19th century exam, 21st century policing: an examination of the New York State Civil Service and police officer recruitment:

Amani Edwards
University at Albany, State University of New York, amaniedwards12@gmail.com
19th Century Exam, 21st Century Policing: An Examination of the New York State Civil Service and Police Officer Recruitment

by

Amani R. Edwards

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ABSTRACT

The civil service exam was created in the late 19th century to reform the hiring process for public officials, focusing on merit (skills and expertise) versus political patronage and other partisan factors. While much of the 20th century focused on redesigning the civil service organizations, exam redesign still remains an important next step that is infrequently considered. In the case of police departments, while other issues arise in recruitment efforts, the civil service exam has been noted by interviewees as the biggest barrier to redesign efforts in accordance with 21st Century Policing goals.

Through in-depth interviews of current police chiefs and civil service administrators in New York State, this study asks to what degree the civil service exam in its current design is reflects current police responsibilities and properly determines officer fit. This study uses the Organizational Process Model and Local Knowledge as theoretical frameworks to explain organizational processes and issues that design the entrance exam and determine how police departments and civil service understand fit.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For Mom and Dad, who supported me from day one.

For my son Quincy, who was there throughout every meeting, interview, and late night of writing.

Thank you to all my friends and colleagues at UAlbany who were with me during this journey.

And lastly, thank you to my advisor and committee for your helping me bring this project to fruition.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“The biggest barrier to increasing diversity and... recruiting qualified officers in general, is the civil service exam.” – (Barry, personal communication, June 2017).

Introduction

Much has been written - shared and tweeted - and debated about the importance of police officer training and accountability. Much less has been written concerning the police officer entrance examination. While literature and debate on police officer training is important, it speaks mainly to only one part of police officer training and development. If we want to change policing, we may have to change the way police officers are selected.

This project is a study of the police officer entrance examination in New York State (NYS). The project uses in-depth interview analysis to uncover the voices of police officers and NYS civil service administrators to better understand the organizational procedures and knowledge behind exam design and what that means for police officer hiring, particularly regarding determining officer merit and fit in the context of 21st Century Policing. The results add to our understanding of not only how the exam is designed – beyond the basic knowledge available in current literature – but how the interactions between police departments and civil service administrators, and more broadly, how the local knowledge of one organization is communicated (if at all) to another organization to support exam design.

NYS is also an interesting case to understand the role of organizational processes and how those processes create barriers to inter-organizational communication. As later chapters will
show, these barriers not only hinder exam redesign efforts, but also create confusion and tension between entities that otherwise need to communicate with each other.

I was informed by an interviewee that the Department of Civil Service (DCS) does not create or administer the police officer entrance examination in New York City. When asked why, I was not given a straight answer. NYS poses an interesting case, not just because of the autonomy of New York City, but because of its emphasis on good governance and mitigating corruption. There are consistent debates in NYS government about the need to reform departments and organizations. As the 2008 recession caused budget cuts, some organizations faced the need to reform while also juggling the decreased personnel due to funding shortages. The US economy did not fully recover from the recession and state organizations never fully regained the lost personnel. The political changes spurring from the 2016 election have also caused renewed panic among some government officials at state and municipal levels regarding the integrity of public service institutions.

The implications of these events for the DCS – an organization tasked with upholding the values of public service and mitigating corruption, political influence, and patronage in a state known for its good, diligent governance (in the US context) – are tremendous. The DCS has been tasked with continuing its mission with less money and increased external pressure.

When I first started this project, I viewed the entrance examination as a mechanism to measure specific skills, knowledge, and abilities associated with policing. However, in speaking with civil service administrators, I found that my original views were misguided. The NYS police officer entrance examination is designed to measure an individual’s ability to learn how to be a good officer. This is important because it expands the initial views of this project: it is not just about design; it is about the intent behind the design. Police officers believe the examination
is supposed to determine candidates who are best for the job of policing, based on certain skills, knowledge, and abilities (SKA’s) relevant to the occupation. This added variable of intent creates a mismatch between police departments and the civil service in understanding what the examination is supposed to do, and what it is believed that it does. Regarding knowledge transfer, this creates a miscommunication between police departments and DCS on what is needed for a successful. That is, police departments are looking for an examination that addresses the competencies for policing; DCS is designing an examination that is valid and reliable.

Administrators at DCS believe that they “cannot test someone on something they don’t know.” Individuals designing the examination are not expected to know what is necessary to be a police officer, just how to design an exam that is valid, reliable. The goal of the civil service is to protect the integrity of the workforce therefore, the entrance examination measures an individual’s potential to learn and the onus to train and teach policing competencies is on police departments and the police academy. The police officer entrance examination, in its current design, measures an individual’s test-taking ability. The subsequent score is associated with a candidate’s ability to learn. The issue with the police officer entrance examination, then, is not whether the exam does what it is supposed to do. Instead, it is about what police departments want it to do, and how to design the exam to achieve that purpose.

The entrance examination is the focal point of this project because it is the beginning of the process for an individual to become a police officer in NYS. This project asks the following questions:

1. Is the current design of the police officer entrance examination a good reflection of current police responsibilities?
2. Is the exam “outdated?” If so, why has the exam remained unchanged despite changes to policing practices?

I argue, citing evidence mainly from interviews with police officers (active and retired) and municipal and state civil service administrators, that the examination does not wholly reflect police officer responsibilities, because it is not designed to do so. Even if the intent is to design an exam to reflect current officer responsibilities, communication between the DCS, municipal civil service agencies, and police departments does not allow for the sharing of knowledge and information to inform exam redesign. The second research question poses a different issue: it is based on perspective. Police officers and civil service administrators view the term “outdated” differently. These views further emphasize their understanding of the examination’s intent and design.

The title of this project is more apropos to the findings: the current design of the police officer entrance examination in NYS is not reflective of current police responsibilities and current societal demographic changes. This “outdated” (according to police officers) design creates an issue for police departments, particularly for initiatives such as 21st Century Policing. Essentially, while police departments are attempting to update their practices (e.g., community policing standards and departmental operating standards) police hiring practices, at the examination level, remain consistent. Civil service administrators push back on this, stating (correctly) that the examination is not outdated because it is created every few years when the police hiring process begins.

The design of the NYS police officer entrance examination has remained unchanged due to administrative differences between DCS and police departments. I use literature on the Organizational Process Model (OP) and local knowledge to explain the bureaucratic processes
that create the exam and dictate the administrative processes of the civil service and police
department culture. Local knowledge emphasizes the translation of knowledge between one
occupation to another (among many other routes of translation) and OP emphasizes the
organizational procedures that create the examination and potentially make change difficult. OP
provides a framework for understanding how organizations operate, specific to this project and
more importantly, how these standard operating procedures (SOPs) affect organizational outputs
and inter/intra departmental communication and knowledge transfer. Changes in an
organization’s OP may affect or create conflicts and miscommunication across organizations due
to organizational differences between SOP’s.

Local knowledge is important for translating the organizational outputs and
understanding how the municipal civil service agencies, DCS, and police departments interpret
the police officer entrance examination. Local knowledge often refers to knowledge shared or
held within a certain group of individuals or subset of workers within an organization. This
project examines the sharing of local knowledge from one organization to another, invoking
issues of not just knowledge sharing but knowledge translation. Differences in organizational
processes and knowledge require that when knowledge is shared, it is also translated for those
outside the organization to understand the knowledge and its context. When understood together,
the theories create a model for how organizations operate and communicate internally and
externally. This way of operating and communicating – as is found in the data analysis – creates
tension and confusion between organizations, hindering progress on exam redesign, by limiting
how communication is shared between organizations. More importantly, it makes these
organizations more resistant to change, or at least, less flexible in implementing it.
The exam does not necessarily show an individual’s potential as an officer; it shows that they can pass a test (Jerry & Beth, personal communication, June 2017; Simon, personal communication, June 2017; Hyrum, personal communication, July 2017; Mack, personal communication, August 2018). The result of the examination is a pool of adequate applications whose qualifications are a score on an exam (Virgil, personal communication, September 2018). While it is unfair to assume that the pool of applicants is not knowledgeable of police work, it is fair to assume that each candidate who passes the exam is, at the core, somewhat of a good test taker. This statement has been backed by both police chiefs and civil service administrators interviewed for this project. Good test takers, however, do not always make good police officers and scores do not always reflect the future work of an officer, this is mainly due to how the exam is designed (Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, & Elliot, 2002).

The police chiefs interviewed for this project reported that they scored an average (mid 80s) or low score (70-84) on the entrance examination, based on what they remember\(^1\). These scores show that despite the civil service measuring merit based on an exam score, scores do not necessarily determine officer fit and merit.

21\(^{st}\) Century Policing, while upholding many of the tenets of community policing, represents a newer focus on departmental organization and processes to increase effectiveness and police responsiveness. 21\(^{st}\) Century Policing is even more of a response to a changing societal demographic, which also requires differing policing practices. Most conversations regarding policing have not focused on the civil service - this study seeks to shift the focus and does so in a state where the civil service, in the context of the data collected for this project, has been defensive about its processes. More importantly, by shifting to qualitative research, this

\(^1\) The lowest score a police chief interviewed for this project received is a 70.
study moves beyond some policing studies that focus on a quantitative approach, gaining insight and knowledge into the exam design process by speaking directly with its designers. This project provides a model for not only understanding the entrance exam design process, but how the intent behind the design influence perceptions about its efficacy.

**Community Policing and 21st Century Policing**

Community policing is an initiative championed by most police departments nationwide that focuses on departments engaging with their community members and building relationships founded on trust and respect (COPS, 1996). 21st Century Policing takes this a step further and includes organizational effectiveness and efficiency (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). It has three main components: community partnerships, organizational transformation, and problem solving (COPS Office, 2015). Community policing saw the largest implementation in the 1990s, with “50 per cent of the police departments, with a city population of 50,000 or more, having implemented community policing” (Oliver & Bartgis 1996, p. 490; see also Trojanowicz, 1993). In addition, the passage of the federal Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 attached spending for police officers for community policing initiatives. It also included the creation of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS - a fitting acronym) under the US Department of Justice to manage the hiring, recruiting, and enactment of community policing (COPS, 1996; Oliver & Bartgis, 1996, p. 490).

Police departments are not the same. Some departments have hundreds of officers, some have only a handful; some departments’ officers are only part-time, and most operate solely with full-time officers. Despite the differences in police departments, the police expectations, particularly when it comes to serving the community, are similar. The main skills needed for
police work under community policing/21st Century Policing as defined by the Occupational Information Network\(^2\) and the skills needed for policing in general (provided by the Office of Personnel Management from 2007) are as follows\(^3\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Policing/21st Century Policing Competencies</th>
<th>General Policing Competencies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Active Listening</td>
<td>- Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Critical Thinking</td>
<td>- Agility</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Social Perceptiveness</td>
<td>- Detail-oriented</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Negotiation</td>
<td>- Conflict management</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>- Coordination</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Service Orientation</td>
<td>- Creative thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Complex Problem Solving</td>
<td>- Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Judgment and Decision Making</td>
<td>- Integrity/honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Time Management</td>
<td>- Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Writing</td>
<td>- Learning and memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Oral and written communication skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Technical competency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Community policing focuses on “an increase in community interaction, a concentration on ‘quality of life issues,’ the decentralization of the police, strategic methods for making police

\(^2\) A resource sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, [Employment & Training Administration](https://www.dol.gov/oust/).  
\(^3\) This list was compiled through the leadership of Nancy Kichak, Associate Director of Strategic Human Resources Policy in Office of Personnel Management (OPM) from 2007
practices more efficient and effective, a concentration on neighborhood patrols, and problem-oriented or problem-solving policing (Oliver 1998; Oliver & Bartgis, 1996, p. 491). Cordner (1995) identifies four major dimensions of community policing and their central ideas: The Philosophical Dimension, the Strategic Dimension, the Tactical Dimension, and the Organizational Dimension that emphasizes reorganization of police departments to handle these new changes, focusing on structure, management, and information (pp. 433-444). These dimensions emphasize being proactive and focus on crime reduction and mitigation and more personalized community service. The Organizational Dimension has become more prominent in recent years during the 21st Century Policing initiative, as it looks to change departmental structures and improve efficiency in departmental responses as well as general administrative tasks. These reorganization efforts are aimed at providing better services to the community to solve and mitigate crime, while also building trust and departmental legitimacy.

Community partnerships emphasizes the relationship between community leaders, organizations, and other members of the community and their respective police department(s) to generate solutions to community problems and increase trust in the police (COPS Office, 2015). An example of this is the Police Athletic League (PAL), which creates partnerships between the police and the community – mainly youth – through sports and other activities (Albany Police Athletic League, 2018). Organizational transformation involves synchronizing organizational personnel and information systems to support community partnerships and problem solving (COPS Office, 2015). This organizational transformation requires the updating and synchronizing of information technology systems in agencies, creating a strong organizational culture and mission, problem solving in the community, and open and efficient engagement with community members. However, in community policing, two other aspects are involved: the
reduction of problems and assessment, which evaluates the success of the responses (COPS Office, 2015). While community policing envisions police departments forming lasting relationships with communities, 21st Century policing looks to further these relationships through problem mitigation and increased community participation.

Civil Service Examination

While 21st Century policing is relatively recent, the civil service examination has a much longer history. The civil service in the United States was created to combat patronage systems within the federal government. The early patronage system in the United States represented a system in which benefits – resources, political appointments, and so on – were given to individuals in exchange for political support (Van Riper, 1958, p. 8). Most public officials were given positions based on partisanship, wealth, personal loyalty, “charity”, and influence (Van Riper, 1958, p. 8). With the implementation of the Pendleton Act in 1883, the civil service, not political patronage, was used to define merit for public employees. It was created to neutralize the effects of the spoils system within the political system (Van Riper, 1958, p.137; Rosenbloom & Emmert, 1982, p.12; Ingraham 1995, p.3). The civil service exam was implemented with three main objectives: “permit government to recruit qualified personnel for public jobs, reward and develop the public workforce, and provide guidelines for organizing the workforce to meet public objectives” (Ingraham, 1995, p.xv). The formation and implementation of the civil service also contributed to the broader objectives of government: to represent and be responsive to the people (Ingraham, 1995, p.xv).

The newly formed civil service looked to address the issue of hiring, leading to the formation of “merit”, which was based on the knowledge and skills of an individual. Merit
decided an individual’s recruitment and tenure in public office. An individual’s merit was determined by an entrance exam and subsequent score (Van Riper, 1958, p.537; Maranto Schultz, 1991, p. 11). Individuals selected to serve in civil service positions were deemed to have the skills and knowledge to perform their duties (Rosenbloom & Emmert, 1982, p. 25).

Recent criticisms of the civil service examination note that the exam does not measure “job-related knowledge, skills, and abilities, and that they are culturally biased” (Rosenbloom & Emmert, 1982, p.25; see also Guion, 1977). These inadequacies have led some to question the effectiveness of the examination in determining merit (O’Leary, 2014). As this study will show, police officers believe the exam design is outdated and that the exam itself does not reflect current police responsibilities because it is specifically designed not to.

What this means is that police officers are recruited through an exam designed by a state entity that is not accurately measuring their abilities to do the job and is instead measuring an individual’s ability to learn how to do the job. Some officers feel that the civil service entrance examination has been reduced from a prestigious gate keeper of public service fortitude to a simple, inadequate formality that – due to many governmental, fiscal, and demographic changes – no longer performs its duty well. As I will show, the test was no longer about determining the merit of future public service professionals, and instead was about weeding out applicants. To an event greater extent, the lack of changes to the design of the examination, and the communication between police departments and civil service shows a greater concern. One of the biggest issues with the current design of the police officer entrance examination is the civil service’s
near unwillingness to consider change that will affect meaningful progress in the recruitment of officers. Instead of the exam being a gatekeeper for public service integrity, civil service, and police departments (to an extent) are seeking to protect themselves.

**Scope of Review**

To advance the literature on police hiring and civil service exam design, this study will focus on the available civil service entrance examination literature and the data collected from interviews for this project. Civil service examinations are not a phenomenon particular to the US. However, because community policing and 21st Century Policing for this project are more US specific – using US definitions, philosophies, and data - the literature is US focused. While an argument can be made for the redesign of the civil service, that is beyond the scope of this project. Combining the literature on OP and local knowledge, the study also focuses on the barriers to exam redesign efforts, focused particularly on the politics administration dichotomy and how “neutral competence” or “professional competence” creates administrative defensiveness which inhibits feedback and redesign efforts.

Interview data showed a surprising agreement among some municipal (not state) civil service administrators and police officers regarding the (in)efficacy of the exam. This agreement is partly due to the fact the police departments have more contact with their municipal civil service agency, and thus, information, grievances, and questions are shared frequently and freely. They agreed that the exam serves as a tool to “weed out” applicants, a statement repeated verbatim by four interviewees – two municipal civil service officials and two police chiefs. In interviews, police chiefs stated that large police departments rely on the civil service exam
because it decreases the number of qualified applicants to a more (monetarily) manageable size. Without the civil service exam, departments would spend more money on the hiring process.

While understanding the exam’s necessity to help departments save money, interviewees scoffed at its effectiveness, dubbing the test as “terrible” and a “bad measurement of fit.” Many interviewees did not see the test as a useful way to determine officer merit and fit. As Ban (2011) stated, “the ideal system would be cost-efficient to operate, would allow the public sector to identify and hire good candidates quickly, and would give managers flexibility to hire the people they identify and to offer them pay and benefits competitive with the market” (p. 145). The statement by Ban represents a sentiment held by some police officers regarding the hiring process. Nevertheless, the civil service exam remains a major - mandated - part of the process. Both police officers and some municipal civil service administrators agreed that the generalized test is an inadequate measure of “merit and fit” for the police officer job. Essentially, a candidate can be a “good police officer, but a bad test taker,” sentiments that contradict the spirit and purpose of the exam, and the DCS role as outlined in the NYS constitution.

The agreement between some municipal civil service administrators and police officers regarding the exam’s effectiveness is interesting, however, there remain issues. First, while each party agrees that the exam is ineffective, only police departments have a desire for exam redesign. Civil service administrators, both state and municipal, may ask police departments to send officers for practice testing, or offer feedback, but the exam has been the same, according to interviews, since at least the 1970s. Individuals looking to be police officers in the 21st century are taking an exam designed in the 20th century. Even if the intent behind the design of the exam is to measure a candidate’s ability to
learn how to be a police officer, what it means to be a police officer and what is expected in good policing has changed significantly since the 1970s, suggesting the exam may to change too.

When municipal civil service administrators were asked about test redesign, they understood that the test was ineffective for measuring police competencies but were not concerned, mainly because the test was not designed to measure for policing competencies. Redesign was a larger process involving resources - mainly monetary – and other parties that would aid in test redesign. State and municipal civil service employees were not flexible or willing to implement change, as this would create issues in SOPs and other organizational processes as well as call into question exam validity and reliability. The civil service also recognized that the intent behind the exam’s current design was misunderstood by police departments, so education about the exam, not redesign, was necessary.

