Understanding Police Management: A Typology of the Underside of Compstat

John A. Eterno and Eli B. Silverman

As Compstat becomes embedded as a police management tool accepted worldwide, it has been held to scrutiny by social scientists, reporters, and policymakers. Some have favorable accounts, others not so favorable. In this study, we add to this literature significantly by documenting a typology of the lesser understood underside of Compstat. By using an anonymous survey of 491 retired commanders in New York City, we identify four (4) main themes that resonate throughout the responses: top-down management; hierarchical pressure; commander morale, abuse, and embarrassment; and organizational inefficiency. We then subject the qualitative findings to quantitative analysis and confirm all but organizational inefficiency as typical of the Compstat process as practiced in New York City.

Key Words: Compstat • police management • police culture • NYPD

When the New York Police Department managerial crime accountability model known as Compstat was adopted by the NYPD in 1994, it was greeted initially with extensive praise and wide adoption by other law enforcement agencies. The favorable reviews centered on Compstat's managerial assets in ensuring effective crime reduction strategies while decentralizing decision making, enhancing local discretion, and empowering area commanders to customize their tactics to their local areas (Bratton & Knobler, 1998; Henry, 2002; Kelling & Sousa, 2001; Silverman, 2001; Silverman & O'Connell, 1999).

The widespread adoption throughout the United States—within its first six years, more than a third of U.S. cities with 100 or more officers claimed to have adopted Compstat (Weisburd, Mastrofski, McNally, Greenspan, & Willis, 2003)—triggered a new wave of Compstat assessments. The most extensive national evaluation was conducted by the Police Foundation and reported in many publications.

Contrary to previous findings, the Police Foundation researchers found significant drawbacks in Compstat operations and concluded that Compstat in practice fell far short of its promise and the expectations of many:

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Compstat agencies were largely indistinguishable from non-Compstat agencies on measures that gauged geographic organization of command, organizational flexibility, the time availability of data, and the selection and implementation of innovative strategies and tactics. . . . Compstat departments are more reluctant to relinquish power that would decentralize some key elements of decision making geographically . . . enhance flexibility, and risk going outside of the standard tool kit of police tactics and strategies. The combined effect overall, whether or not intended, is to reinforce a traditional bureaucratic model of command and control (Weisburd et al., 2003, p. 448).

[A]gencies that had adopted Compstat programs were much less likely to focus on improving the skills and morale of street level officers . . . suggesting that Compstat represents a departure from the properties of “bubble up” community and problem-oriented policing programs that had been predominant in police innovation until Compstat arrived on the scene and had focused attention on the empowerment and training of street-level police officers. Indeed, Compstat appears in this sense to be modeled more closely on the traditional “bureaucratic” or “paramilitary” form of police organization (Weisburd, Mastrofski, Willis, & Greenspan, 2006, in Weisburd & Braga, 2006, p. 290).

This article addresses these Compstat findings in terms of whether and to what degree their depiction of an inefficient, inflexible bureaucratic model may apply to the NYPD’s Compstat (the Police Foundation study did not include New York City in its survey). Readers less familiar with Compstat should read NYPD Battles Crime by co-author Eli B. Silverman for a thorough overview of Compstat implementation and its process.

For the purposes of our analysis, we distinguish and examine four components of this model that have emerged as common concerns in officers’ questionnaire responses. They are: (1) top-down management; (2) hierarchical pressure; (3) commander morale, embarrassment, and abuse before one’s peers; and (4) organizational inefficiency.

Methods

To examine the Compstat process in New York City scientifically, we use both qualitative and quantitative methods. These methods include a self-administered mail survey; informal in-depth interviews with 15 recently retired members of the service (all who worked in the Compstat era and were familiar with Compstat—some intimately involved in Compstat on
a daily basis); and our collective understanding of NYPD based on years of participation, observation, and experience. Earlier studies tend to use one method with little or no congruence with other criteria (e.g., Dabney, 2010). Thus, our research offers triangulation of methods, making it unique among studies of its kind.

