentro de la cultura organizacional de la Policía Militar del Estado de Sao Paulo (PMESP), tras adoptar prácticas de vigilancia policial comunitaria con base en el Sistema Koban japonés. El surgimiento de un nuevo orden (democrático), confrontando a uno viejo (represivo), implicó desafíos sobre las autopercepciones de policías y sus rutinas diarias. Muchos empezaron a responder por medio del esfuerzo personal, realizando actividades del tipo servicio social. No obstante, la idea de ser un "bombero social", que intenta resolver profundas desigualdades sociales, parece contener en sí una promesa que muchos soldados, especialmente los sargentos, no consiguen cumplir. Algunos rasgos culturales del modelo japonés proponen diferentes ángulos para observar esta dinámica. Estos sugieren que el sentido de propósito en la línea del frente del trabajo policial –y la cohesión de grupo que emana de este– representa una preocupación estratégica para la PMESP, en su esfuerzo continuo por convertirse en una institución más ágil.

Palabras clave: *Sistema Koban; PMESP; cultura organizacional.*

Resumo

Desorganizando e Reorganizando as linhas de frente do Policiamento Comunitário: aspectos institucionais do Sistema Koban Japonês em São Paulo.

Este artigo explora algumas das desorganizações e reorganizações dentro da cultura organizacional da PMESP, após a adoção de práticas de policiamento comunitário com base no Sistema Koban japonês. O surgimento de uma nova ordem (democrática), confrontando uma velha (repressiva), implicou desafios sobre a auto-percepções de policiais e suas rotinas diárias. Muitos começaram a responder por meio de esforço pessoal, realizando atividades do tipo serviço social. No entanto, a idéia de ser um "bombeiro social", buscando resolver profundas desigualdades sociais, parece conter em si uma promessa na qual muitos praças, especialmente os sargentos, não conseguem realizar. Alguns traços culturais do modelo japonês propõem diferentes ângulos para observar esta dinâmica. Eles sugerem que um senso de propósito na linha de frente do trabalho policial – e a coesão de grupo que dele emana – representa uma preocupação estratégica para a PMESP, em seu esforço contínuo para se tornar uma instituição mais ágil.

Palavras-chave: *Sistema Koban; PMESP; Cultura organizacional.*