There is tension between the exam design and police departments. Most police officers expressed negative feelings about the civil service exam regarding its ability to accurately measure candidates’ potential. A few of the officers interviewed were indifferent or resigned to the process and the examination, stating that “the exam does what is supposed to do”, a rather veiled statement. Some police officers feel that the examination is created by the state with little input from police departments. As police chief stated, “they create the exam and say, ‘Here you go’. We just have to work with what we’re given” (Mack4 personal communication September 2018). This shows that not only is there little communication in the exam design process between the civil service and police departments, but police departments feel completely left out, and helpless, about the process itself.

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4 All interviewee names have been changed to protect their identity.
The fact that the police officer entrance examination is designed to measure an individual’s potential to learn how to be a police officer presents an issue for police hiring practices, as the first step to becoming a police officer is focused less on policing competencies, and more on test taking abilities. High stakes examinations are not always the best method to determine an individual’s merit and fit for a position. For police officers in particular, an examination – at least in its current design – is an inadequate way to determine merit and fit. Policing competencies point to skills, knowledge, and abilities (SKA’s) that are not easily testable and are not identified in the current exam design. This means that while the civil service is doing its duty to ensure a fair and partisan hiring process, it is also not measuring the fit of its future civil servants – in this case, police officers.

This project has three empirical chapters. In each chapter, I ask about the design of the exam, definitions on what a good police officer is, solutions to change the exam, and interpretations on the term outdated from both civil service administrators and police officers. The first (Chapter 3) focuses on police department perspectives, relating the statements to three main themes and fitting the analysis to the literature on OP and local knowledge. The second empirical chapter (Chapter 4), does the same, however focusing on civil service organizations – state and municipal. The third empirical chapter (Chapter 5) revisits both the police departments and civil service agencies, connecting them more strongly to the literature and analyzing how they connect with each other. The end of Chapter 5 provides solutions stated by police officers on how to improve the exam and future implications for this research.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

To better understand how the civil service and police departments see the examination, I ask two questions: Is the current design of the police officer entrance examination a good reflection of current police responsibilities; What are the barriers to police redesign efforts? That is, why has the exam remained unchanged despite changes to policing practices? My first research question focuses on whether the police officer entrance examination reflects current police responsibilities. Answering this first question required a look at the history of the civil service examination as well as an analysis of current exam design procedures. The previous chapter provided some basic information about the civil service examination. However, throughout the course of the project, I discovered that the examination, particularly its history, were not widely known. Before delving into the details of the civil service examination, I will provide a brief explanation of the civil service system. Interviewees stated that the civil service examination, and civil service agencies as a whole, are still in need of change (or to the least extent, some minor upgrades).

My second research question focuses on barriers to examination redesign, and more importantly “is the exam outdated?” “Outdated” has a different connotation that is discussed more in-depth in later chapters, however, redesign efforts in general pose an issue to police officer hiring and 21st Century Policing initiatives. In answering my research questions, I learned that the examination design is a result of the current civil service bureaucratic context and perspectives regarding entrance exam design and purpose.

This chapter provides a brief history of the civil service and the civil service examination and a summary of the two theories utilized for this study: The Organization Process Model (OP)
and the theory of Local Knowledge. These two theories provide a framework for understanding the bureaucratic processes and standards that inform decision-making while also explaining how communication (or lack thereof) between each entity influences exam design perspectives. The chapter concludes with a focus on the politics-administration debate and institutional legitimacy. The politics-administration debate provides an explanation for the defensiveness on why the civil service defends its examination designs, and why it very rarely (if at all) accepts feedback from police officers.

**Why do we have a Civil Service Exam?**

Before the late 19th century, public service posts were often filled by patronage. While patronage allowed for posts to be filled quickly, it did not necessarily facilitate a system that worked for the people. Instead, patronage “produced inequities among applicants and employees, impaired the efficiency of the Federal workforce, and denied many supervisors the staffing authority necessary [for] sound management” (U.S. Civil Service Commission, 1956, p.2).

Before the creation of the merit-based system, as Henderson (1976) points out, there was some attention to individual competence as well as to administrative stability regarding recruitment and retention of civil officials (p.9).

The Pendleton Act of 1883 provided the framework for the merit system for both federal and state government (Ordway, 1917, p. 251). At its signing, only 10% of the Federal workforce adopted the provisions of the legislation (Henderson, 1976, p. 8). From 1883-1932, the percentage of the Federal workforce under the merit system expanded to 80% (Henderson, 1976, p. 8). The formation and implementation of the civil
service also contributed to the broader objectives of government: to represent and be responsive to the people (Ingraham, 1995, p.xv). Van Riper (1977) states:

> We can conclude, then, that the American legislation of 1883 stimulated the development in the United States of a merit system founded on British precedents; that is, a system of Civil Service recruitment and organization based on: (1) competitive examinations, (2) relative security of tenure, and (3) political neutrality (p.100).

With the creation of the merit-based system came the standards of merit, which were “objectives and principles” for how the civil service would operate. The merit system was designed to not only diminish patronage; it also provided a design which insulated public servants from partisanship (Kellough and Nigro, 2006, p. 2). The merit system was designed to achieve the following general objectives: (1) securing the best qualified available personnel, either for particular jobs or for entrance into a career in the system; (2) securing a stable body of employees dedicated to carrying out the policies established by officials responsible for policy formulation; and (3) providing a substantially equal opportunity for all interested citizens to be considered for employment without discrimination based on political, religious, racial or other grounds (Van Riper, 1977, p.5; U.S. Civil Service Commission, 1956, p.28-29).

The parameters created for filling positions were designed to make sure the public at large was aware of job opportunities at the state and federal levels. This helped to open the applicant pool to more potentially qualified candidates. Each applicant was given a “reasonable opportunity” to not only learn about the positions but apply for them as well (Van Riper, 1977, p.5). The main parameters for selection, distinguishing the merit system from patronage, are the following: (1) selection must be from among those determined on the basis of the standards to be most competent; (2) each applicant should be able to learn what consideration was given to their application; (3) each applicant should have an opportunity to request and receive an
administrative review of the consideration given to their application (Van Riper 1977, p.5; Office of Personnel Management, 2020; U.S. Civil Service Commission, 1956, p.28-29).

Theodore Roosevelt, described by John W. Macy, Jr., the Civil Service Commission Chairman from 1961-69, was a major proponent of Federal Government reform and lead some of the early efforts to establish the Civil Service not just at the federal level, but in New York State (NYS).

**New York State Department of Civil Service**

Theodore Roosevelt, as a member of the New York Civil Service Reform Association, worked hard for passage of the New York State Civil Service Act of 1883, the first state civil service act in the nation, starting his work to fight corruption in the NYS government (Office of Personnel Management, 2020). A few months after the passing of the Pendleton Act, Assemblyman Theodore Roosevelt pushed a bill through the state legislature and into the hands of the then governor, Grover Cleveland (Estes, 2008, p.2). The law created a Civil Service Commission which would be operated by three commissioners, serving from different political parties (Estes 2008, p. 2). After the passage of the Pendleton Act, in NYS a state civil service bill was passed with a section of the state law authorizing mayors with city populations 50,000 and higher to establish a merit system (Ordway, 1917, p. 251)

A constitutional convention in 1894 created a revision to the NYS constitution, which has come to define the Department of Civil Service (DCS) since. Article V, section 6 of the NYS constitution states, “Appointments and promotions in the Civil Service of the State and all of the civil divisions thereof … shall be made according to merit and fitness to be ascertained, as far as
practicable, by examination...” (N.Y. Const, art. V, § 6). What was considered a minor insert to the NYS constitution resulted in wide ranging changes to DCS Commission. From this charter revision, DCS created a competitive civil service testing program as well as two other divisions to implement the program at the local levels (Estes, 2008, p.3). The ratification of the constitution in 1894, making NYS the first state to “embody the principle of civil service reform in its organic law” (Ordway, 1917, p. 253). After this constitutional amendment, however, there were issues with the process, which led to the continuing of patronage appointments. In 1897 Governor Frank Higgins passed what was regarded as the “Black law”, which took the exclusive right to give examinations from the Civil Service Commission (Ordway, 1917, p. 254). When Theodore Roosevelt became governor in 1899, he signed legislation to tighten loopholes and ensure an unbiased process. Since that time, classification was extended to the larger counties and villages, which resulted in greater efficiency in the municipal services. As Ordway (1917) stated, “…the constitutional provision has been the bar which has prevented the complete debauchery of the service.” (p. 254).

These legislative changes put most of the onus on the civil service to design examinations and determine candidates fit for the position they applied to and provided a safeguard from local authorities or others who would seek to delegitimize the civil service system. As Ordway (1917) proclaimed,

“This is as it should be, for the merit system is a state system founded on a general constitutional provision and a general state law. Enforcement of the constitutional provision and uniformity in administration are secured through the powers vested in the

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5 The full text is as follows, “Appointments and promotions in the civil service of the state, and of all the civil divisions thereof, including cities and villages, shall be made according to merit and fitness to be ascertained, so far as practicable, by examinations, which, so far as practicable, shall be competitive; provided, however, that honorably discharged soldiers and sailors from the army and navy of the United States in the late Civil War, who are citizens and residents of this state, shall be entitled to preference in appointment and promotion without regard to their standing on any list from which such appointment or promotion may be made. Laws shall be made to provide for the enforcement of this section.”
state commission. Supervision by the state commission is the only real safeguard provided in this state against the turning over of the control of the administration of the civil service law in cities to the exigencies of local politics. It provides an absolutely necessary check against non-enforcement of the law by local authorities and against falling below the standards established by the state commission.” (p.261-262).

Today, the civil service functions in NYS are divided between two organizations: the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and DCS (Riccucci, 2006, p. 303). The CSC oversees the civil service system, while DCS administers the rules and regulations issued by the CSC as well as the state’s civil service law. DCS is responsible for recruitment, testing, transfers, promotions, and determining titles, salaries, and qualifications for state jobs (Riccucci, 2006, p. 303). The appointment of Commissioner George Sinnott by Governor George Pataki led to reforms that brought about a more cost-effective and efficient testing process through the standardizing and streamlining examination methodologies (Riccucci, 2006, p. 308). The civil service also reduced the time required to report written test results from an average high of more than 150 days to less than 60 days. However, it must be noted for that for the police officer entrance examination, some candidates (including myself) waited up to 150 days for results to come back.

Despite legislative action to reform the NYS civil service, there is still a realm where politics does not have as strong of an effect. While the civil service was made more efficient and some rules and procedures changed, the goal and mission of the civil service, and the agency’s position of political neutrality, remained consistent. Though the civil service’s continued political neutrality leaves the integrity of its processes and examinations, it does not allow for change or criticism. The division between politics and

6 This reduction must be for certain positions.
administration is strong between police departments and the civil service. This creates miscommunication when transferring knowledge across organizations.

**Political neutrality may Create Organizational Partisanship**

The politics-administration dichotomy has, as Overeem (2005) stated, “one of the most disreputable notions in the field of public administration” (p. 311). The relationship between politics and administration is not so much separate as it is “complementary” (Overeem, 2005, p. 311; see also Frederickson & Smith, 2003, pp. 15-40; Riggs, 1987; Svara, 1998, 1999, and 2001; Svara & Brunet, 2003). Some literature regarding the politics-administration debate has focused on the political neutrality of civil servants. That is, an administration that is not beholden to one political party or the other, but instead, shows “neutral competence” - or professional competence - exhibited through neutrality to changes in politics, yet a strong ability to “do the work of government expertly” and “according to explicit, objective standards” (Kaufman, 1956, p. 1060).

Political neutrality and administrative competence have often resulted in what Portillo et. al. (2019) view as institutional legitimacy and institutionalized myths (p. 521):

“Together institutional legitimacy and institutionalized myths combine to form an endless feedback loop used to understand organizations and reinforce their primary functions. Organizations use myths to establish their legitimacy and connect with broader societal norms and values. Once an organization is seen as legitimate, it continues to promote the same institutional myths, even though the myths may be far removed from the actual functions of the organization and possess little empirical evidence justifying their need” (p. 521; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983).

Court cases, such as *Griggs v. Duke Power Company* (1971), *Wards Cover Packing v. Antonio, Lorance v. AT&T*, and *Ricci v. DeStefano* (2009), focus on inequities in the hiring process as it relates to race/ethnicity. However, professional competence has created a civil
service system in which administrators are instead dedicated to their organization and work. The civil service was created to reduce patronage and protect public servants from political partisanship. This has created an ethos of neutrality in the civil service, despite political changes. While civil service administrators remain neutral and unbeholden to the political climate, this project has shown a strong adherence to another entity: the civil service. In matters of politics, the civil service is neutral; in matters of the police officer entrance examination, the civil service is unmoved in its stance.

Exam design is within the realm of the civil service and the design process follows a set of rules and guidelines that help to ensure a valid and reliable examination. Civil service administrators do little to stray away from this process, including listening to comments by police officers regarding the design of the examination. However, police officers must often respond to political and social comments and changes. While police departments shift with political and social changes, the civil service (short of direct legislative action) does not.

The strength of the civil service is dependent on having employees who believe in and are dedicated to the mission of the civil service (Wilson, 1989). This dedication to the mission has created a partiality to the civil service tasks, missions, goals, and procedures. This dedication also stifles exam reform and creates defensiveness among some civil service employees when asked about the exam’s integrity or design. Police departments and the civil service represent two sides of the politics-administration dichotomy: police departments are often influenced by politics; civil service is dedicated to its administrative functions, which protect the integrity of public servants. Police departments are looked upon to respond to changes in politics and society; the civil service responds, often, to themselves and the rare legislative change (see Overeem 2005; Riccucci 2006).
It is important to note that police officers have their own strict administrative processes as well, which are often regulated by the civil service. There are laws and policies in place that keep officers from sharing certain information, engaging in certain activities, or even adhering to certain changes in police practice. Even more so, officers, like civil service agencies, will provide information that is in the best interest of their organization. While frustration regarding the entrance examination was well founded (after careful exam analysis), police officers provided little information about how they worked to combat some of the effects of the poor exam design, or the avenues they took to shore up legislative support for exam redesign efforts. Police officers protect the integrity of their organization from external influence, pinning much of their frustration on the civil service examination. However, there are necessary changes to be made on both sides. This project, however, focuses within the scope of the entrance examination, which is in the realm of the civil service.

Civil service is not free from external influence. Unions, personnel psychologists, and other external actors are critical to not only the exam design process, but civil service operations. Instead of insulating or removing itself from this influence, the civil service has designed mechanisms to receive, interpret, and utilize feedback. The feedback loop designed by the civil service regarding exam design is not to listen to the local knowledge of police departments but is instead for administrative purposes to reinforce the civil service professional competence. There are opportunities for feedback, but they are limited; the avenues for providing feedback are designed and administered by the civil service. This process often limits what officers can say and the feedback they provide.

Police officer local knowledge regarding the entrance examination is often disregarded because it is contrary to the knowledge and goals shared by the civil service. Police officer local
knowledge exists outside of DCS; it is not seen as constructive feedback or positive reform. It is viewed as external influence from actors who have little connection to, or knowledge of, the civil service processes and culture.

**Theoretical Framework: Organizational Process Model (OP) and Local Knowledge**

The police officer entrance examination is more than just a reflection of civil service intentions and ideas regarding exam design and purpose but is also a reflection of their organizational processes and their organizational reasoning that requires political neutrality. The Organizational Process Model (OP) and Local Knowledge provide a framework for understanding the procedures that create the exam, which will help to answer whether (and more importantly, why) the police officer entrance examination is not a reflection of current police responsibilities. These theories also provide a framework for understanding how police departments and the DCS function.

OP focuses on the administrative processes and organizational culture that determine the outputs of an organization; local knowledge focuses on the knowledge sharing within organizations that inform these decisions; the politics-administration dichotomy connects both theories, explaining why local knowledge is not translated, at least not completely, from one organization to the other. While OP explains the policies and procedures of an organization, it also explains how each organization responds to its own reasoning processes in relation to the politics—administration dichotomy. That is, the policies and procedures of the civil services require political neutrality; the policies and procedures of police departments, as well as the structure, often leave departments open to criticism and reform. Police departments represent the politics side of the dichotomy; civil service represents the administration. Though they
complement each other, they often do not interact and by nature of administration’s political neutrality, cannot. This leaves little to no room for local knowledge to translate from one organization to the other.

Understanding these theories is not only essential for this project, but also for understanding certain bureaucratic processes. The norms and procedures that influence policy decisions and outcomes are significant not only in their design, but in how they interact with—and in this project, conflict with—the processes and initiatives of other departments. The relationship between the DCS and the police departments they serve is a pertinent example of this phenomenon.

Organizational Process Model (OP)

Graham Allison (1971) introduced OP in his work Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (1971), and later in 1990, relabeled it as the Organizational Behavior Paradigm (OBP), with Phillip Zelikow. Though this work focused on the federal government and foreign policy, the concepts can also be applied to DCS and municipal civil service agencies and police departments, as they are particularly appropriate for capturing low-salience decision making, namely routine or technical policy areas dominated by bureaucracies rather than high-level officials (Allison, 1971; Allison & Zelikow, 1990; Jones, 2010).

OP provides a framework to understand police departments and civil service agencies standard operating procedures (SOPs) and competencies, more importantly, how these factors affect each entity’s views on the police officer entrance examination. Without an understanding of organizational behaviors and procedures, the views of interviewees seem disconnected; however, interviewees’ statements regarding the examination are linked to their perceptions on
policing competencies, which are a product of their organizational environment and operations. OP looks at decisions and outcomes as the products of the routine activities of the departments involved. Organizations are defined by their SOPs. These SOPs provide a framework by which organizations develop policies, which often fit within a limited perspective defined also by previous experience. Rules, norms, and routines allow the organization to make regular judgments concerning events that arise. However, these standards make organizations more hesitant to base actions on uncertain consequences and unfamiliar tasks can lead to resistance and damaging interactions between operators in the same or in differing organizations (Allison and Zelikow, 1999, p. 152). Furthermore, organizations and their programs and SOPs do not change significantly over time. Instead, they adapt slowly and incrementally. Bureaucratic inertia rather than innovation is the prevailing condition. This reality is troubling for high-level officials, who must rely on organizations to implement the decisions that they make and who sometimes encounter foreign policy challenges that do not correspond to preexisting bureaucratic routines (Allison, 1971, p. 87–91).

Organizational culture surfaces to shape the behavior of individuals within the organization in ways that align with informal and formal standards. The result is a distinctive entity with its own identity, reflected in its SOPs. In this manner, organizations develop what Philip Selznick defines as a “distinctive competence” a clear identification of what the organization does and how it identifies itself (Selznick 2009). For the DCS and municipal civil service, which have a strong, distinct identity, this is important. This identity sets the tone for how the police officer entrance examination is designed, but also informs conversations and tendencies regarding expertise, validity, and reliability. The “distinctive competence” of the civil service results in the creation of a defensive shield
from unsolicited exogenous forces; those who would seek to otherwise undermine or question not only the exam design process, but the exam itself. This defensiveness was seen throughout my interviews with DCS employees, who took great offense to even the most basic questions about the exam’s integrity or design processes. This defensiveness has created, to an extent, organizational isolation; but the organizational support of the mission and purpose provides civil service administrators with the viability and support to continue its duties.