The survey was sent on September 10, 2008, to 1,197 retired members of the NYPD in the ranks of captain and above. Those ranks are most important to the Compstat process because the managerial style is based generally on bureaucratic hierarchy (see, for example, Cowper, 2000; Eterno & Silverman, 2006; Willis, Mastrofski, & Weisburd, 2003). There were 491 returned responses, indicating a 41% response rate. Of these, 323 (66%) respondents retired in 1995 or later, and 166 (34%) retired before 1995 (the first full year of Compstat). For this purposes of this paper, we analyze the data from respondents who retired in 1995 or later. Among the respondents were 263 (54%) captains, 98 (20%) deputy inspectors, 63 (13%) inspectors, 28 (6%) deputy chiefs, and 34 (7%) others. These percentages also approximate the ranks of those retired. These data increase our confidence that there is little, if any, non-response bias.

The survey was a self-administered mail survey. The Captains Endowment Association (CEA) of the NYPD provided the researchers with access to the retirees while a grant from Molloy College supported all expenses. The survey is four sides (two pages) of typical 8 ½ by 11 inch paper and includes 23 questions. It was purposely kept short as lengthy questionnaires often discourage respondents from filling out the instrument (Neuman, 2000). Question wording was tested extensively in development. Focus groups with retired and current members of NYPD, as well as a separate focus group comprising other researchers, reviewed the instrument carefully. Wording was changed numerous times to ensure that respondents clearly understood the meaning of the questions. The CEA also reviewed the questions.

One essential feature of our method was the use of anonymity. Most importantly, it helps to reduce social bias especially when respondents answer sensitive questions such as those this survey asked (see, for example, Babbie, 1989; Bradburn, 1983; Dillman, 1983; Neuman, 2000). While anonymity and questionnaire length are very important, they are also limitations. We had to make tradeoffs for these vital features, but the decision to apply them was carefully considered and based on sound scientific reasoning.

Most survey questions were close-ended with the exception of the last question. As is typical of such surveys, the last question is open-ended to allow respondents to advise the researcher of any crucial points they wish to add. Thus, at the end of the survey respondents were asked, “Please make any comments that you feel are important to understanding the NYPD based on your experiences as a manager (attach other pages if necessary).”
This article reports some of the more pertinent comments respondents made to this question. Importantly, this means that we did not solicit directly the respondent comments on Compstat that we report here; those responding felt strongly enough about these issues to communicate their experiences to us through this instrument. All comments in this manuscript are from the anonymous mail questionnaire unless otherwise noted.

Results & Analysis

For the purposes of this paper, we chose some unsolicited comments from our respondents that exemplify the lesser known bureaucratic underside of New York City’s Compstat.

Unlike other previously published research (e.g., Dabney, 2010), we take the additional step of supporting these comments by conducting statistical analyses of the entire sample. Again, negative comments about Compstat were not solicited; respondents who felt a need to share their thoughts on this issue made these comments freely. These are only a small selection of the many comments respondents made. Some were positive, while the negative comments reflect respondents’ views on the underside of Compstat. It is also important to note that a different respondent offered each of these comments.

While this paper focuses on the underside, we do believe, as do some of our respondents, that Compstat possesses many positive qualities, which the literature has already described extensively (Giuliani, 2002; Maple, 1999; MacDonald, 2002; Moore & Braga, 2003; Silverman, 2001; Walsh, 2001; Walsh & Vito, 2004).

Qualitative Analysis of Unsolicited Statements

We categorize the respondents’ unsolicited statements regarding Compstat’s bureaucratic dimensions in terms of their reference to: (1) top-down management; (2) hierarchical pressure; (3) commander morale, embarrassment, and abuse before one’s peers; and (4) organizational inefficiency. These themes emerge as commonplace among respondents. This section offers specific respondent examples of these components, while the next section presents quantitative analysis to support these qualitative statements. In all cases, the comments appear exactly as the respondents wrote them, with any errors of spelling and idiosyncrasies of usage retained.