A “viable” organization, as James Q. Wilson states in his book *Bureaucracy: What Governments Do and Why* (1989), is an establishment that has been “infused” with worth so that it exhibits competence (p. 92). This competence is determined by the organization’s ability to perform tasks and the strength of its mission. While every organization exhibits some flaws and imperfections, it is important to note that the civil service’s viability, while stemming from a coherent sense of support for the mission, is also due to the necessity of the civil service. External actors may find fault in the exam design process and the examination itself; however, even in the face of this opposition, they support the need for an examination and the function of the civil service itself. For example, most police officers interviewed for this project showed negative sentiments towards the entrance examination, however, they understood the necessity of the civil service - its mission and purpose.

Taking a multiple model’s approach to the Cuban Missile Crisis worked in the earlier publication of this text; however, in later writings Allison moved away from this viewpoint. Organizational processes were treated as constraints and conditions were specified for when organizations could be considered “players” or unitary actors within the policy-making process (Jones 2010, p. 15; see also Jones 2001). The result was a framework clearly focused on “politics” rather than OP’s emphasis on “bureaucracy.” OP was believed to have also lost its operability due
to changes in scholarship, which focused on New Institutionalism, such as agenda control, the principal–agent model, and the new economics of organization (see, e.g., March & Olsen, 1984; Moe, 1984; McCubbins, 1985; Pratt & Zeckhauser, 1985; Hammond, 1986; Bendor, 1988; Eisener & Meier, 1990; Moe, 1991). This scholarship views political institutions as able to shape and manipulate the preferences of bureaucratic organizations (agents) through rewards and sanctions. Another relatively new body of work, more consistent with OP’s perspective, affords bureaucrats considerable discretion over key decisions, especially managerial choices (Heymann, 1987; Haass, 1994; Rainey, 1994; Moore, 1995).

The “New Institutionalism” defined by March and Olsen (1984) focuses on the deemphasizing effects of politics on society, instead looking at an interdependence between the two entities (p. 738). More importantly, as March and Olsen note, “The bureaucratic agency, the legislative committee, and the appellate court are arenas for contending social forces, but they are also collections of standard operating procedures and structures that define and defend interests. They are political actors in their own right” (p. 738). Politics, organizations, society were actors themselves, often influencing each other rather than imposing over the other.

Bendor and Hamond (1992) also disagreed with Allison’s (1971) argument that “standard operating procedures, sharply limit and constrain behavior, that is, that simple rules generate simple, predictable behavior” (pp. 78-79, 83, 87-91; Bendor & Hammond, 1992, p. 309). Instead, they argue that this line of thought “greatly underestimates” how complex behavior of even one actor in an organization can arise out of basic rules (Bendor
& Hammond, 1992, p. 309). They also argue against Allison’s view of the constraint on cognitive abilities.

The focus on the new varying factors that effect, or are affected by, government organizations, based on the research for this project, do not match the phenomena between the DCS, municipal civil service agencies, and police departments. While much of the public administration and policy literature shifted away from Allison’s original beliefs regarding OP to embrace a new focus on organizational interdependence, polity, and social factors, this project continues to focus on the original model as stated by Allison in 1971. When designing the police officer entrance examination, DCS works almost independent of police department feedback. One can argue that its process for soliciting feedback regarding exam questions represents an interdependent process. I argue that while this process helps the civil service avoid criticisms related to exam validity and reliability, this feedback is done within a well-defined, non-iterative setting where feedback is limited by the parameters of the civil service.

Essentially, in the context of this project, DCS is an old institution in a new institutionalist world. The governmental interdependence on societal functions, individual and group input, discretion, and feedback is oftentimes missing from the DCS exam design process. As stated before, while some non-civil service actors are involved, their scope and feedback are limited. DCS, due to its protective nature and mission to remain nonpartisan, has left it isolated, leaving the exam design process consistent, effective, yet independent of individual feedback, discretionary authority, or external social concerns.

Local Knowledge
The theory of local knowledge, for the purpose of this project, addresses the issues regarding police and civil service expertise and how each is translated (or not) from one entity to the other, informing the design of the entrance examination. Particularly, this theory provides a framework for understanding how DCS, working in near isolation on exam design, affects police perceptions of the entrance examination and impacts police hiring processes in relation to community policing/21st Century Policing. Local knowledge can be used to explain how and why police officers define a “good officer” in certain ways; it also explains why DCS, and municipal civil service agencies believe their outreach to police departments is sufficient. More importantly, the theory explains the communication relationship between police departments and civil service agencies.

Dvora Yanow (2004) defines local knowledge as the “very mundane, yet expert understanding of and practical reasoning about local conditions derived from lived experiences” it is the “knowledge that develops in interaction among people” and is specific to certain (local) contexts (Yanow, 2004, p.12). James C. Scott (1998) used the term “metis” or “a wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment” (p. 313). In the manner,metis, like local knowledge, changes and evolves based on conditions and situations. Local knowledge is not merely information gathered from interactions with others, it is based on the parameters of an individual’s occupation and training as well. Current research on local knowledge focuses mainly on knowledge translation between employees within organizations and how this knowledge affects decision making and informs organizational processes, though some literature hints at the lack of knowledge sharing in the policy design process (see Paris & Reynolds, 1983; Schmidt, 1993; Bechky, 2003; Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Orr, 1992; 1996).
Local knowledge is often learned in the field – through job training, shared stories, or practice. In contrast, scholarly knowledge, is learned in the academy – that is through formal education or training (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p.109). However, local knowledge, as Yanow (2004) stated, “legitimates the experiential-contextual as a type of specialization equal in value to the scholarly-academic” (p.12). This scholarly knowledge can also be referred to as evidence-based practice, which aim to improve “practices that lead to desired outcomes, while eliminating dysfunctional practices” (Rousseau & Gunia, 2016, p. 4). This evidence-based practice oftentimes favors empirical (testable) knowledge over learned experiences. But, as Greenwood and Levin note, “local knowledge systems are [also] complex, differentiated, and dynamic” (p. 109). Local knowledge, in other words, is situational, but that does not mean that it necessarily lacks specialized expertise. Each has its place.

The translation and transferal of local knowledge, as Bechky (2003) stated, “is assumed to have the same meaning for both the person who expresses it and the person who receives it” (p.313). Therefore, knowledge is most potent within the community from which it emerges because it is associated with a widely shared and understood set of activities and contexts (Bechky, 2003; Yanow, 2004). Lave (1988) explains this more by stating that "knowledge is not primarily a factual commodity... it takes on the character of a process of knowing” (p. 175). The issue then becomes how these activities and knowledge are viewed outside of the occupational context from which they emerged. Essentially, occupations and specializations, even those within the same organization, have varying work experiences. As Maanen and Barley (1984) suggest, individuals then make sense of “organizational events” through the lens of their work cultures and occupation.
Blackler (1995) states various types of knowledge. The first, embrained knowledge, is knowledge that is dependent on conceptual skills and cognitive abilities (Blackler, 1995; see also Ryles, 1949; James, 1950). Encoded knowledge, which is information conveyed by signs and symbols, also includes information transmitted or learned electronically and through other mediums such as “books, manuals, and codes of practice” (Blackler, 1995). Embodied knowledge is action oriented and usually unambiguous. Zuboff (1988) stated the following regarding embodied knowledge: “such knowledge…, depends on peoples' physical presence, on sentient and sensory information, physical cues and face-to-face discussions, is acquired by doing, and is rooted in specific contexts” (see also Scribner, 1986; Hirschhorn, 1984; Suchman, 1987).

There is also encultured knowledge, which is the “process of achieving shared understandings” (Blackler, 1995). Cultural meaning systems, as Blackler states, “are intimately related to the processes of socialization and acculturation; such understandings are likely to depend heavily on language, and hence to be socially constructed and open to negotiation” (Blackler, 1995; see also Swidler, 1986; Orr, 1990; Srivastva & Barrett, 1988). Lastly, there is embedded knowledge, introduced originally by Granovetter (1985) in his theory of economic action, which is the knowledge that resides in and is developed from systemic routines. Embedded knowledge is found and analyzed in an organizations technologies, procedures, tasks and roles, and routines, emphasizing the knowledge that is ingrained in the organizational system, which is then shared and learned to newer individuals in the organization through the same procedures.

The knowledge and knowledge learning literature are focused mainly on the sharing of knowledge within organizations. The literature rarely focuses on knowledge
transfer and learning *between* two differing, yet connected, organizations. This is mainly because local knowledge literature focuses on a hierarchical structure to how knowledge is developed, shared, and understood. Yanow (1993, 1996) examined knowledge sharing and community development of a national-level government corporation in Israel, finding that despite wanting to understand the community views on local needs, high level managers disregarded this knowledge and designed the program without consultation. Orr (1991, 1996) examined copier technicians and their intimate knowledge of the machines they serviced, as well as their customer needs. In each of these cases, as well as others, knowledge was dismissed by individuals on higher levels of the organizational structure in favor of their own knowledge and expertise.

Yanow (2004) explored the phenomena of why local knowledge is often dismissed by other individuals/groups, who oftentimes hold higher-level positions (p. 17). Theories regarding organizational size and occupational class present possibilities for understanding the dismissal of local knowledge but are not supported by empirical studies thus far. Scholars such as Argyris and Schon (1974, 1978) provide psychological approaches to this issue, explaining that higher-level managers often disregard local knowledge as to not appear to be “admitting to ignorance.” Local knowledge is also present in public policy formulation. Decision-makers often design legislation without input from others who may have relevant insight (see Wynne, 1992; Paris & Reynolds, 1983; and Schmidt, 1993). Literature on “border-crossings” provides another nuanced view of local knowledge translation. As Yanow (2004) writes

“Focusing on cultural meanings of border crossing suggests other, and to my mind, more generative possible explanations. When they cross over or ‘transgress’ organizational borders, these workers are disturbing the ‘natural’ organizational structural order of things. Studies in cultural anthropology have noted the importance to cultural groups (extended here to include organizational collectives) of boundary maintenance: clear, definable borders, whether of organizations or of categories, maintain a sense of order and keep chaos at bay. Peripheral workers interact across domains, ‘polluting’ the
category system and boundary definitions in the process. This makes them perhaps ‘other’ and ‘untouchable’ in an organizational sense” (see also Turner 1974).

In the case of police officers, local knowledge is not simply what is learned through “on-the-job” training and practice, it is an accumulation of experiences and stories as well. It also includes what social work defines as practice wisdom (similar to embodied knowledge) – a “system of personal and value driven knowledge”, which usually derives from interactions between the (in this case) bureaucrat (or officer) and their clientele (loosely defined) (Klein & Bloom, 1995, p.803). Practice wisdom translates empirical and theoretical knowledge, as well as experiences, into professional behavior (Klein & Bloom, 1995, p. 803). Similar to Paris and Reynolds’ (1983) study on policy design that found that “local knowledge that would have informed [policy analysts] that adding wells was likely to encourage a tribesman to increase his herd size” or Schmidt’s (1993) work that found that the “collapse of a dam after site-based grouters’ ‘intimate knowledge’ of local rock conditions for cement preparation was ignored by project engineers on site and/or design engineers”, this project also emphasizes some of the issues plaguing knowledge translation between entities with different skills sets, knowledge, and purpose.

Like participants in these studies, police officers report having little to no input in the design of the entrance examination. However, DCS notes that higher ranking police officers are solicited for feedback. The issue is not whether their feedback is solicited, it is how much of this information is used to inform the design of the examination. What is difficult to gauge in this study is the hierarchical structure that often accompanies local knowledge research. Because police departments and the civil service are separate
entities, the hierarchical structure that leads to the creation, and dismissal of local knowledge is not evident. However, such a structure does exist.

In this case, the hierarchy is horizontal. Police departments are street-level bureaucrats while civil service administrators are at the bureaucratic center. As the civil service, the knowledge and expertise regarding exam design is held in that structure among a select few individuals. This structure and process are rigid and consistent and creates the examination that is used by the civil servants (police officers). Because police officers are believed to not be experts in exam design – from a scholarly standpoint – and their jobs and positions do not task them with creating the exam – invoking professionalism and expertise – their local knowledge regarding what is necessary to go on the examination is often disregarded or confined to feedback loops designed by DCS. However, there is no top-down structure of one organization having authority or full direct oversight over the other. Police departments need the civil service for their hiring process; the civil service needs police departments to provide feedback for its exam design process.

Questions regarding why certain actors in organizations do not consider local knowledge remain unanswered. OP provides one of the best explanations: organizational processes do not allow for unstructured external knowledge and influence. Police officer input is solicited by DCS to create the examination; however, the feedback is only a part of the process, not necessarily an asset to the examination. Furthermore, this feedback is provided by individuals who are far removed from the entry level police officer position. While their occupation as police officer provides them with some insight, their higher-ranking position does not provide them with the complete “knowledge” to determine what is and is not necessary for the entry level police officer position.
Local knowledge, OP, and the politics-administration dichotomy provide insight to how DCS and police departments operate, but also how and why knowledge is miscommunicated or deemed illegitimate between organizations. As the empirical chapters will show, there are misunderstandings and about what each organization does and how they interpret the same phenomena. This reflects how their organizational processes create barrier for knowledge translation.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This study asks the following research questions: Is the current design of the police officer entrance examination a good reflection of current police responsibilities? Is the exam “outdated”? If so, why has the exam remained unchanged despite changes to policing practices? To answer my research questions, I interviewed police officers, civil service administrators in upstate New York asking questions regarding the entrance examination design process. This study takes place in upstate New York. Department of Civil Service (DCS) does not have jurisdiction over New York City regarding the police officer entrance examination, so the project focuses on upstate New York for that purpose. The interviews for this project are from police officers in various departments in upstate New York; two of the officers interviewed for this project were a convenience sample of one retired and one active police officer from cities outside of New York State (NYS).

Specifically, I interviewed police officers and civil service administrators, asking questions regarding the entrance examination design process, police hiring process, officer background, and other questions that arose from the interviews. The data collection for this project began in 2017 and ended in the summer of 2019. The police departments from which interviewees were drawn ranged in size from 10 officers to over 100 officers; they also represented rural, urban, and suburban districts. I interviewed over 30 individuals representing police departments, civil service administrations, and academic institutions. Two of the individuals interviewed for this project were police officers not affiliated with any New York State entity and one of these interviewees was retired. Three of the officers interviewed were

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7 At least eight more individuals were contacted via phone or email without a response.
new hires and had been police officers for no more than a year; one of these officers was still in the probationary period. Nine of the individuals interviewed were civil service administrators; fifteen of the interviewees were police detectives, lieutenants, commanders, or chiefs. Two of the interviewees were academics in the field of public administration and policy, with extensive research in exam design. Three of the police officer interviewees are close friends who were able to sit for interviews for the start of this project.

The range of interviewees provides myriad perspectives into not only the exam design process but policing competencies as well. Police chiefs, lieutenants, and commanders (some detectives as well), because they are “far removed” from the police officer entrance examination, are contacted by the DCS for the initial design of an examination. They are also part of the hiring process of new police officers after they pass the exam. Since they are in top positions in police departments, they have a better understanding of the wide range of competencies and skills that are necessary for policing. More importantly, they provided a historical lens on the police officer entrance examination, that is, how has the exam changed (or not) over years, sometimes decades.

The newer officers were the closest to the examination; they provided clearer and more updated insights into the connection between the entrance examination and policing, in contrast to chiefs and other higher-ranking officers who had not taken the examination for some time. However, newer officers were not able to speak to all of the competencies and skills that were necessary for policing, mainly because they were still training, or simply, learning themselves. Though they were police officers, their lack of
experience did not afford them with a wider, stronger “knowledge” of policing compared to their superiors.

Civil service administrators were represented at both the state and municipal levels. Interviews with municipal civil service administrators were facilitated initially through emails and cold calls to offices. After the initial interviews, civil service administrators provided direct contacts to colleagues in other offices to solicit interviews. DCS administrators were more difficult to contact. While municipal civil service administrators stated that had contact with state administrators, their offices could not provide a direct phone number to administrators in charge of the exam process. Interviews were initiated through a contact associated with my University. From there, follow up interviews were established based on emails and phone numbers from the initial interview.

The two scholars in public policy and IO psychology were mainly to provide a “scholarly knowledge” to the exam design process. The first scholar was a former associate who studies examinations for firefighters; the other was a professor at my University. Both provided resources and information regarding the necessary factors to create an entrance examination as well as examples of other types of examinations to accurately measure policing competencies such as problem-solving, leadership, and critical thinking.

My first interviewees were a convenience sample of two officers (one active and one retired) in my community network. Participants were then recruited through personal solicitation, specifically phone calls or emails to departments with information obtained from departmental websites. I conducted in-person semi-structured interviews, which ranged from ten minutes to two hours. I used a specific set of questions for each interview, but as new or interesting information was provided, I included other questions. For example, as more information was
shared regarding the intent behind the design of the entrance examination, I asked follow-up questions of civil service administrators and police chiefs to gauge their understanding of the intent behind the exam design. The Appendix I includes a list of the main questions asked. The project uses interviews as its main source of data because local knowledge is often shared through stories gained from experiences (Forester 2006, p. 132). These stories and experience later shape the individuals and organization’s practice wisdom, which then may inform future practice, guidelines, and regulations (Samson, 2014; Klein & Bloom, 1995).

The questions were open-ended and designed to provide interviewees with the space to share their stories and knowledge. I remained cognizant of my own biases, such as my perceptions on policing based on my community experiences as an African American woman, as well as my personal relationship to some officers, when asking questions so as to not elicit an answer. I wanted the interviewees to explain the issue in their own terms, particularly since this project’s focus is on police officers’ perceptions, experiences, and expertise. I began by asking interviewees general demographic questions – “How long have you been an officer?” “When did you take the civil service exam?” – to gain a better understanding of their experience.

Interviews were used to gain a sense of the interviewees’ information, preferences, values, identity, and local knowledge (Forester, 2006, p. 132). Interviews were also used to access more “intimate” stories and knowledge, adding to the local knowledge and information that is necessary to attempt to comprehend police work in its entirety (Hulst 2013, p.636). This in-depth knowledge is essential for police experiences and more important when gauging the implications for knowledge translation and exam redesign efforts.
Most interviews were recorded, and handwritten notes were taken as well. In cases where I was not able to record the interview (e.g., the interviewee did not want to be recorded) then I would hand write notes verbatim or as close to verbatim as possible. Interviewees were assured that none of the recordings would be shared with others and all names and locations were changed for anonymity.

**Codes and Themes**

I transcribed my recorded interview data using DragOnn transcription software. I then checked the transcriptions and hand-written notes for accuracy. Notes and transcriptions were then imported to NVivo software to search for themes and patterns. Initially, most of the work was hand coded on paper and initial, preliminary themes were created inductively. After the final round of interviews, I used NVivo software to parse out quotes and themes from the interviews that may have been missed during the hand-written codes and to help me organize my themes and concepts to help form my conclusions, applying the codes systematically across my data. Most of my codes were combined to create larger themes; most of the interviewees stated or repeated the same ideas and concepts – some repeated the same statements nearly verbatim. After each interview, I went back through the hand-written notes and transcriptions to pick out important quotes, comparing them to other statements by interviewees. From these methods I developed themes – supported by data from interviewees – with which to draw my conclusions.

I searched to find themes emerging from the similarities in the codes. While each code could be a theme in and itself, a few of the codes were not appropriate to answer my two research questions, though the comments from the interviewees are still relevant. Figure 1 includes the summary of the data and analysis process. Taking the interview data, I sorted the
data by common themes to develop codes, which were created based on the information in the interviews. For example, when asking police officers about questions regarding exam design, one of the codes that was frequently used was the word “outdated.” Codes such as this helped me develop some of the larger themes of the project and answer show potential answers to the research questions. I also was sure to write down important quotes, information, and connections after each interview to keep track of important themes and concepts.

Open Coding
- Each line of transcribed interview text was analyzed and coded
- Transcribed interviews were also analyzed and coded in NVivo
- The codes and vignettes were compared, and new codes were generated

Selective Coding
- NVivo word-counts of transcribed interviews were used as second check for additional codes and/or categories, though it did not yield any significant results

Descriptive Coding
- A coding query was used to help discover themes by linking codes and vignettes from open and selective coding where a direct relationship was clear
- Selective codes with the most relationships formed the foundation for descriptive coding
Descriptive coding resulted from the relationships both within and across the open codes and selective codes. I used coding query to aid this analysis. As a result of my initial coding, I found seven key themes,

1. Civil Service Examination: as the main topic of my project, the police officer entrance examination is the largest and most referenced theme. The examination was a point of contention throughout the project and was met with few positive comments.

2. Communication: communication references communication between police departments and the civil service, both state and municipal. Communication was not just regarding formal communication channels such as conferences, telephone calls, and emails, but also informal conversations between officers and civil service administrators. More importantly, the frequency and nature of this communication was recorded.

3. Outdated: this theme relates to my second research question and contains notes about whether the exam is outdated. The term “outdated” is debated and analyzed in chapter five, with police departments and the DCS having two contrasting views on the exam being outdated.

4. Police Requirements: this theme refers to the requirements to be a “good” police officer as discussed in chapters 4 and 5. Police officers provided in-depth statements about their beliefs of a “good officer.” These statements were contrasted with civil service beliefs about officer merit and fit.

5. Score to Performance Correlation: this theme is fairly small and is based on anecdotal evidence seeking to link officers’ score on the entrance examination to their performance as police officers. Because the information relating a police officer’s score to their future
performance is purely anecdotal, this information was collected solely to gain an understanding of police officer beliefs regarding this matter.

6. Solutions: every police officer was asked what they thought could be done to improve the examination. This includes flexibility in the hiring process and exam design. This theme provides answers on how police officers believe the examination could be improved.

7. Testing Competencies: this theme was created from police officers and civil service administrator’s beliefs on what is necessary to do well on the examination. The mechanisms ranged from studying available test booklets to generally being “a good test taker.”

These themes are broad but touch on different parts of this project and emphasize many of the frustrations exhibited by my interviewees. More importantly, having seven themes shows the specificity of the civil service process and various actors and factors that are involved from the creation of the exam to the police academy. That is, there was little variation between the responses of my interviewees, mainly due to the rigidity of their work and the civil service examination process.

I winnowed down the themes to those addressing the research questions and created these three main themes. These themes will be discussed more in depth in the next chapter. These themes show a difference in meaning across each entity; each meaning is influenced by SOP’s and knowledge. These differences in meaning show differences in knowledge and understanding of the same issue – the exam design – but a lack of translation of knowledge and expertise from one group to the other.

1. What is outdated? – the term outdated, and all of its synonyms were a constant theme throughout the project. However, the term “outdated” has different meanings and
contexts depending on the interviewee. This theme also exposed some of the defensive tendencies of the civil service when speaking about the examination.

2. Competent vs. Incompetent – going back to the discussion on determinants and definitions of merit, police officers and civil service administrators have different ideas on what this means in the context of the civil service examination. Even more important is how those different ideas on competency influence the design and intent of the entrance examination and what that means for a candidate’s fit. Competency also refers to the professional competence and how that influences how policing competencies are included (excluded) on the examination.

3. Communication – some civil service administrators are communicating with their departments, but that communication does not always include conversations about the exam. Some civil service administrators do not communicate with their respective police departments, and vice versa. The main point that emerged from this theme is that communication is sparse and oftentimes unproductive.

The word “outdated” was from the police officer perspectives on the design of the examination, not the examination itself. However, the civil service had a different, more protective, view on the term. Chapter 4 represents the police department perspective; the civil service perspective is presented in Chapter 5; a comparison of both perspectives in relation to theory is explained in Chapter 6 and implications for exam redesign. These chapters provide the following insights: The NYS police officer entrance examination is not a reflection of current police responsibilities because the exam is not designed to reflect police responsibilities; The NYS entrance examination has changed, but the design is (debated) as being “outdated”. As these
themes show, police officers and civil service administrators view the same phenomena completely different, influencing their view on the exam’s merits.

The Entrance Examination

One of the most important steps in the data collection and analysis was applying for and completing the police officer entrance examination in 2017. My first round of interviewees insisted that I take the examination to better understand their statements and to see the examination for myself. The Appendix II contains the application for the exam as well as my official score and police canvass letter. I took the exam in early December and received my official score in April of the following year. I received the canvass letter a few weeks afterward.

The days leading up to the examination were nerve wracking. The municipal civil service agency did not send out information about the examination until the week of, meaning that I received the letter regarding the examination date, time, and location the Wednesday before the Saturday exam. The day of the exam, I forgot to bring a number #2 pencil. Because the exam location was close to my house and a CVS, I was able to grab these materials quickly and head back to the exam location. Even though the letter stated strict guidelines regarding entering the building and what materials you could bring, it was clear these guidelines were not enforced. Multiple individuals entered the building to register and mark their attendance after the “door had closed” and many potential test takers were using cell phones in the lobby and the examination room.

I was not sure of what other exams were happening in the same building at the time, however, the demographics were starkly different from what I originally imagined. Based on a cursory look at most of the attendees, there was a (relatively) large number of women and
racial/ethnic minorities in the building. Based on my own perceived ideas regarding age, I felt like I was the oldest test taker. After registering and noting my attendance, I was taken with a large group to one of the free rooms and told to choose a desk. It was a typical middle school classroom, with desks spaced about 3 feet apart. As I waited to take the exam, I noticed that the rooms were getting full, and some participants had to take the exam in the hallway on tables and folded chairs.

After a reading of the rules by one of the test facilitators, I was given a cover sheet to note my demographic data and then a sheet of paper placed face down. I was told repeatedly that I could not take any notes on paper and if I did, such notes would be confiscated. This made sense as interviewees later in the project noted that individuals would write down examination questions and then share them. We were given three hours to take the exam; I completed it in an hour and a half. The first ten minutes was the rote memorization portion. We were given a scenario on a separate sheet of paper and had a little less than five minutes to memorize the details and information of the scenario. The scenario was a hypothetical situation where I was called to situation at a home. The scenario seemed interesting; it was filled with details that someone may not notice if they were not paying attention. Once the time was up, the scenario was taken, and the examination was given to us.

The first portion of the exam was about 10-15 questions regarding the scenario, focusing on the details of the scene – what individuals were wearing, where they were sitting, what they were saying, their mental/physical state. After that, the rest of the examination was a 100-question reading comprehension exam. The questions were multiple choice. I was first presented with a law, and then asked to provide the right answer regarding that law. For example, one of

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8 Most attendees looked like they had just graduated high school. I was in my fourth year of my doctoral program at this time.
the questions explained what constituted a school bus. I was then asked about 3-5 questions regarding what is and is not a school bus, and whether a certain scenario would fall under school bus policies and regulations. This was how most of the questions were set up.

Once I completed the examination, I looked it over and gave the packet, with my demographic sheet, to the test facilitator. It must be noted that I did not study for this examination beforehand. I wanted to take the examination “cold” not knowing what to expect. My subsequent score (85) was what I consider to be an accurate estimate of my own test-taking ability.

The methodology for this project is based on in-person semi-structured interviews. Some of the data was gathered through participant observation, but a majority of the data presented for this project is through interviews. The following two chapters explore the data provided by police officers and other employees in their departments and civil service employees, both municipal and state.
CHAPTER 4

Police Officer View

Police officers’ beliefs regarding what a “good” officer is are critical to understanding their perspectives about the entrance examination. Essentially, police officers believe that their perceptions on what makes a good police officer cannot be measured by an exam, at least not the one currently designed by Department of Civil Service (DCS). While there is little literature regarding the design of the entrance examination, police officers’ beliefs provide a gateway to understanding some of the discrepancies in the examination and how to best address some of the underlying issues of the examination’s design. Police officers’ sentiments are the crux of the local knowledge argument of this project, as they possess the local knowledge and expertise needed to better inform exam redesign efforts to measure policing competencies.

This chapter outlines police officers’ beliefs regarding the entrance examination in relation to the three themes – Outdated, Competence, and Communication - described in the previous chapter. The officers interviewed for this project had varying thoughts regarding the entrance examination. However, it is important to note that only one of the officers, out of the 23 interviewed, provided a positive reaction to the examination. Five of the police officers interviewed were content or resigned with the examination, the other 19 had a negative view. The three newer officers had a negative view of the examination. Police officers also note that their input in the design of the exam does not go beyond a questionnaire and possible solicitation to take the examination. That is, most of the work of exam design is done by DCS.

This chapter emphasizes the divisions between police departments and the civil service regarding exam design and organizational procedures. That is, local knowledge from police departments is disregarded and professional competence of the civil service is safeguarded. This
creates, in the police officer view, an examination that does not, cannot, measure the characteristics and competencies necessary to determine a “good” police officer. Recognizing this, police officers still support the civil service system, understanding the need to decrease patronage and political partisanship.

Before stating some of the changes that police officers envision for the exam, it is important to show what characteristics and competencies police officers envision for a “good” officer – because police officers have the local knowledge of what a good officer is - and how this relates to the design of the entrance examination. These characteristics are important because part of the hiring process after the examination is analyzing these characteristics through interviews or other tests. The issue then becomes why these same standards are not evaluated – at least to some extent – by the entrance examination.

What Makes A Good Police Officer?

One interviewee, Virgil recalled the Bible verse Matthew 5:9, reflecting on not only what drove him to become a police officer but how he sees policing itself: a calling that not only keeps the peace, but creates it for the community. Police officers and two municipal civil service administrators interviewed for this project believed that policing is not so much a job as it is a “calling.” A police officer is not simply someone who applies to the job, but someone who is answering a lifelong calling, almost as if responding to a divine intuition. Individuals who become police officers are therefore assumed to have – or at least strive to attain - the highest levels of objectivity when dealing with their community and with other officers. Objectivity, though seemingly technocratic, is a common term to describe the fit of an officer, even for those who feel they are answering a calling.
Knowing what makes a good police officer is important for creating material to test potential officers with the hope that the exam screens for these characteristics. As previously stated, police departments are different; however, the definitions of a “good” police officer are similar from department to department and officer to officer. And despite hours of research, the only way to find out what a good police officer is… to ask them.

So, what makes a good police officer? More importantly, what qualities does a qualified police officer possess? Every police officer interviewed, except for the three newer officers, focused on integrity – honor and veracity – as one of the key characteristics necessary for policing. The three newer officers were not in a position where they may communicate with civil service agencies, manage other officers, or hire and train new candidates, so their lack of mentioning of integrity is not out of place. However, it does not mean that they may not see it as important for police work. The characteristics they mentioned were more in relation to what they witnessed in the few months they worked in their position, not from years – or decades – of experience recruiting and training police officers.

In the context of 21st Century Policing, integrity is not a novel concept. The police officers interviewed for this project were hired in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, however, integrity (as well as other factors) was viewed as an innate characteristic of a police officer that was needed prior to hiring. The International Association of Police Chiefs (IACP) stated the following regarding integrity:

“The public demands that the integrity of police officers be above reproach. Police officers must, therefore, avoid any conduct that might compromise integrity and thus undercut the public confidence in a law enforcement agency… Respect from the public cannot be bought; it can only be earned and cultivated” (1989).

My oldest interviewee, a retired police officer, Barry, mentioned integrity as the first, and one of the most important characteristics of a police officer (2017). Larry, a police chief in a
medium sized city, mentioned integrity as “no-brainer” for what is necessary to be an officer (August 2018). Mark, the (now former) police chief of a large sized city believed integrity to be key in how a police officer interacts with the community (2017). More interesting about these statements is how they tie back to the characteristics found in community policing and 21st Century Policing. Though integrity was significant, there were other important characteristics.

“Fast, furious, foresight,” the police chief Larry stated multiple times. In fact, he was quite certain that a police officer needed to possess those qualities to be qualified for the job. “Fast” because they need to, well, catch whoever they are running after. But more importantly, they need to be “quick on their feet” – possessing problem solving and critical thinking skills that allow them to solve problems quickly, effectively, and fairly (August 2018). They needed to be “furious” because an officer needed to be dedicated to their work and their community. “Foresight” to predict crime and stop it before it happens. While foresight may be confusing to someone outside of policing, it fits right into the goals of 21st Century Policing. Foresight is more than just predicting crime it is also crime mitigation. It allows an officer to work effectively to reduce crime in the future, alongside their respective department and community members. Larry was the only police officer, and police chief, who described policing characteristics this way. It was almost as if he had been asked these questions before. Larry was also one of the older police chiefs interviewed, so he probably has been asked this question fairly often throughout his career as well as having more time to engage and reflect on these characteristics in not only in himself, but in the officers he managed.

“Fair.” But more importantly, “neutral” (2017). This was interesting because out of all interviewees, only the retired officer, Barry, stated that neutrality and fairness were important. This falls directly in line with the competencies for 21st Century Policing, even though Barry
retired before the initiative had begun. He reasoned that an officer cannot negotiate or make decisions in the interest of their community if they are biased. Critical thinking, social perceptiveness, and judgement and decision-making are all tenets of community policing as well as competencies for police work in general. A fair, neutral officer will make decisions that are, according to Barry, in the best interest of the individual and the community and not in accordance with the officer’s personal ideals on that individual or the community. Barry was also an instrumental figure in his department’s diversity and community policing efforts. He was behind an initiative in his respective state to change the hiring standards that provided women and people of color opportunities to serve as officers and qualify for promotions. He perceived fairness and neutrality as not only necessary characteristics to better service the community, but also necessary to creating a diverse, inclusive, and effective police department. Again, all sentiments of the 21st Century policing initiative.

“Educated,” the police chief named William stated (August 2018). He understood that education was the key to an officer’s ability to problem solve, negotiate, make decisions, critically think, and essentially, reduce bias. Without education, how was an officer expected to interact with their community effectively? And how were they expected to comprehend the parameters of their work? They did not need a PhD or even a bachelor’s degree, but they needed some training beyond the police academy – study abroad experience, apprenticeships, for example – that opened them up to the larger world around them and prepared them for the job of policing. William had worked at multiple police departments in different states and institutions of higher education and taught classes, so education was not only a belief for him, but it was also a way of life. Being in an environment dedicated to learning also meant that he and his officers would interact with varying types of people. How could someone work on any university
campus, with thousands of people from all walks of life, without having a similar experience themselves, or at least, taking opportunities to engage?

Education for police officers, however, is also about outcomes. William and his assistant chief Mack, as well as Chief Virgil, all agreed that officers with a higher level of education outperformed their peers who did not possess it. Though they could not confirm differences in their exam scores, they stated that these officers wrote better reports, took less time away from the job, interacted with their community better, and received more promotions and training (William, Mack, and Virgil 2018). Education requirements differ between states and locales. Some police departments only require a high school diploma; others want a certain amount of college credits. None of the departments interviewed required a bachelor’s degree. What was also interesting was that even though most officers had a background in criminal justice or political science, police chiefs also preferred variation in degrees obtained, pointing out how a “degree in sociology or languages” was just as effective for police work, mainly because it provided a perspective on how to understand varying populations and how to interact with them.

“Must possess character,” police chief Martin stated, providing some ambiguity to his definition of a good police officer (July 2018). After some explanation, it became clear. A police officer must be personable; they must be someone that a community member would want to approach with an issue, or to simply chat. Martin was over a small department in a relatively small city compared to surrounding areas. Having a personality was not just what makes a good police officer, but what was needed to perform the duties of the department’s community policing goals. His views on policing were of an individual who could easily integrate into the community and relate to the locals.
While being personable is common in 21st Century Policing literature and discussions, Martin’s case was different. His locale was small but was gentrifying rapidly. Many locals felt they were being pushed out of their city by “out of towners” – cost of living, unemployment rates, and traffic were increasing (Martin 2018). Having an officer who not only knew the city, but was from the city, was helpful. The department, because of its size, was more ingrained in community policing initiatives then most other departments interviewed. Character, for Martin, was not only a significant trait, but a necessity to perform the job well.

Police officers stated that personality characteristics were some of the key aspects of a good police officer. While these chiefs responded differently to the same question, their answers fell within the parameters of the general ethos of 21st Century Policing and within the same skill set. However, there is a mismatch between what police officers say a good police officer is and what the examination measures. The entrance examination does not account for the character of an individual – something each police officer interviewed for this project has stressed as essential.

How Do Police Officers View the Examination?

Only five out of the 23 police officers interviewed for this project expressed contentment and resignation with the examination – but nothing beyond that. As police chief Albert, the chief of a small suburban city, stated, “it is not the best, but it is what we have.” (June 2017). Chief Larry stated a similar sentiment, “it is not the best, but I think it does what it is supposed to do” (August 2017). The “thing” the examination is supposed to do, is weed out applicants, which Larry later recognized. Chief Kirk stated that the examination was “good for what is was
designed to do”, again, weeding out candidates (June 2018). Chief Melvin stated similar sentiments to the above interviewees (July 2018).

These police chiefs who expressed contentment or resignation with the exam had been on the force for at least two decades. They understood the procedures and standards of the police hiring process and were in positions to communicate frequently with civil service agencies. However, their sentiments of contentment, resignation, and their professional and personal backgrounds did not provide a clear indication as to why they were content with the examination. One possible explanation is department and community needs; however, officers in similar locales were less enthusiastic about the exam. Their contentment and resignation may be due to their own personal beliefs regarding the process, as well as their views on what they can and cannot change.

When asked about the design of the entrance examination, police officers did not hold back their sentiments. Mack stated that the exam “just prevent[s] patronage from being as effective as it would otherwise” (2018). The examination brought up many feelings, again, most of which were negative. Police officers’ perspectives regarding the examination reflect a very intimate, personal take on the issue of merit, professionalism, and fit. As I will show in the next chapter, administrators in DCS recognize that they cannot create an examination that tests for police responsibilities and competencies because 1) the exam cannot capture every policing competency in an examination; and 2) the exam cannot test someone on information they do not know. While these reasons are fair, they also show issues with knowledge translation.