Top-Down Management

Respondents focus on the top-down management style the Compstat leadership employs at its meetings. Police commanders must stand at a podium in front of higher echelons at semi-weekly meetings (known as Compstat meetings).
Comstat has lost its original theme. C.O.’s were allowed to make their own decisions when it first started and then held accountable. Now all you do is follow someone else’s orders and decisions and still you are held accountable. NOT FAIR.

Similarly, another respondent writes,

[T]he lack of management training to all ranks caused an Us vs. Them environment. Management training as the department was undergoing a sea change in how it was to accomplish its mission was left at the backdoor. The team concept from the Commissioners to the rank and file was not sought, the tools to accomplish the new tasks were not given. . . .

Clearly, the first respondent believes that with Compstat you are told what to do and later held accountable for what someone else ordered. In other words, you are held responsible for doing what you are told regardless of whether your action is successful or not.

This is basically a “do as you’re told” style of leadership lacking a team approach. Cowper (2000) depicts this as police leadership’s misunderstanding of a military leadership approach. As he points out, “This style of leadership (not even a true representation of leadership by boot camp drill instructors) has . . . created organizations that are centrally controlled and highly inflexible. . . . " (Cowper, 2000, p. 237; see also Shane, 2010). This top-down approach, supposedly a military style, strongly reinforces the hierarchical structure of the organization.

Hierarchical Pressure

Many respondents refer to intense Compstat pressure emanating from higher ranks. One respondent observes:

The pressure placed on captains and above was just too much to live with on a long term basis. It’s a shame to leave a job you worked so hard for at the age of 44 because of the pressure and poor quality of life (Days off, hours, vacation, etc).

Another respondent remarks:

For Captains & Above high pressure from supervisors to produce ‘impressive’ results so that they (your supervisors) look good drives Captains out of the Department. Unrealistic given resources.
The extreme level of pressure felt by commanders could not be expressed more clearly. Many of our in-depth interviewees also advised that they spent countless hours at their commands without additional remuneration due to upper level Compstat pressures, which filter down into the streets. When commanders are pressurized, lower ranking police officers and eventually the public may receive little or no respect. Lower ranking officers who feel pressure from above are subject to greater stress. As a result they may be less inclined to reflect a service mentality and treat the public in a manner similar to the way they are treated by higher ranking officials.

Respondents’ references to top management pressures forcing members to retire may also affect commander morale, abuse, and embarrassment before one’s peers as the next section demonstrates.

Commander Morale, Abuse, and Embarrassment
The themes of poor morale, managerial abuse, and embarrassment emerge repeatedly. One respondent notes,

Compstat was a good Compstat but became very abusive to the very people that were expected to implement the programs, consequently turning people and depressing morale. There is still too much second guessing, no other dept goes through that. . . .

Another respondent writes,

Compstat is a great concept and productive tool when used fairly. I have seen it become a personal vendetta by some commanders towards a variety of Captains and other Commanding Officers.

The respondents sometimes portray Compstat as a device for punishment and reprimand rather than as a mechanism to fight crime constructively. One respondent writes,

Compstat . . . was turned into a tool of petty vindictiveness to punish people who were thought not to be fully committed to the department policies.

Another respondent writes,

Compstat . . . was a tool of 1 PP [1 Police Plaza—Headquarters] to elevate/end careers at will.

Respondents frequently frame managerial abuse in terms of the embarrassment they or others experience at Compstat meetings. One respondent writes,
Compstat the meeting, is generally ineffective to those who work hard but aren’t always successful. Compstat should do as it says, offer assistance, ideas, plans, etc. to managers. Not ridicule & embarrassment.

Another writes,

Compstat was the most embarrassing moments in my career.

Yet another:

Compstat = Embarrassment in front of peers. NYPD management style is to berate and embarrass subordinates publicly.

Organizational Inefficiency

While many in the literature (e.g., Bratton, 1998) advocate Compstat efficiency, several commanders advise that Compstat is anything but. One example:

The pressures on management leads to micromanaging the Sgt & Lt ranks which has led to less decision making at those levels. Often the managers during the Compstat process are treated very differently depending who has been “chosen” to advance at a rapid rate.