More interesting was the police officer response when I mentioned that administrators at DCS stated the police officer entrance examination was designed to measure a candidate’s ability to learn. Carl, a new police chief in a small city, stated that the statement was a “load of
malarkey” (April 2019). He went on to say that the exam was not fairly written to even measure a candidate’s ability, and that the exam “ha[d]n’t been changed in 30 years” (April 2019). Virgil stated the exam “probably doesn’t” measure a candidate’s ability to learn how to be a police officer (April 2019). He stated that character and integrity are more important, however, he recognized that “probably can’t get that on a test” (April 2019). Police officers are the holders of the local knowledge, possessing the expertise and experience necessary to perform the job of policing; thus, having the strongest insight and thoughts into what is necessary to test a potential officer.

Theme I: Police Officers View the Entrance Examination as “Outdated.”

The police officer entrance examination is actually… new. That is, new examinations are written when the eligibility list expires, and it is time to hire new officers. Police officers know this, as one officer stated, “I know they’re working on a new exam. We’ve had some guys go and take the practice test.” (Calvin, April 2018). However, while police officers recognize the newness of the exam, previous comments regarding the newness of the exam were not about the exam itself, but the design of the exam. The term “outdated” was stated by police officers in their interviews regarding their views of the entrance examination design as being old and “irrelevant” to what is needed for police departments now.

“You know, most of the questions are reading comprehension… There is a memorization and they give you a police scenario” stated Neil., a police chief in the largest department interviewed for this project (August 2017).

Because of his department’s size and experience in the force, he had in-depth knowledge of the examination, yet did not frequently communicate with the civil service agencies. The
examination I took in 2017 was exactly how he described it: a memorization section and then reading comprehension where I was told about some of the laws and then asked questions based on those explanations. In follow up interviews after the exam, I mentioned what was on the examination, and most police officers were not shocked that it was the same. “I mean when I took it, it was like basic application of law” Mack stated as he recalled taking the examination over a decade ago” (Mack 2018).

Chief Kirk stated the following, “The original entrance exam to my recollection … mostly judgment questions, memory, things of that nature. It was still rote memory, just what has been” (June 2018). Six other officers noted that the design of the exam was basic reading comprehension and memorization; these officers took the exam between 10-30 years from the year 2019. Chief Oliver stated that the exam “hasn’t been changed in 30 years” one of the few officers to blatantly state that the examination in its current design has remained unchanged (March 2019). The examination itself is not outdated; the exam design is outdated. Mack noted that it is a “1960s approach to developing a test for a 2019 world” (August 2019). Hyrum, a commander, even went further to suggest that the questions are similar,

“You know, they have a bank of questions. If you study enough of those review books, I guarantee you one of the questions you'll see on the test, you know, and just like promotional tests. There's companies out there that make money tutoring police officers and how to take promotional tests” (September 2018).

As I later learned, some of the ways in which this knowledge is shared are illegal. Beth, a municipal civil service administrator, informed me that there have been instances of exam questions being shared illegally (September 2018). A reason why Hyrum’s statements may be true, as Beth notes, is because individuals may take the exam, illegally jot down the questions,
and share the information with others, profiting from future practice examinations and “study guides” (September 2018). This also explains some of the defensive sentiments during interviews with DCS. DCS administrators may have been fearful that I was looking for exam questions to share with potential test takers, hurting the integrity of the examination. Virgil had a similar statement regarding the examination,

“Some of the Chiefs and just officers, commanders…They were like, yeah, it's the same format. It's probably just different questions and so it’s essentially been the same test since like the 70s … which is sad, especially if you're looking at the socio-political shifts between oh yeah 1970s [and] 2018. It doesn't really help me out” (July 2018).

In this sense, the examination is outdated in that the design of the exam has not changed for the current socio-political climate and what officers perceive as a change in policing in general. This creates issues for not only 21st century policing, but future examinations. If the exam design has not changed, yet police departments have, then how can the examination accurately determine the fit of a potential officer or their ability to learn how to be an officer? The problem then is that the civil service views the examination as a mechanism to test a potential officer’s ability to learn; however, police officers think that characteristics are a necessary part of policing that should be tested for in the entrance examination.

Officers who took the test in different decades recall a similar format and questions. Mack states that the examination has not been rewritten “for a decade because of costs and legal challenges” (December 2018). That is, the cost to redesign the examination to how police officers would prefer is costly and legal challenges may arise from this new design. The civil service finds it safer to use an examination that has been tested to be reliable and valid. He is the only interviewee to address legal challenges as a hindrance to exam redesign efforts. Most interviewees focused on costs. However, this line of thinking does not follow the same as civil
service administrators, who consistently state that the exam has been updated, yet cannot confirm, mainly due to confidentiality, that the most recent design is different than years past.

Nevertheless, any proposed issues with the examination could mean a change to the DCS SOPs. Redesign requires a new set of questions, a group of subject matter experts, a new group to recruit those experts, and money to pay for consultants to design and review the exam to mitigate instances of bias (as much as possible) and ensure the exam’s validity and reliability. However, as Virgil stated, “if you want the best people, you have to invest in the process” (April 2019). Funding for exam redesign is often an issue as budget constraints are a constant factor for police officers not participating in some exam practices. However, they also view perceive that more money invested in exam redesign would require less training and money on the backend for their departments.

Greg, a Human Resources administrator at a local police department, echoed similar sentiments to the officers they served, noting that the universal complaint regarding the examination was that it was “outdated” and “the questions aren’t relevant” and “need to be updated” (May 2019). Like Hyrum, they said that “anyone can buy a book and study for those exams” (May 2019). While the barriers to exam design are evident, what is not is a feeling of helplessness to redesign the examination. One officer lamented that the civil service was “not accommodating” when redesigning the examination (Larry, June 2018); another stated that they felt like they “have gotten absolutely nowhere” in their arguments for exam redesign (William, August 2017). The overall sentiment is that the system is designed to operate one way and that there is little that can be done to change it.

The issue of being outdated, according to police officers and personnel in their departments, is more than just an examination that has been used so many times test booklets
reflect some of the exam questions, it is also about the integrity of the test. If policing is supposed to be a calling, and current police trends are supposed to reflect the changing societal demographics, then what does it mean that the entrance examinations – a mechanism to determine fit – is outdated? Without explicitly stating that few, if not most, of the candidates who are canvassed for police officer positions are unqualified, at the very least, each candidate can take a test, a skill that, as stated before, is not necessary for policing.

**Theme II: Competencies are a Reflection on Individuals, not Training.**

According to DCS, policing competencies can, and should, be learned in the academy. However, police officers believe that these competencies are not only a reflection of training, but more importantly, a reflection of the individual. But what it means to be a good police officer and how that translates to a test is not just about what someone knows, but their character; and according to police officers, character is not tested for on the exam and cannot be tested for with the current design of the exam. The competencies and characteristics to be a good police officer, do not, cannot, be translated to the same examination currently provided by the civil service.

“People skills,” as Oliver stated, are necessary to be a police officer (March 2019). There are personality tests, but those are not included in the civil service examination. “Can’t tell a good officer by the examination” Larry stated, hinting at an underlying belief of most police officers (July 2018). This comment was particularly interesting because even though Larry was resigned to the current design of the exam, he recognized that the exam itself was not a good determinant of officer fit. The current design of the examination does not test for certain personality traits and competencies that are necessary for policing, but there are examinations that can.
The entrance examination has many questions on NYS law and tests officers’ reading comprehension to not only understand the law, but to successfully apply it to a given scenario (answers are in a multiple-choice form). Hyrum did not have positive feedback on this design, stating.

“Look it up. Okay, that's not something that you need to know and even some of the penal law questions. ..I'm very good at the law. And I know the law really well, but does it matter on the street? If I arrest you why it's not like TV. I don't have to say you're under arrest for violation of section blah blah subdivision 23 a of the New York State penal. I go. ‘No, you're under arrest.’ I bring you back to the station and then I look up in a book. I type it up and give it to you” (September 2017).

Hyrum was frustrated by the exam design and the questions, but also the competencies that were measured. Much like other officers’ arguments, Hyrum did not understand why the questions on the exam were being asked. This sentiment was reflected by Virgil, who stated that he did not think “the test is valuable” for measuring policing competencies (April 2019). Like other sentiments, the exam did not measure competencies that were necessary for policing. Ralph a police Chief, stated the following about the examination,

“So, it is like the SAT and ACT. I mean… you'll get a reading comprehension you'll get, you know, a page this of a whatever scenario … and it'll ask you questions about what is the best answer to ask you, you know, just reading comprehension then you'll get another list bunch of questions where they'll give you five sentences and it’ll say what order would this paragraph make the most sense. It has nothing to do with policing, which I get. You know what I'd like to be able to do is to develop a test where you pull more of the intangible skills attributes traits out and highlight those as opposed to someone who you know was an English major in college.” (June 2017).

Ralph’s comments illustrate police officers’ leanings towards an examination that tests for personality more than it does for reading comprehension or memorization, as personality traits are what make a police officer competent in their job. Competence, according to DCS, is correlated with exam score; for police officers, competence is about an individual’s personal behavior and characteristics. The main reason for the mismatch between the police officers’ and
civil services’ views on competencies is due to a misunderstanding over who holds the responsibility to train and weed out potential officers. The civil service exam tests on basic competencies and the “ability to be a police officer” because actually teaching the competencies of policing is a task for police departments, according to DCS administrators (Arya, March 2019). Police departments understand that teaching someone how to be a police officer is a goal for the academy – and subsequent probationary period. However, the test is assumed to be a reliable measure for police officer merit and fit and to initially measure for some of the testable competencies of a candidate. Essentially, candidates do not have to know how to be police officers, but they must possess the basic competencies – integrity, neutrality, foresight, competent judgement, and decision-making – to begin training. While DCS suggests “that’s what the academy is for” police officers state “the test should do that.” Both entities have different perceptions on whose responsibility it is to assess candidates. The civil service tests on basic policing competencies and rely on police departments to train candidates; police departments do not assume their candidates to be perfect but want the civil service examination to weed out candidates on testable personality traits and competencies related to policing.

**Theme III: Police Officers Do Not Have Frequent, Reliable Communication with the Civil Service**

Communication between civil service administrators and police departments was inconsistent and dissimilar from department to department. The problem is not that there is no communication between police officers and civil service administrators and agencies, but according to police officers, the communication is one sided. That is, the civil service is
communicating in a way that suggests to some police officers that they do not care about their opinions regarding the examination or their general questions and concerns.

For those who did not have frequent or occasional communication with the civil service, there was a sense of frustration with civil service agencies and exam design. This was largely reflected in the police officer sentiments towards the exam and civil service responses to critique about the examination. While only five of the police officers were content with the examination, communication between chiefs and the civil service also provided some insight into how police departments regard the examination. Police officers who communicated occasionally with the civil service showed a content or positive view of the entrance examination. They also understood the design of the examination better than their counterparts from other departments. Though they all may not have agreed with the exam design completely, their views were not as negative compared to others. For example, Kirk thought the exam was a good measure of a police officer’s abilities. He mainly communicated with his municipal civil service office regarding the eligible list, potential hires, and the entrance examination dates.

“I'm actually a thorn in her side right now. Okay, we're constantly going back and forth with the county... Once that list comes out. That's that just beginning of the mad dash back and forth between us to try to coordinate getting the certification of “eligibles” going through the process of hiring going back and forth with her and make sure she's on board whatever you're doing. So, there's a lot of interaction between us throughout the process throughout the hiring process.” (June 2018).

Communication from the civil service varied by both which civil service agency and the time of year. When there was a new exam, local Civil Service offices stated that they communicated with their respective police departments to advertise the examination. When the examination was being designed, DCS stated that they communicated with police departments by administering a job analysis survey to select officers to help develop test questions.9

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9 I was not able to see a copy of this survey.
However, while DCS states that they reached out, police officers often did not recall – and some openly admit - to not hearing from the DCS.

DCS solicited questions from municipal civil service departments who they regard as the “eyes, ears, and mouths” when it came to examination issues (Arya, March 2019). DCS did not directly communicate with police departments – that was the municipal civil services’ job (Arya, March 2019). However, not every municipal civil service had a strong connection with their respective police department. DCS used the job analysis surveys to gauge participation by police departments in the exam design process.

There were also issues with the surveys. The surveys were regarded as “tedious.” Virgil stated, “I remember seeing a survey. I did not fill it out all the way. It was too long and tedious” (April 2019). He also saw the job analysis survey as not being valuable and “too much of a hassle” (April 2019). Others simply do not recall receiving one - “No, I don’t remember filling out a survey.” (Carl, April 2019). Hyrum, had the following to say about the DCS’ methods for surveying police departments,

“Civil Service just did a study… where they had us give a questionnaire to both administrators and some of the new officers and supervisors that we've hired to try to make the tests better and more associated towards law enforcement perspectives…I had an issue with who they were actually asking…. There's no point asking the brand-new people. They gave it to us like ‘No, please give two of these to administrative personnel two to supervisors and two to your newest employees.’ Well to me, they don't really know … they haven't done the job yet. They've been here three or four months, you know…one of them is still in training. So, it was difficult to you know, get that information from them” (2017).

Some lamented that the request for surveys and for police officers to take the practice examination were not accommodating to smaller departments who did not have the budgets and time to pay officers overtime to participate and replace the personnel who would be out taking the practice exams or participating in some of the feedback sessions (Larry, July 2018). This
often meant that the feedback DCS received was from departments that had the budget – and subsequent personnel – to complete the surveys or send officers to provide exam feedback. This means that feedback regarding exam design was limited to a handful of individuals and departments.

Police officers’ views on the “value” of the job analysis survey is partially because the surveys were (possibly) large and tedious to complete, especially when the police chief and other administrators who were charged with completing the survey must manage a department as well. However, the value of the job analysis survey is strongly tied to the perceived value police officers’ place on the entrance examination. Most police officers interviewed for this study did not see the examination as valuable tool and determinant of a candidate’s fit. Therefore, why take time filling out a “tedious” job analysis survey for an exam that, historically, is perceived to have no value or connection to the position anyway?

This is a perfect example of local knowledge remaining in the periphery or perceived to remain in the periphery. Some police officers have stated that their views and knowledge regarding what is necessary to measure a candidate’s fit for policing are ignored by DCS. DCS has its own processes (OP), expertise, and goals that inform how it designs the exam. These come into conflict with the local knowledge held by police officers and further enforces the vertical hierarchical relationship of civil service to civil servant. Police officers therefore choose not to participate in a process that historically does not value their knowledge.

Police officers, within the current social and political context, are feeling the consequences of what they believe is a failure of the design of the entrance examination\textsuperscript{10}. Some police departments are trying to adopt new standards, specifically in the realm of community

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\textsuperscript{10} There are other issues in police departments, however, for the sake of this project, the focus is on the entrance examination.
policing. However, police officers interviewed feel that much of the changes needed are stifled due to the design of the entrance examination, which hinders their hiring options. Police understand the necessity of the civil service, but do not feel as though they can hire well-qualified officers under the current design of the examination. The examination provides a list of candidates whose only skill, thus far, is test-taking ability – a skill that is not necessary for any component of policing.

**Discussion: Police Officers and the Politics in the Politics-Administration Dichotomy**

Police officers recognize the necessity of the civil service in protecting the integrity of public service and diminishing patronage. Their frustration lies with the lack of reform regarding the entrance examination, not with the examination itself. The most interesting point is that the frustration with the civil service is mainly directed towards DCS, not the municipal civil service agencies. Police departments have more frequent contact with their municipal civil service agencies, mainly because it is the municipal agencies who handle questions related to examination logistics. They are also a lot easier to contact\(^\text{11}\). Police officers are responding mainly to political pressure to reform departments. While they do not want to be heavily involved in the political process, the nature of their jobs requires them to engage with politics and society. This leads to varying views on what is necessary to reform and redesign policing, particularly the entrance examination.

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\(^\text{11}\) According to DCS, municipal agencies are the “eyes and ears”, acting as the main translators of knowledge and inquiries. However, as the next chapter will show, most municipal agencies do not have frequent communication with DCS or have a direct contact to a DCS administrator (or even know that they are considered the “eyes and ears” for DCS).
These views are in stark contrast to some DCS administrators’ perceptions but show a clear disconnect between what police officers believe is necessary for the exam, and what the civil service perceives as necessary and measurable. The practical implications of the police officer views regarding the entrance examination show that the examination, in its current design, does not reflect current police responsibilities, competencies, or necessary characteristics. From the DCS view, the examination is not supposed to reflect current police responsibilities, mainly because police officers do not believe they are viewed as “professionally competent” enough to provide feedback on the exam that would aid in its design. Because they are outside the civil service, police officer local knowledge, is disregarded, confirming previous theoretical assumptions regarding OP and local knowledge.

Police officers have their own SOP’s, policies, and processes. These processes inform how they perform their jobs and how they interact with their community. As street-level bureaucrats, they are afforded a larger amount of discretionary authority, which is informed by the parameters of department, local, and state policies and practices. Discretionary authority becomes the strongest factor when deciding policy outcomes and determining equity. These decisions constitute the services "delivered" by government and contribute to the connection between the citizenry and the government (Lipsky, 2010, p. 4). Street-level bureaucrats such as police officers are final implementers of public policy and their ideas on distributive justice are an aggregate of their values and beliefs (Kelly, 1994, p. 23). Alongside this set value system are professional and organizational norms and rules that effect final decisions and outcomes.

Police officer knowledge is local, on-the-ground knowledge about the specific competencies that are necessary for an individual to successfully perform the job (Klein & Bloom, 1995, p. 803). Police departments have SOPs, but they are often fluid, changing as
societal and political norms change as well. Though there are administrative standards and practices that often persist, police departments are susceptible to change. This knowledge includes their interactions with the citizens in the communities they work and are often responses to societal or political change. However, police officers find that they have limited options to share this knowledge with DCS and some municipal civil service agencies. Police officers provide feedback on the exam within a narrowly defined scope designed by the civil service. Within this scope, feedback regarding exam redesign options and broader questions regarding officer competencies, skills, and abilities, is limited. Police officer knowledge is both local and scholarly. However, it is the local knowledge regarding policing competencies and SKA’s that are significant for exam redesign efforts. The narrowly defined opportunities to share police officer local knowledge with the civil service often places restraints on what knowledge is shared, and more importantly, what knowledge gets incorporated into the exam design process.

For street-level bureaucrats, such as police officers, local knowledge is a major part of the occupation, often determining and how and why they interact with certain communities. Most of the local knowledge literature focuses on employees and agencies who are considered street-level bureaucrats (see Yanow, 2004). However, this is not an intra-agency relationship, which is what most local knowledge literature covers. As stated in Chapter 2, there is still some debate about why local knowledge is not translated from one group or entity to another. This project shows that knowledge not only faces barriers of translation between two differing agencies, but when the knowledge is translated, it is often confined within a narrow scope of professional competence.

These findings add to growing local knowledge literature that focuses on knowledge translation between two, differing organizations, identifying a clear hierarchical relationship
between one agency from the other. Even more interesting is that police departments mainly communicate with the civil service for hiring and examination. Most of their other duties require communication with other organizations or groups such as the city council. Yet, police officers seem to push much of their frustrations on the civil service in the hiring process.  

The police officer view offers a new reason for why local knowledge is often rejected: political neutrality. The civil service not only does not want to accept knowledge from other organizations, but by its design, it cannot accept this knowledge. It was designed to be free from political influence, which has led to its being free from other unsolicited and undefined external influences. The idea of political influence is beyond legislation or changes in political leadership, but also societal changes, popular opinion, and other socio-political changes. These instances are fluid; the civil service, to remain reliable, must be constant, stagnant. This consistency to its original principles represents a barrier to local knowledge.

Police departments have their own administrative burdens and professional competence. This competence informs how they create and share local knowledge and determines what they believe is needed to redesign the examination. The politics-administration literature often focuses on politics as political actors and parties (see Ban, 2011). In the case of this project, politics is generally referred to as external actors (police departments) whose feedback lays outside the scope designed by the civil service; administration are the agencies that adhere more to professional competence (civil service). However, much like civil service professional competence deems this local knowledge as an insignificant part of the examination design process, police officers are not necessarily suggesting a two-way conversation between DCS and

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12 This could be due to the nature of the project or because they honestly feel this way.
themselves to help with redesign efforts. It is therefore professional competence versus professional competence.

This professional competence is defined by the police departments and civil service’s OP. Both believe that their perceptions on the examination are valid because of their professional competence – civil service has competence regarding exam design and police officers are competent in policing KSA’s. Police officers believe that they are competent in matters of policing to provide valuable feedback for the exam that would benefit the exam’s design. However, civil service administrators adhere to their professional and political neutrality, which not only limits the scope of feedback received by unsolicited external actors, but also reinforces their own expertise regarding exam design.

It is already difficult for groups and individuals to communicate knowledge to others within the same organization. Studies such as those by Paris and Reynolds (1983) and Yanow (1993, 1996) (respectfully) further emphasize the challenges of knowledge sharing and translation between an agency and community members. Not only does the civil service rarely accept police officer input regarding the entrance examination because of differences in organizational policies and procedures (OP), but political neutrality and professional competence nearly prohibit this knowledge translation.
CHAPTER 5
Civil Service View

Civil service administrators from both the Department of Civil Service (DCS) and municipal civil service agencies have consistent views of the police officer entrance examination. This consistency has led to an almost maternal protection of the exam’s integrity and the design process. While confidentiality plays a role in how civil service administrators share and portray exam information, there is a sense of duty (if you will) to protect the exam from those who may think or speak against it. The civil service definition of a good officer is based on an individual’s score on the examination – the higher the score, the better the ability to learn. Training and learning then become the responsibility of police departments. The civil service’s impetus to create a reliable and valid exam is in tension with the police officers’ aim to create an exam that measures the skills needed for the job. This is due to their understanding of what can and cannot be tested in the context of an entrance examination.

In the civil service view, professional competence has transformed to organizational patriotism, which in turn has caused some civil service administrators to perceive themselves as the gatekeepers of the entrance examination. While this is important for ensuring the integrity of the examination, it diminishes the feedback loop necessary for reform (Portillo et al. 2019). Redesign efforts are stifled due to the civil service’s goal of political neutrality and professional competence. Therefore, feedback is limited and oftentimes ignored.

How Police Officers are Chosen in the NYS Civil Service System

For municipal police officers in NYS, the entrance examination is still regarded as a determinant of fit for prospective public servants, which is why the exam’s design has major implications for hiring and recruitment. While the initial application process screens prospects
for eligibility, the examination provides the score that purportedly determines merit and one’s potential skills, knowledge, and abilities as they pertain to the job. One of the bases for designing an exam is the job classification, which in the state of New York is (supposedly) drafted by both the municipal and state civil service agencies. This job classification describes the competencies and relevant skills, knowledge, and abilities of police officers. Job classification also has two other purposes: cataloguing jobs within an organization and providing a basis for setting pay (U.S. Civil Service, 1956, pp.4-5). As the Civil Service Commission (1956) stated, “If jobs are accurately classified the supervisor will be able to obtain employees who are qualified to do what those jobs require” (p.5). However, designing the police officer entrance examination is not as simple as drafting questions relevant to the job classification.

**Test Design**

Interviews with senior level DCS administrators regarding test design provided more insight into the process by which the test is designed to make sure the test is both valid and reliable. The process (as explained to me in the interview) is as follows:

1. Civil service receives notice from police departments that a test is needed. This is typically done when there is a need to hire new officers and the eligible list has expired.
2. A Request for Proposals (RFP) is created to solicit help from a third-party consulting firm to help with test design.
3. Once a firm has been chosen to help, DCS does a job analysis.
   a. This job analysis asks police departments to identify the most important tasks necessary for policing. Police departments receive a “survey” that they are asked to
fill out and return to the DCS. However, it is unclear what is on this job analyses.

Some police officers find it useless.

4. After the job analysis, the test is created in coordination with the firm.

5. After the test is created, DCS solicits police departments to send officers to take a practice exam.
   a. These officers are generally those who have received good performance ratings.
   b. Their scores are then compared to their performance ratings. If there is a strong, positive correlation between the two then the test moves on to the next step.

6. The test is then shown to various underrepresented groups – racial/ethnic minorities, women, etc. – to make sure there are no issues of cultural bias.
   a. It was not specified who or where these individuals are from and the measurements to detect bias, only that a group of underrepresented minorities review the examination.

7. The test is then completed and sent to the proper municipal civil service departments to advertise the position and administer on the test date. The test is offered at the same date and time for each locale, except in New York City.

This process is done every time a new exam is needed and, as I was informed, a new exam had just been completed13.

Each civil service position that requires an examination has an eligibility list - a list of everyone who passed the examination and is eligible for the job they took the examination for. For police officers, an individual may pass the examination, but may not be selected to fill their desired post, so they remain on the eligibility list for at least four years until a spot is open and

13 This was in April 2019.
they are canvassed for the position. When the eligibility list expires – after all candidates from the list have been solicited for the job - a new exam is created and administered.

One of the main selection processes after the eligibility list is completed, is what is called the “Rule of Three” (Ban 2011; see also Mack, August 2018). Once exam scores are finalized, candidates are ranked based on their score (those who scored 100 points are at the top, and so on). This rule is a ranking system, which requires that police departments canvass the top candidates first, going down the eligible list by threes and selecting candidates based on their score until all open positions are filled. As it was explained to me by an officer, if there are 9 candidates on a list and 6 open positions, with the candidates having a score of 100, 99, 98, 97, 96, 95, 94, 93, and 92. The top three candidates are canvassed first in a group of three – so the candidates who scored the 100, 99, and 98 receive the first canvassing calls/letters.

If they all say “yes” to pursuing the position offered, then the selection process moves down to the next three top scores (candidates with a score of 97, 96, and 95). This process is done until all open positions are filled. If multiple candidates have the same score, they are ranked together and canvassed at the same time. For example, if the scores were 100, 100, 100, and 96, then the Rule of Three would mean that the candidates who scored the 100s are canvassed first. It then moves to the next three highest scorers until positions are filled.

Candidates who passed the examination, yet were not canvassed for an open position, are then put on an eligibility list, which is active for four years. After the four years, or when all candidates available have been canvassed, the list closes and another examination is created to begin a new hiring process. If a candidate is rejected at any point in the police officer hiring process, then the candidate with the next highest score is canvassed.
This rule is another mechanism to diminish patronage in the hiring process and purportedly, allows candidates a fair opportunity at being selected for the job. Even after examination, police officers have some frustrations with this process. However, to reduce patronage, the rule has stayed. Officers voiced frustration with the Rule of Three, particularly officers from smaller departments where recruiting officers from the community was a priority. Officers from smaller departments understood the need to have the rule but lamented that maybe the officer who was best for the community was too far down the list to be canvassed. How candidates are recruited is based on their score. Therefore, even though the examination does not reflect current police responsibilities - and mainly determines an individual’s test taking ability – it requires that a candidate score higher to even be considered for a position at a police department.

Again, the statement, “you can be a good police officer, but a poor test taker” becomes even clearer. An individual who is a poor test taker may not score well on the exam, either leading them to fail the test, or score so low that they are not canvassed for a position at the municipal police departments where they applied. Scoring higher on the exam determines an individual’s chance of being canvassed for a position, but their score does not necessarily mean that are well-equipped to do the job. It simply means that they can pass an examination. This means that police departments are selecting candidates from a list whose only qualification is test-taking ability.

The police officer entrance examination is valid and reliable and, based on interviews with DCS administrators, tests for potential officers’ ability to learn how to be an officer. However, police departments see the exam design as lacking and unable to test for 21st Century Policing skills, knowledge, and abilities (SKAs). The process to design the exam ensures validity
and reliability. This is based on the professional competence of the civil service, For the exam to be invalid or unreliable, would call the integrity of the exam, and the competence and reliability of the civil service, into question.

Based on the analysis of interview data, there are a few issues. First, each department has different views on community policing – even though the policing competencies and national definition of policing remain the same – choosing officers with good performance ratings (a system that has issues of bias as well) is not necessarily the best way to measure exam validity and reliability. Second, asking underrepresented groups their thoughts on the exam to detect any cultural bias is commendable. However, from interviews, this process is not clear. Is there a review team who takes the test to determine the biases? Are the individuals being asked have training and background in detecting and mitigating issues of bias? Where do these underrepresented minorities come from? How are they solicited? When I asked these questions, I received a vague answer, possibly indicating that there is no clear, or real, method to this or that this process is confidential.

The police officer entrance examination is created by police experts who are chosen by the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police Inc. and other groups. These police experts are, as DCS describes, “far removed” from the exam. In fact, a host of individuals “far removed”¹⁴ from the exam are involved in the process such as police chiefs, most of whom are retired, subject matter experts, civil service administrators, and an undisclosed third-party testing company. The civil service states that it selects officers “far removed” from the examination because they need information from officers who have been on the job long enough to

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¹⁴ “Far removed” meaning their positions are not similar or close in rank to the one being tested.
understand what is necessary for the position, but not in a position to relay information to potential candidates.

Police officers are solicited for feedback; however, they also stated that the exam is outdated and does not reflect current police responsibilities (see Chapter 4). DCS has admitted to not testing for policing responsibilities and competencies because it would not be possible to do that, considering that the examination is for an entry level position. Yet, they also are proud of their efforts in contacting police departments to provide job-related information to help them design the exam. The main issue is that the surveys sent to police departments and job analysis details are left confidential, so it is not certain if officers are being asked a specific set of questions that are then implemented on the entrance examination, or if their feedback is being completely ignored. Considering that the examination is designed not to measure certain characteristics and abilities, many officers are not sure if they can confirm that those who take the exam possess some of the competencies necessary for the position.

This is a frustrating issue, particularly from the management side. One the one hand, DCS solicits officer feedback to help them develop an examination for an entry level position. However, due to the exams design that tests an officer’s ability to learn, and statements showing that the tests cannot be designed based on information someone “cannot know”, as well as a lack of information about the surveys response rate, then the examination does not possess information necessary for entry-level officers. Police officers on the other hand find little value in the entrance examination, which translates to the finding little value in the job analysis survey. This results in many departments not completing it, on top of some departments not receiving the survey at all. While job analyses for exam design are common, in the case of this project, this important step seems to be the least valuable.
What Makes a Good Exam?

In understanding exam design, there are two concepts that must be defined: reliability and validity. Validity and reliability are important because they measure not only the exam’s ability to accurately measure whatever is intended, but to also be replicated and produce the same (or similar) results – an essential aspect of research. Reliability is about the consistency of measurement. If someone were to take the same test multiple times, would they get the same score? Validity, however, is concerned with the measurement of the test. That is, does the test measure what it was intended to measure (Pynes, 2013, p.196)? Reliability is necessary for a test to be considered valid; however, a test that gives consistent results is not necessarily measuring what it is intended to measure (Pynes, 2013, p. 195). There are three main tests for validity: criterion-related validity, which requires that test scores be correlated with a criterion accepted as a reasonable indicator of job aptitude, construct validity, which requires that tests be designed to measure certain traits that are generally associated with satisfactory job performance, and content validity, which measures whether the content of a test closely matches the content of a job. (Pynes, 2013, pp. 196-198; Nigro & Kellough, 2014, p. 79)

Norma Riccucci (1991) states that test validation “continues to be relied on to conceptualize and operationalize merit… A valid test measures only what is intended to measure” (p. 89). The exam design and results are to provide employers with an indicator of future job performance of an applicant (Nigro & Kellough, 2014, p.79). The issue then becomes the construction of a test that is valid, so employers can measure merit and fit. This means that “fit” is related to test taking results more so than other individual characteristics. This informs how and why the Civil Service designs the police officer entrance examination in the current manner and supports its firm stance regarding the efficacy of the examination.
Because the entrance examination is designed to determine a candidate’s ability to learn, it is not designed to correlate an exam score with future job performance. Instead, subsequent police officer trainings and assessments conducted by the police academy and departments become the main determinant of future officer performance. There is not enough information to determine the score to performance ratio. However, understanding the design of the exam, I can determine, at a minimum, that the exam is valid and reliable.

**Theme I: The Civil Service Does NOT Believe the Exam is Outdated**

“I just want to start and let you know that our exam is not outdated. I’m not sure where you are hearing that, but it’s not outdated.” – (Arya, April 2019)

When I stated that interviewees, mainly police officers, had mentioned that the exam was outdated, the response was strong and frustrated. DCS has done its due diligence - from the technocratic standpoint - to create a reliable and valid examination. In DCS technocratic sense, the exam is not outdated. That is, when applicable, a new examination is generated and distributed to solicit new police officers. Barring complaints from past test takers or changes coming from higher ups in the NYS government, the process to create the examination remains the same. However, the term outdated has a different meaning within the civil service context.

This difference in meaning is important because the second research question was developed based on comments from police officers, who used the word outdated quite frequently. Police officers are looking for an examination that measures specific traits and
characteristics that they believe are necessary for “good” policing; the civil service aims to measure an individual’s ability to learn police competencies based on their understanding of policing, which is informed by job analyses. The disconnect between these entities is not only in their understanding of the exam’s purpose, but their support for the exam’s design to fulfill that purpose. A competitive exam and subsequent score determine the merit and fit of an individual, in accordance with the position, so an outdated exam would mean that the integrity of the examination and its subsequent scores are questionable. An unreliable exam is the opposite of what DCS wants to achieve.

DCS interprets the word outdated in the following sense: the entrance examination gets reused over again each time there is an exam announcement (Arya, April 2019). When outdated is used, it is interpreted as old, inefficient, recycled. Even when I clarified that police officers used the word outdated in relation to the design of the examination, not the actual exam itself, the interpretation did not change. “That is not the case” – as I was told over and over (Arya, April 2019).

The exam design process is the most important indicator of professional competence in the civil service; the defense of the exam design and examination in general is an example of organizational patriotism. Much of the exam design process is designated within the realm of the civil service. Even though police officers possess the local knowledge to provide information regarding policing responsibilities and competencies that are necessary for potential candidates, exam integrity and political neutrality have put exam design efforts within the scope of the civil service, often barring unsolicited feedback from influencing the exam design process.

**Theme II: Civil Service puts the Onus to Teach Policing Competencies on Police Departments and the Police Academy**
“We don’t need to do that. That’s what the academy is for” (Arya, April 2019)

The job of the police officer entrance examination is to determine an individual’s “ability to learn” how to be a police officer (Arya, April 2019). This sentiment mirrors that of Wilson (1989). Though Wilson speaks regarding managerial positions, his notion on civil service duties when it comes to understanding the exam are relevant. He states that “the purpose of the examination is to identify people who have the ability to become managers” (p.138). Much like police officers and managers, DCS and Wilson (1989) understand that certain jobs are not easily learned and an examination on a specific skill set is not feasible for a candidate who has (potentially) never done the job. The academy is where individuals learn policing; that is not what the test is for. As another civil service administrator stated, and understandably so, “[we] can’t test people on things they don’t know” (Sal, April 2019).

Municipal civil service personnel echoed the same sentiment. Burt, a municipal civil service director with close ties to their respective police department, who also sits on some police officer hiring committees, understood the DCS’s statement. Burt received complaints from the police department in his area, with officers saying that the examination questions have “got nothing to do with the job” but responded back to such statements with the proclamation that the “ability to comprehend is everything” (April 2019). That is, test takers should have the ability to comprehend the questions on the examination, which only measures someone’s ability to learn. Actual job-related skills are taught in the academy and during the probationary period. The civil service understands the police officer entrance examination as a “base test”: the examination is supposed to measure basic skills needed for policing.
DCS and other municipal civil service agencies did not clearly state the competencies needed to be a police officer. The examination emphasized the skills of memory and reading comprehension, yet civil service administrators were not clear on whether these were appropriate determinants of someone’s ability to learn how to be an officer. The design of the exam was based on job analysis surveys administered to police departments and feedback from the Police Examination Review Committee – an ad-hoc committee composed of police chiefs (mostly retired) who reviewed the exam for efficacy. More interesting were the conversations between DCS administrators about the exam design during my phone interview with them. (I wonder if they remembered that I was still on the phone). Some DCS administrators did not agree with the notion of designing an exam to test someone’s “ability to learn.” This disagreement was quickly shot down, and the individual was reminded that they cannot design an exam to test someone on something “they don’t know” (Arya, April 2019; Sal, April 2019).

The civil service is stuck between a rock and a hard place: they cannot design an exam based on policing competencies that someone not yet in policing can know, but they must still design an exam somewhat related to the job. Even more interesting, as part of the exam’s measurements for validity and reliability, they submit job analysis surveys to gather information that may or may not be used on the examination; thus, creating confusion and tension within some police departments regarding DCS’s commitment to creating an exam that measures policing competencies.

DCS does not possess the local knowledge to understand policing competencies for two reasons: they do not do police work and they rarely communicate with police officers at an intimate enough level to gain this information. While some may argue that generalizing police officer local knowledge for a test may not be feasible across a diverse state like New York, two
things are at play: first, this exam is only for upstate New York, as New York City abides by its own examination requirements and, second while locales in upstate New York differ, interviews with police officers – and academics - have shown general agreement on what is needed to thoroughly test potential officers effectively. As Kirk stated,

“The problem with that is that any updating to the test has to be done at the state level. So, it wouldn't even fall so much on the county side. It would be more something has to take place at the State Civil Service over in Albany, and I don't know if they even in recent years even reached out to anybody to find out (July 2018).”

Distinctions between the competencies necessary to do police work and those tested for on the exam are vastly different. The examination tests mainly for skills such as rote memorization and reading comprehension. However, the competencies necessary for policing include skills and characteristics such as integrity, negotiation skills, social perceptiveness, neutrality, and decision-making. As stated before, the current design of the examination has presented few technical, social, or political problems for DCS, so it remains the same. As Burt stated, the police officer entrance examination is “not an exam [I] often get feedback on” (April 2019). The mismatch in the competencies between police departments and the civil service is, again, part of issues with local knowledge translation and organizational behavior.