Another respondent states,

I would also argue that over time, applying the ‘Comstat process’ to the myriad other roles of the police (trafficstat, Narcostat, etc.) weakened executives’ ability to effectively do their jobs. These exercises although sold as improving efficiency actually distracted police executives.

A similar comment:

I feel that Compstat is not cost effective. In B’klyn South 13 Commands, Transit, Housing and support units spend 3 hrs at the session in addition to travel time. Strategies and procedures should be discussed in a more timely manner.

Yet another writes,

Compstat lost its focus instead of concentrating on what works to reduce crime it is strictly focused on the negative. In addition Traffic stat is a complete waste of a Command’s resources. It forces the XO to go
against the overall mission of the Dept and the Pct Commander. Both the XO and CO are competing for very limited resources.

We now present relevant quantitative data from the entire survey.

Quantitative Analysis
The questionnaire contained several pertinent close-ended questions, which we analyzed to triangulate methods to determine whether our qualitative examination is accurate. We used descriptive statistics and univariate analyses on these key questions for comparison purposes. All questions are based on a 1 to 10 scale with 1 being low and 10 being high, making comparison relatively simple. As a baseline, we used a question about reducing crime, which is reportedly one of Compstat’s most positive aspects. Respondents were asked their “overall opinion of Compstat with respect to reducing crime.” As we would predict for this question, the response was very favorable \((M = 7.51, \text{SD} = 2.248)\). Further, 58.1% of respondents thought that Compstat was excellent at reducing crime (see Tables 1 and 2). We now turn to examining variables that are the focus of this study—the themes in the previous qualitative analysis. We link the four (4) themes to specific questions in the survey. These questions may or may not validate them in the entire sample.

Top-Down Management
We first turn to top-down management. The question that examined the extent to which the entire sample thought Compstat is a top-down management approach asked respondents’ “overall opinions of Compstat with respect to improving teamwork among rank and file.” While not an exact measure, those who thought that Compstat is not a top-down style should then assert that it helps improve teamwork within the rank and file. The mean response to the question related to improving teamwork was much lower than the mean response to the favorable aspect of reducing crime \((M = 5.18, \text{SD} = 2.553)\). The mean difference between the favorable aspect of Compstat and improving teamwork was fairly high (mean difference = 2.33). Additionally, 27.3% indicated that Compstat is very poor at improving teamwork within the rank and file, while 19.9% indicated it is excellent at improving teamwork, with the remainder in the middle (see Table 3). Clearly, the sample was not enthusiastic about Compstat’s ability to improve teamwork among the rank and file. This suggests that, at a minimum, Compstat is ineffective at improving teamwork, which reaffirms the concept of top-down management style in the entire sample.
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Compstat Survey Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reducing Crime</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.51</td>
<td>2.248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Teamwork Among</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>2.553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank and File</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension Among Management</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.78</td>
<td>1.484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease Index Crime</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>2.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morale Among Rank and File</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>2.554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Teamwork Within</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>2.761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Management</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>2.619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valid N (listwise) 305

Note. Response N differs because some respondents did not answer all questions.
Minimum and Maximum indicate scores received. Valid N (listwise) refers to the number
of respondents who answered all questions in this table. For reducing crime, improving
teamwork among rank and file, improving teamwork within management, and improving
management effectiveness, a score of 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent. For tension
among management and morale among rank and file, a score of 1 means greatly reduces
and 10 indicates greatly increases. For decrease index crime, a score of 1 is least
pressure and 10 is most pressure.

Table 2. The Effect of Compstat on Reducing Crime Categorized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valid

Missing System 13

Total N 323

Note. Frequency refers to the number of responses in that category; low is a score of 1–3,
medium is 4–7, high is 8–10. Valid percent refers to those responding and not missing.
Table 3: The Effect of Compstat on Teamwork Among Rank and File Categorized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>27.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>80.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N</td>
<td></td>
<td>323</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Frequency refers to the number of responses in that category; low is a score of 1–3, medium is 4–7, high is 8–10. Valid percent refers to those responding and not missing.