DCS designs the police officer entrance examination for those who do not know anything about policing. Malcolm, a municipal civil service administrator, states, “when you go for a test like that, you don’t have a background in policing” (April 2019). The civil service, while gauging some of the competencies necessary for policing, designs the examination with the theory that those who are taking the exam have little to no knowledge of policing.

While DCS makes efforts to reach out to police departments (via survey or practice tests) it does not intend to generate a test based on all, or most, police competencies, as that would be unfair to the test takers who may not have a policing background. Coupled with little negative
(or positive) feedback on the examination, the police officer entrance examination has remained unchanged and represents the most minor and easily tested for skills, which are mostly irrelevant to policing.

**Theme III: The Civil Service Views its Communication with Police Departments as Fair and Consistent**

DCS was defensive when speaking about their communication with police departments. DCS rarely connects directly with police departments. Instead, municipal civil service departments are regarded as “the eyes and ears” for DCS regarding testing, complaints, and other information (Arya, April 2019). Regarding the entrance examination, DCS communicates with police departments in two ways: the completion of a survey to gauge police responsibilities and soliciting police officers to take the newly created entrance examination.

The survey was to gauge police responsibilities as to better understand policing and make sure the test reflects these responsibilities (Sal, April 2019). Once the test is created, DCS solicits police departments to send officers to take the examination. It is not clear how this feedback is used in the design of the examination. There are some drawbacks with these measures, as stated in the previous chapter. The main drawback is the ability – monetary and time related – of police departments to participate in these activities. Many police departments lack the extra funding to pay their officers to take the practice examination. The job analysis survey, as mentioned before, is often not received or completed by police chiefs. The time needed to complete the survey (a pretty large packet of questions from what I understand) is not viable for many chiefs. When asked about the survey response, I was told that the response rate was “pretty large.” However,
when asked for an estimate of surveys received compared to the number of police departments serviced by DCS, I did not receive a clear answer (Sal, April 2019).

While DCS sees municipal civil service agencies as the main source of information and contact for police departments, municipal civil service administrators often only communicate with police departments during entrance examination times and also have very little power to address concerns regarding the entrance examination. Municipal civil service agencies’ knowledge regarding the examination is mostly regarding testing dates, application materials, and eligibility lists. Administrators reported receiving complaints about the examination, but few, if any, are reported to DCS.

Even more interesting is how some municipal civil service administrators view their role as “eyes and ears.” Some Civil Service administrators state that police departments can and should report any concerns to the DCS, relegating their relationship with these departments strictly to testing and hiring matters and contradicting DCS claims that local offices are the “eyes and ears” (Beth, April 2019). It seems that municipal civil service offices are confused, or unaware, of the how DCS views their role in relation to communication with police departments.

One of the main issues with communication was within DCS. Police departments reported infrequent communication with DCS; municipal civil service agencies did not frequently contact DCS. However, some departments at DCS seemed to not contact each other or understand each other’s tasks. Whether this was due to protecting information, confidentiality, department size, or general unawareness, it was frustrating and scary. At the early stages of this project, I interviewed individuals from the municipal civil service agencies. I then asked for a contact to DCS - a general, yet relevant, number to get started. The administrator in the municipal civil service agency proceeded to flip open a large binder and painstakingly attempt to
find a number that would bring me somewhat close to a credible contact to discuss exam design. When I asked this administrator for a number, she seemed very confused on even where to begin looking in the large binder of numbers on her shelf. She finally connected me with a name and number that may be helpful.

Even more interesting was a 30-minute rerouting between multiple DCS administrators. After receiving a number from the municipal civil service administrator, I proceeded to call, with hopes of being given a name, email address, or another number. I was first routed to an administrator who had no idea who handled exam design and whether it was the DCS’s duty in general. NYS Civil Service has thousands of employees; understanding the vastness of the department, I asked for another number – she connected me to another administrator. This administrator was the most confused and off putting. After telling them my name and the reason for my call, this conversation ensued,

AE: “Hi. I am calling to talk to someone about the police officer entrance examination. Can you connect me to the department that would handle that or provide a number or email?”

DCS: “I’m sorry, no one here does that!”

AE: “I understand that it may not be your department that handles the examinations, but do you have the contact of someone who may be able to help?”

DCS: “No I don’t, no one does that here.”

AE: “So you’re saying that the New York State Civil Service does not handle exam design for entrance examinations.”

DCS: “Yes. I don’t know why you’re calling here. There’s no one here to talk to about that” (DCS. administrator, August 2017).
I made sure to tell her that I did not want to know what was on the examination and that I only wanted to ask questions regarding exam design to the relevant party. I also mentioned my project multiple times. She continued to say that I had the wrong number and was talking with the wrong department. She did not provide a name and was unwilling to do so.

From DCS’s perspective, two things are possible. First, the administrator did not know who handled those types of issues, so responded as such to avoid any further conversation. Second, the administrator was answering in this manner to protect any information or shield the department from possible criticism. State departments, under constant threats of budget cuts or power shifts that may change their operations, have become protective of their procedures and information. This is understandable, as these factors are crucial for operations, effectiveness, and efficiency. At one point the administrator asked me again why I needed the information; I explained my project again. The tone during the conversation was very distrustful and defensive.

The other part of this conversation that scared me was the fact that the administrator mentioned that DCS did not develop the entrance examinations. I made clear that I was already told by two high-ranking individuals in two separate departments and entities that this was indeed a duty of DCS. This did not phase the administrator. Her comments were the third time that an administrator in DCS did not know the proper contacts for exam design duties and denied that it was the duty of DCS. If I was not able to contact someone in DCS, how was a police chief going to do so, to provide feedback regarding the examination? This process showed that it is not clear how to talk to someone in DCS. It also showed that municipal civil service agencies themselves do not have direct contacts to DCS. Municipal civil service agencies are supposed to be the “eyes and ears” for DCS; however, they do not have a direct contact to DCS. Police departments mainly communicate about the examination with municipal civil service agencies,
who cannot easily relay that information to DCS. This further enforces the narrow feedback loop.

DCS rarely communicates with police departments and has views of municipal civil service departments that are not widely known or shared by some of those same departments. Based on my initial conversations, there is some confusion in the department itself about other department’s tasks, specifically as they relate to exam design. This is especially unhelpful for police departments or even municipal civil service departments looking for answers or hoping to pass along information and concerns. This confirms the theoretical assumptions that DCS’s OP, informed by its professional competence, does not allow for feedback it may receive from police departments regarding the entrance examination. While DCS administrators ask for feedback from officers at different stages of its exam design process, it also admits to not using some of this feedback to an extent.

DCS does not solicit this feedback to appear legitimate, instead, this feedback is simply a part of the exam design process. What I found then is that constructive feedback based on local knowledge, is somewhat regarded as unfounded complaints in the face of what DCS considers an otherwise legitimate process. While feedback solicited through the exam design process, which is standardized according to the civil service procedures, is viewed as legitimate. The only local knowledge that matters then, is the knowledge within the civil service. Other knowledge basis, even if relevant to the examination, is illegitimate.

Discussion: DCS Administrators Want to Insulate Themselves from Politics
The civil service view represents two phenomena that hinder reform: political neutrality that encumbers exam redesign efforts and professional competence that obscures and confuses the relationship with other agencies. DCS, however, while adhering to professional competence, does not understand the other agencies that it must interact with to design the examination. DCS administrators’ assert certain roles for municipal civil service agencies yet have not clearly communicated those roles to those agencies. DCS admits that it solicits information from police departments by sending out a job analysis survey yet cannot confirm how many departments responded and how the responses from that survey influence their design of the examination. As witnessed by the quick retort of the civil service agent to her colleague after he spoke up after questioning the efficacy of the examination, political beliefs do abound within the agency and are shared by some administrators. However, they are quickly discouraged and dismissed.

DCS is focused on making an examination that is valid and reliable. It is, therefore, more focused on the technical design of the exam, than whether it accounts for policing competencies. DCS professional competence leads it to view exam design in the strictly scholarly sense, often neglecting the realistic necessities of an entrance examination stated by police officers. DCS, in soliciting police feedback, collects these responses through a process that is defined by DCS’s professional competence standards, which also are in line with their SOP’s and other practices. DCS, by defining how it receives feedback and communication, has allowed itself to remain neutral to political sway while also maintaining its professional integrity.

The adherence to administrative competence and neutrality hinders the translation of knowledge across organizations, stifling growth and reform and leaving DCS disconnected from other agencies. The horizontal hierarchical relationship applies with DCS to police officers, but there is a vertical relationship between DCS to municipal agencies. Municipal civil service
agents take recommendations and insight from DCS in dealing with other civil servants and handling inquiries about the civil service examination. DCS and municipal civil service agencies communicate with each other, but within a limited scope. Even more so, DCS and municipal agencies misunderstand what each other’s purpose is regarding communicating with police departments. Local knowledge literature understands this as common, as factors such as hierarchical competence (e.g., supervisors not wanting to seem less competent than their subordinates) or technical differences (e.g. differing SOP’s and KSA’s between DCS and municipal agencies) hinder this communication and create misunderstandings. However, this is further evidence of DCS’ removal from the political process to the extent that if often does not communicate with municipal agencies that share near similar goals and tasks. Audrey, a municipal civil service agent, was quick to reinforce DCS statements regarding entrance exam design: “the exam is designed to test a candidate’s ability to learn” (Audrey, May 2019).

The civil service view supports the notion of political neutrality as why exam redesign is difficult and local knowledge is often rejected. DCS administrators are protective of the exam’s integrity, even when there is internal criticism, as noted above. One interesting finding from interviews with civil service administrators is how the administrators tended to have near scripted answers for the questions, while police officers spoke freely. Municipal civil service agents were freer in their answers, however, careful to not provide confidential information or anything that was outside the scope of their jobs. DCS administrators were calculated in their responses, even requesting the questions ahead of time. When instances of criticism arose, it was quickly shot down, almost harshly, and corrected to fall back in line with traditional practices and thinking.
Local knowledge shows that it is not difficult to communicate knowledge from one group to another within organizations – it is difficult for that local knowledge to be implemented or received. The police officers’ view shows that it is even more complicated to communicate knowledge with a separate organization. The civil service view supports both notions. DCS has little communication with similar agencies within its scope (municipal civil service agencies) and little to no direct communication with separate organizations (police departments). Local knowledge studies show communication between different groups within the same agency, or agencies with community populations. However, few studies show how this communication is strictly defined. DCS was designed to adhere to little political influence and designs the scope of communication with other agencies, but it rarely receives communication or insight from other agencies. This is on purpose.

The civil service receives knowledge from external organizations; however, this knowledge is received and interpreted within a narrow, well-defined scope. For police departments, the job analysis survey is one of the only ways to communicate with DCS. Yet, the survey is structured by DCS, meaning that the knowledge communicated by police departments is limited to the structure, design, and intent of the survey. Municipal civil service agencies are perceived as the “eyes and ears” for DCS; however, municipal agencies are not fully aware of this role. They also do not have a straight line of communication with DCS to share information that they receive from police departments. This was clear when Arya was confused as to why some police chiefs believed the exam to be outdated (April 2019). If municipal civil service agencies were communicating with DCS regarding police officer input about the exam, then this would not be surprising.
As stated before, DCS is a large organization; however, size is not the only issue. It seems that political neutrality is even extended to municipal agencies. In an interview with a municipal civil service agency lead, she mentioned a meeting where a DCS employee answered some question regarding feedback about the exam. At no point in the story did it seem that municipal agencies could share their own experiences (Karen, April 2019). DCS see municipal agencies as part of the larger civil service efforts, but not necessarily on the same level to regard their feedback or communicate with them frequently. This structure (or lack thereof) creates issues of knowledge translation within similar organizations. As stated before, DCS operates within an old institutionalist form, making it difficult to adjust to newer social and political changes. It seems the goal of DCS to remain politically neutral has also led to its inaccuracy in the design of an exam that police officers view as “outdated.”

We can assume that at some time, the civil service had its own local knowledge, that has since translated into procedural practice and procedures (i.e., scholarly knowledge). The current dynamics of the civil service specifically DCS, show a strong adherence to the principles of OP and the administrative side of the politics-administration dichotomy. The civil service upholds scholarly knowledge – administration – while local knowledge not within the scope defined by the civil service is disregarded. In the realm of exam redesign, this is a harmful outcome of the politics-administration relationship.

The police officer entrance examination, despite its flaws, is a valid and reliable exam. The exam design may not be perfect, but the process by which it is made, and the resulting examination is a near perfect process (as perfect as it can be barring the inclusion of police competencies). Police officers themselves recognize this, acknowledging that an exam is necessary and at times applauding the process, noting its history of diminishing patronage and
creating a system that uphold public service integrity. The main issue is with the design of the examination, not the exam itself.
CHAPTER 6
Implications and Conclusions

James Q. Wilson in *Bureaucracy* (1989) emphasized the multiple factors that affect organizational behavior, policies, and procedure. In Chapter 8, Wilson recalls the interaction between a personnel specialist and engineer at the United States Navy’s Naval Ocean Systems Center (NOSC). The personnel specialist approached an engineer to classify their job, asking them, essentially, what they do (Wilson 1989, p. 137). After replying with “inventing things” the personnel specialist proceeded to their office and found that the engineers reply was not in line with their job description; the personnel specialist recommended that the engineer’s classification be downgraded (Wilson 1989, p. 137). The engineer’s supervisor “erupted in anger” hearing that one of the lead experts on logic systems of torpedo guidance devices – the engineer – would be downgraded. The anger stemmed from one main issue, as Wilson (1989) notes, “if his job were downgraded, he would probably quit” (p.137).

This incident is representative of the two theories presented in this project: OP and local knowledge. The personnel specialist’s procedures related to organizational behavior led them to classify certain tasks and duties with classifications and job descriptions. This pattern followed a (fairly) uniform set of policies and procedures that personnel specialists understand are necessary for classified jobs to keep them “in order to insure the fair, equitable, and nonpolitical treatment of public employees” (Wilson 1989, p. 138). This pattern contrasts with that of the engineer and supervisor. In this example, the engineer, due to their expertise, were classified at a higher level to provide them more benefits, higher pay, and to keep them at the organization, especially since their skill set is incredibly specialized and specific. The supervisor understood this; the personnel specialist did not.
This is also an example of local knowledge and how it fails to translate, and more importantly, how it runs across different barriers. The supervisor understood that retaining such talent required a higher classification. The “arm wrestling” between the two parties emphasized a rift in the knowledge base: the personnel agent did not fully comprehend why the supervisor did not believe the duties of the job required a certain classification, specifically as it pertained to the engineer; the supervisor did not fully comprehend the meritorious safeguarding inherit in the personnel agent’s job that required them to properly classify a job and its respective duties.

Both theories play a part in how the NYS police officer entrance examination is designed. Police officers have stated that the examination is different from other exams. That is, you cannot test a potential police officer the same way you would another position. Police officers understand the need for a civil service exam, emphasizing the goal to diminish patronage and increase oversight in the hiring process. These are the same principles that drive the civil service in their mission to create a valid and reliable exam. However, police officers disagree with the design of the exam, stating that it does not fully capture what is necessary for policing. The exam tests people on things that do not matter for policing. The police officer entrance examination is a high stakes exam for a high stakes position: what the test measures and what is needed for the job are distinctly different, to the detriment of the hiring process.

The exam that is administered measures two main factors: memorization and English language comprehension. The questions asked are mainly regarding the law, and not necessarily police work. Lester, a professor who has done research with civil service examinations, finds fault in how the tests are created. He states, “If you hire an expert to design an entry level exam, that’s where the mismatch is” (personal communication 2017). More importantly, he asks, “does the test accurately reflect the job they’re applying for” (personal communication 2017)? That is,
while experts are designing the examination to test for validity and reliability, they may not be well-versed in the competencies necessary for the exam’s position. This conflicts with the notion of the civil service exam. Experts are designing a valid and reliable exam to test candidates who may not have a background in the position they are applying for. However, if the examination does not accurately reflect the responsibilities necessary for the job, then the hiring process may not be as successful as intentioned and the candidates who do pass the examination may not possess even the ability to learn how to be police. Police have little say in the design of the examination. Therefore, when the exam is erroneous in its assessment of police officers, police have little ability to effect change, and limited avenues to voice concern.

The purpose of the merit system was to hire a qualified public service workforce that worked for the people and was shielded from political influence. What this project showed is that the goal to decrease political influence within and over the civil service has also stifled exam redesign feedback and efforts, thus, limiting the quality of police officers on the eligibility list. While remaining politically neutral is necessary to uphold public service integrity and perform job duties and tasks effectively for the sake of the public, this project shows that the feedback that is provided is done in a narrow scope designed by the civil service, which also effects who and how individuals are hired. The politics-administration dichotomy is useful for upholding the mission of public service but is contrarian to feedback and reform.

The civil service leans toward the belief and practice of strong professional competence and political neutrality; police departments are not necessarily impartial but have varying procedures and knowledge that clashes with the competence of the civil service. While this project was focused in upstate New York on police departments and the civil service, the
theoretical and practical implications add to the conversation in local knowledge literature and add to the conversations regarding the politics-administration debate.

Local knowledge comes in conflict most with OP of the civil service. DCS has a clear and rigid process and understanding for designing the exam. Even in attempts to gather local knowledge for police officers to help with job analysis information, much like the implementers at the Israel Corporation of Community Centers that Yanow (1993, 1996) researched, those with the power to implement did not use it, and to an extent value the local knowledge that was collected and provided to them. In this case, knowledge sharing, and translation does not just meet barriers within organizations, but between organizations who may have varying process models, but rely on each other for information. The exam design process, for DCS, relied partly on police officer feedback, but the process itself, and DCS administrators, also recognized that this feedback was generally irrelevant for the exam. The request for feedback then is not necessarily part of an intentional exam redesign process to create a better, more relevant exam, but instead part of the general standards and practice of the civil service.

Standard operating procedures supported by OP play an important role in the design of the examination. DCS recognizes the issues with the exam, however, the exam remains – according to police departments – outdated. DCS and municipal civils service agencies have received few complaints regarding examination design – mainly because it is difficult to communicate with them. This is due to lack of communication structures between DCS and municipal agencies, which lend itself to misunderstandings about each other role. Essentially, “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it.” The examination’s design, and process for design have worked for this long, so why change it?
Continuing to generate a test that is (in the non-technocratic sense) unchanged remains in DCS’s best interest. Redesigning the entrance examination to a test that would measure certain characteristics (integrity, neutrality) and skills (decision-making, negotiation) would require a completely different examination design than what is currently offered. Changing the test and including competencies that are more in line with police officer sentiments would not only require a change to current procedures for testing but would also abandon DCS’s principle to not test on competencies that they deem only a police officer can know and go against their intent and model of designing a test to measure ability to learn. More importantly, the exam design process and the scope by which feedback is acquired would need to expand, including what DCS may deem as a more political tone. This is contrary to its intent.

Summary of Findings

Some time ago, I was looking through YouTube and ran across a video of a union meeting in New York City sometime in the 1960s. At a large table, dressed in black suits, men were debating the union contracts, which also devolved into a conversation about experience and professionalism. One man stated that he was professional: he took and passed the civil service examination and had done his job for many years. Almost immediately, the man across the table from him stated, “You’re not a professional, you’re a civil servant who took an exam.”

Even in the context of 1960’s New York City, there was an understanding that the civil service exam did not have implications regarding knowledge or expertise. When reviewing DCS intentions regarding the design of the police officer entrance exam, this statement is not farfetched. The police officer entrance examination was designed to be a neutral, apolitical tool for “weeding out” potential candidates for policing positions. The intent of the exam was not to
measure whether the individual could do the job, but rather, if they could “learn” how to do the job. Merit and fit then is not whether someone possesses the SKA’s to be a police officer, but if they are competent enough to learn how to do the job.

DCS states that the exam is not designed to determine a candidate’s expertise or knowledge, it is to determine if they can learn, if they are trainable, coachable. However, based on what is understood about the current design of the police officer entrance examination, at the very least, all those who pass it are good test-takers tested on certain competencies but, according to officers, not the ones that matter.

Looking back on sentiments first expressed by police officers, many feel that the entrance examination does little to actually test for policing capabilities or potential. As Virgil states:

“The entrance exam nobody really talks about it and it's like a thing that you have to do to get in the door. Yeah. Nobody really cares what it is. That just determines our applicant pool. You know as an administrator; I think it restricts us and how many in the pool that we can hire. You know, you can recruit the best person you think for this community to be a police officer. And if they can't score high, then you're taking somebody from that. You have no idea now, they could have wind up good, but you know, you know again the frustration is like what kind of recruitment effort are you going to do when people self-select, and the score determines who you can hire? So, I do see a disconnect there in terms of … you know … I'm sure there are other hiring practices that would be more effective than simply taking a test (personal communication 2018).”

Police officers generally do not think the current design of the police officer entrance examination is a good reflection of current police responsibilities. While there are some who believe the exam is okay, that is it – they simply believe the exam is okay and do not see the link between the examination and current police responsibilities but admit that the “examination does what is was designed to do.” This is due in part to how police officers perceive their responsibilities compared to how the civil service’s intention on the exam design.

Local knowledge is stifled by OP, which is upheld by professional competence. This means that the local knowledge needed for exam redesign is left in the periphery,
and rarely brought to the forefront. The exam is stagnant, but the society is dynamic. Individuals looking to be officers in the 21st century are taking an exam designed in and for the 20th century. The civil service does not design an exam to reflect police responsibilities – they feel that such an exam is unfair and unreliable because you cannot test someone on information they do not know. As the exam is the first step towards becoming a police officer, applicants with poor testing abilities are often eliminated, or see a drop to the bottom of the eligible list, even though test-taking abilities are not competencies for police work.

It must be noted that in the interview with DCS, I asked (rather bluntly) if there were anything that they would like to change about the exam. (I asked this question to all the police officers I interviewed and wanted to see what civil service administrators would say). The civil service administrators responded that they did not believe the exam needed to be changed. This statement reflects civil service sentiments towards the examination, a small part of a larger attachment and protection of not only the examination.

The public administration literature shows that organizations develop SOPs that often hinder change. The SOPs, in this project, are the exam design process that DCS has used for years to measure the validity and reliability of the exam, as well as account for policing competencies (according to DCS). This also impedes upon instances of knowledge translation, which may be helpful when creating change, specifically for specialized positions such as policing. The data provided to me by DCS administrators and police officers comes close to answering the question. The police officers mention a stagnant exam that has not changed in its design and remains unchanged in how it defines police competencies. DCS administrators describe a process, which they define as inclusive of various police voices, yet did not provide clear answers on changes to the exam or feedback they received regarding the exam.
There is a clash between the professional competence of the civil service and police officer knowledge and skills. The professional competence is defined by standard operating procedures, organizational goals and mission, and employee knowledge (educational or experiential) as well as political impartiality and organizational loyalty. External to this are police departments. They are trying to communicate with the DCS regarding the examination, however, their knowledge and skills regarding policing cannot push beyond the (figurative and literal) barrier that is organizational behavior, practice, and competence. Though there are opportunities to provide information, the knowledge becomes lost between massive paperwork and a lack of funds to participate.

The SOPs themselves do not block the translation of local knowledge, it is the perceived competence and loyalty to those SOPs that blocks the translation of local knowledge from police officers to the civil service. Both the civil service and police departments exhibit loyalty to their respective organizations. Police departments even recognize the necessity of the civil service exam and process. However, feedback given to the civil service from police departments, that is provided outside of the standardized feedback loop of the exam design process, is disregarded.

Police officers do not see the job analysis survey as legitimate because they feel that the civil service does not take their feedback seriously and because the survey itself is designed in a way that does not for complete, honest feedback. The job analysis survey is one of the few ways DCS receives knowledge from police departments, but it is within a narrowly defined scope. At the same time, while municipal agencies are supposed to provide exam feedback from police departments, they do not have a direct, structured line of communication with DCS. DCS understand police officers’ feedback as merely a part of the process. The job analysis survey is perceived as the one and only legitimate way to provide feedback for DCS. Police officers,
However, view the survey as merely a procedure without any merit or influence on the exam design process, as they believe the exam to still be outdated. Without having seen the job analysis survey, yet receiving differing views about it from different entities, it does not seem to be as consequential to the overall exam process, further complicating knowledge sharing between both entities.

Speaking from a technical standpoint about exam design, it is important to reiterate the importance of exam reliability and validity. Reliability is about the consistency of measurement. If someone were to take the same test multiple times, will they get the same score? Validity, however, is concerned with the measurement of the test. That is, does the test measure what it was intended to measure (Pynes 2013, p.196). Reliability is necessary for a test to be considered valid; however, a test that gives consistent results is not necessarily measuring what it intended to measure (Pynes 2013, p.195). There are three main tests for validity,

- Criterion-related validity, which requires that test scores be correlated with a criterion accepted as a reasonable indicator of job aptitude.
- Construct validity, which requires that tests be designed to measure certain traits that are generally associated with satisfactory job performance, and
- Content validity, which measures whether the content of a test closely matches the content of a job. (Pynes 2013, p. 196-198; Nigro & Kellough 2014, p.79)

The exam design and results are to provide employers with an indicator of future job performance of an applicant (Nigro & Kellough, 2014, p.79). The issue then becomes the construction of a test that is valid, so employers can properly measure merit and fit. Norma Riccucci (1991) states that test validation “continues to be relied on to conceptualize and operationalize merit… A valid test measures only what is intended to measure” (p.89). The police officer entrance examination, however, presents an issue of construct validity: the test is not designed to measure certain traits and characteristics related to job performance.
The exam does not have a scoring mechanism to account for critical thinking, social perceptiveness, or problem solving - all significant competencies of police work and 21st century policing. The exam, simply, does not measure the merit and fit of an officer based on basic police competencies. The exam potentially weeds out people who would be good police officers, leaving the pool of people skewed towards those who are simply good test takers. Potential officers are, therefore, judged on criteria mostly unrelated to police work. This creates another problem. DCS states that the examination is designed to tests a candidate’s “ability to learn”; police officers believe that the examination is supposed to assess whether a candidate possess the competencies necessary for the job. However, the examination simply measures a candidate’s test-taking abilities. The examination designed, coupled with the Rule of Three, constrains police departments on who they can hire based on a candidate’s test-taking ability.

The myth of bureaucratic neutrality, discussed by Portillo et al. (2019), is another example of the issues regarding exam design. Regarding the data from this research, even organizations that work towards neutrality exhibit biases that effect outcomes. DCS, police departments, and municipal civil service agencies are not neutral. They each present their own biases, which inform their SOP’s. In the case of exam design, this strive for neutrality has created a civil service that is biased (to the point of contention) about its own processes and purpose. This results in an examination that is biased towards a certain way of thinking. The police officer entrance examination requires participants to set aside their own biases to engage themselves with a new set of biases, aimed at measuring an individual’s “potential to learn” how to be an officer. These biases are not only an example of the myth of neutrality but are not even in line with what police officers state is necessary for the job. The process itself has created an ineffective examination with skewed outcomes.
While there are organizational barriers to change there are multiple steps required to facilitate change in organizations. Change often comes through the communications and persuading from leaders regarding the need for change (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; see also Burke, 2002; Judson 1991; Armenakis, Harris, & Field 1999; Laurent, 2003). Fernandez and Rainey (2006) identify the following eight main steps necessary for change: ensure the need, provide a plan, build internal support for change, and overcome resistance, ensure top-management support and commitment, build external support, provide resources, institutionalize change, and pursue comprehensive change (pp.169-173) These steps for change face roadblocks in this project for multiple reasons:

- Ensure the need: DCS – the organization in charge of gathering feedback, states that they have received little to no feedback on the examination’s design, mostly because they are unaware of this role and do not communicate with police departments regarding exam design. Municipal civil service agencies who receive feedback regarding the examination, provide the same answers to police departments as DCS does, “you cannot design an exam based on something [they] don’t know.”

- Provide a plan: due to the differences in procedures, and competence, the chance of police departments and DCS drafting a plan together would be difficult, if not near impossible. Even if the need were recognized, a formalized initiative to address the problem would require accurate knowledge translation between both parties. This could be done in focus groups, for example, where officers are paid overtime to offer feedback on policing competencies and exam design.

- Build internal support for change and overcome resistance: The second interview with DCS employees shows that there are some disagreements in DCS ranks concerning the
exam. However, these concerns were minimal and were immediately suppressed. This was shown when a DCS administrator pushed back on the notion that the exam is designed to test a candidate’s ability to learn. His inquiry and push back received (harsh) backlash from his colleague. However, it does call in to question whether there are others who feel the same; thus, making the case for internal support more hopeful than previously thought.

- **Ensure top-management support and commitment:** this issue is a question of funds. If their money is not there, then the initiative may end before it has a chance to begin.
- **Build external support:** if the problem is accurately explained, I believe that external support is possible. Again, funds are the main issue. However, current socio-political changes have shown dynamic shifts in not just police training, but also towards changes in hiring and qualifications. This external support may not include other governmental organizations, but civil society at large.

**Solutions**

OP, as stated in Chapter 2, emphasizes the barriers to exam redesign witnessed by police officers looking to change the exam. As Mack stated, the “inertia that is New York State won’t allow effective, positive change (personal communication April 2019). The civil service argues that police officer knowledge, while valuable, cannot be fairly measured on an examination because, one would need to be a police officer to understand it. Police officers, however, argue that an individual’s characteristics are more important for determining merit and fit; more importantly, characteristics can be measured successfully on an examination. After reviewing the
literature on this, police officer solutions, and speaking with academics familiar with exam design, I agree with the police officer stance regarding this issue.

When I asked police officers what they would change about the exam to better measure candidate’s characteristics and policing competencies, they mentioned the following. Lincoln, a Lieutenant, was a bit more skeptical, and stated the following,

“I don't know what you know what answer I've seen things like personality tests, and you know, because this is government there's always people trying to sell us stuff and they think it is the next best thing and we'll come in and tell you we have a 500-question personality test will determine what their personality will give you, but they all want to be paid for that. That's just a bigger test. I mean if a person sits down to take a hundred question civil service exam or most of them aren't even that, many and maybe scores an 85. How are they going to be after 15 questions of this personality stuff?” (personal communication, 2018)

As stated before, Virgil did not feel that significant characteristics for police officer candidates, such as integrity, were possible to test on an examination. One of the reasons for this, as mentioned above, is because there was not enough known research or studies on how to test for this in the police officer context that would fulfill the purpose. More significantly, the notion that policing was a calling means that characteristics such as integrity are not things that can be easily taught or tested for.

Despite some differences and hesitancy, some of the main redesign ideas provided by police officers are as follows,

1. Pass/fail examination – by creating a pass/fail examination, the eligible pool widens to include more individuals. Police officers often expressed potentially good recruits being left out of the process simply because they were not able to score well on a test. A pass/fail system would allow those individuals to potentially reach the interview process and become police officers. This also diminishes the bias that mostly good test-takers become examinations.
2. Scenario-based testing – this cost more money and time but has been pushed by two officers (William and Luke). Scenario-based testing would decrease the implicit-bias that many believe to be inherit in the examination, while also showing departments how someone would react in various situations. While reactions are often determined on training, these tests are assumed to also determine personality traits and other characteristics, while providing police departments knowledge about their recruit’s biases and reactions prior to training.

3. No more rule of 3 – the rule of three states (simply) that the top three candidates on the eligible list must be contacted for recruitment before the next three candidates can. Essentially, to recruit candidates, police officers must start from the top of the list to the bottom. The issue with the rule of three mainly comes from smaller departments who prefer candidates from their towns. The rule of 3 may keep them from selecting a good candidate with community connections, simply because of their score (which is already regarded as a poor determinant of merit). The Rule of Three further accentuates the disconnect between police departments and the civil service, pitting what departments and the civil service believe is necessary to do the job, versus what the examination actually produces.

These exam types are feasible, however as noted previously, funding remains an issue. Some of these solutions – Rule of Three and Pass/Fail – also interfere with the civil service goals of reducing patronage and potentially open this hiring process up to problems regarding bias. Smaller departments find that eliminating the Rule of Three and creating a Pass/Fail system are the best options for them, as they would have a greater chance of selecting officers who come from their community. This further reinforces their 21st Century Policing goals. William, for
example, as saw these options as potentially decreasing bias and providing police departments with the ability to hire more diversity.\textsuperscript{15} Personality tests were also an option, and while police officers were looking into those options, they were not completely clear on their feasibility, or had not gained enough knowledge about them, despite seeing them as a necessity for determining a qualified police officer. With that said, two police chiefs stated that they were looking at possible personality tests, at least for their departments to screen candidates in the beginning of their hiring process.

Civil service exam design often focuses on civil service job classifications. However, as stated above with the example presented by Wilson (1989), job classifications often clash with the local knowledge presented by managers and other personnel within the organization. While protecting employees is important when classifying jobs and designing examinations, it is also important to understand the needs of the organization – which is why local knowledge is important. Local knowledge from the organization can help to determine appropriate job tasks and duties. More accurate knowledge regarding the positions from those who do the job, or manage those who do the job, can help in the creation of an examination that is more closely related to the job responsibilities.

For police departments, this may seem more difficult, but it is possible. As we have seen in recent years, the job of policing has become tied more and more to changes in society and politics. While one of the goals of the civil service is to remain impartial, consistently reforming an examination to account for these changes in job tasks and competencies is difficult. However, policing, like other civil service positions, is an evolving field and a high stakes profession, that, even if influenced by changes in society or politics, requires an examination that matches current

\textsuperscript{15} This belief hints at the idea that there may be bias in the design of the entrance examination. Any suspected bias (race/ethnic, gender, sexuality, etc.) was not examined for this project.
police responsibilities. I argue that these changes do not challenge the perceived competence of the civil service or even hinder its neutrality. Instead, it shows a greater competence and knowledge of civil service employees through its continued ability to evolve its exams to reflect the necessary changes needed for an efficient and effective police force.

**Limitations of Study**

The main limitation was the confidentiality of much of the materials in this study. Though I was able to sit for the police officer entrance examination, multiple attempts to find a copy of a past examination failed. I was not able to access a copy of the job analysis survey sent to police departments, and many of the questions I asked of DCS administrators were answered with an “I can’t tell you.” Entrance examination practice books are widely available online and offer the only look to the NYS police officer entrance, apart from the analysis here. Also, asking civil service administrators about their own experiences has limitations in that they are bound to their SOPs, which include rules on confidentiality. While many were helpful in connecting me to others who would answer my questions, many provided uniformed answers, which seemed almost rehearsed.

The process of coding and analyzing the data, particularly as a doctoral student researcher, had its limitations. As Terrence Meehan (2016) stated in his dissertation, “There was therefore no opportunity for other researchers to improve or gauge the reliability of my coding schemes. This is a legitimate, though controversial, complaint about this kind of analysis” (p.122). The use of direct quotes was important for improving the reliability of not only my codes, but also my analysis. While single handedly coding the data is arduous, quotes and citations were provided for not only reference, but validation.
Despite the limitations, this study is one of the few in-depth looks at the design of an entrance examination, particularly for police officers. When beginning this project, I found an array of civil service examination literature for promotional examinations, but not for entry-level officers. This project, for the most part, started with no general foundation on entrance exam design apart. One thing that is certain about entrance exam design: it is rigid. There are specific processes and conditions. OP provides the perfect framework for understanding the rigidity and the civil service is the perfect model. OP, like what was mentioned in the literature review, in its previous formulation was different, near resistant to the new knowledge brought about by the literature on New Institutionalism. However, this project shows that a 50-year-old theory, relegated to only a pedagogical tool, still serves a practical purpose. SOP’s and competence are more important for the civil service in this case. The defensiveness that the civil service exhibits is extreme adherence to its professional competence more than a fear of external political influence.

Even more is how local knowledge has expanded beyond organizational boundaries. Traditionally, local knowledge literature focuses on intra-organizational knowledge sharing. However, this project adds to a growing literature on inter-organizational knowledge sharing and knowledge translation to fulfill a practical purpose. More importantly, as each study states, this local knowledge remains an important part of not only organizational operations, but in also understanding of job tasks, roles, and SKA’s. Police departments and the civil service are two different organizations, connected by an infrequent phenomenon: examinations. This phenomenon requires an arduous process of knowledge sharing, that like most local knowledge studies have found, often is disregarded, in this case, for the sake of organizational processes and expertise.
Conclusion

The findings for this study show a long road ahead for examination redesign. While socio-demographic changes have initiated changes in police departments the outlook for exam redesign does not seem as promising. While there is a clear and consistent voice from police departments regarding the need, the changes that they look for may not happen for some time. In the chance that it does occur, long conversations regarding a feasible, valid, and reliable measure of potential officer merit and fit would be necessary.

This study emphasizes a dynamic in the local knowledge literature. Some of the literature focuses on interactions within organizations, examining communication between horizontal and vertical hierarchical relationships. This projects focus is on the relationship between two different entities with two different purposes, but who, per legal mandates, must interact with each other, even if the scope of the interaction is narrow and rigidly defined. Even more so, this study shows how administrative processes and professional competence often hinder redesign opportunities. The civil service is at the top of the horizontal hierarchical relationship - which is common in local knowledge literature - as many police officers attest to, citing extensive barriers to not only communicating with the civil service, but also sentiments of being bound to civil service protocol and procedures. These sentiments often resulted in a feeling of helplessness by departments regarding exam redesign efforts.

The civil service does not represent the same mission and goals as police departments yet oversees the mechanism by which officers are hired. However, coming from differing organizations makes the translation of knowledge and expertise more difficult, and places less and less reliability on the information exchanged and more and more constraints on exactly how
the knowledge is transferred. Amid police departments looking to update the examination, from a technocratic standpoint, the expertise still lies with the civil service. Socio-political changes have ebbed and flowed and yet the exam and its designers remain constant. Changes may be warranted by certain parties, but in the end, the mission of the civil service remains the only significant factor.
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