Hierarchical Pressure

We next turn our attention to examining hierarchical pressure. One question in the survey that measured the extent of hierarchical pressure in the entire sample examined respondents’ views about “the extent that Compstat reduces or increases tension among management,” on a 1 to 10 scale with 1 indicating Compstat reduces tension and 10 indicating it increases tension. Here, there is no doubt that hierarchical pressure is very high. Indeed, no respondent chose “1,” and the mean response clearly shows respondents felt enormous tension with a very small standard deviation ($M = 8.78$, $SD = 1.484$). The mean difference between reducing crime and the tension that management experienced is fairly large (mean difference = 1.27). Even though respondents recognized Compstat’s success at reducing crime, their recognition that it increases tension levels was even greater. Univariate analysis indicated that 85.2% of the sample believed that Compstat greatly increases tension among management (see Table 4). This finding clearly confirms the comments about pressure with Compstat.

Further, the pressures to decrease index crime are also strong. In response to a specific question about the pressures to reduce index crime, we found a comparatively large mean, which indicates there is certainly great pressure on respondents to reduce index crime ($M = 8.26$, $SD = 2.053$). Univariate analysis indicated that 74.3% felt high pressure from superiors by way of Compstat to decrease index crime. Only 4.4% indicated low pressure, with the remainder in the middle. This variable also confirms accounts of the high levels of pressure on commanders (see Table 5).
Table 4. The Effect of Compstat on Tension Within Management Categorized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Missing  System  12
Total  323

Note. Frequency refers to the number of responses in that category; low is a score of 1–3, medium is 4–7, high is 8–10. Valid percent refers to those responding and not missing.

Table 5. View of Pressure to Decrease Index Crime Categorized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Missing  System  8
Total  323

Note. Frequency refers to the number of responses in that category; low is a score of 1–3, medium is 4–7, high is 8–10. Valid percent refers to those responding and not missing.

Commander Morale, Abuse, and Embarrassment

As far as morale and embarrassment is concerned, quantitative results provided substantial support for the qualitative response. One question in the survey focused specifically on morale, which is clearly related to reprimand and embarrassment our respondents discussed. The low mean for morale stands out ($M = 4.48; SD = 2.554$). The mean difference between respondents' opinion of Compstat's effect on crime and its effect on morale was 3.03—large compared with other findings. Further, 40.8% indicated that Compstat greatly reduces morale and only 13.3% indicated Compstat greatly increases morale (see Table 6). Overall, we confirm embarrassment and lower morale.

However, the respondents' thoughts on commander abuse seemed borderline. To attempt to confirm abuse, we used respondents’ overall opinion of Compstat with respect
to improving teamwork within management." For this variable the results were somewhat borderline: we saw a fairly large mean difference (mean difference = 1.38) between improving teamwork within management and reducing crime ($M = 6.13; SD = 2.761$). Also, 41.5% believed that Compstat improves teamwork within management (see Table 7). We leave this finding as borderline due to the larger mean difference; yet, at the same time, respondents have a fairly good opinion of Compstat with respect to improving teamwork. It may be that some management abuse takes place but not enough to upset department-wide teamwork. Further, perhaps only a few of the inquisitors are abusive. Regardless, presence of low morale and embarrassment are confirmed, but management abuse is borderline.

Table 6. The Effect of Compstat on Morale Within Management Categorized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>86.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Frequency refers to the number of responses in that category; low is a score of 1–3, medium is 4–7, high is 8–10. Valid percent refers to those responding and not missing.

Table 7. The Effect of Compstat on Improving Teamwork Within Management Categorized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>58.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Frequency refers to the number of responses in that category; low is a score of 1–3, medium is 4–7, high is 8–10. Valid percent refers to those responding and not missing.
Organizational Inefficiency

The final theme we identified is organizational inefficiency. The question we used to examine the extent to which the entire sample felt Compstat is inefficient was respondents' "overall opinion of Compstat with respect to improving management effectiveness." For this theme, unlike the others, we cannot confirm that the statements of the respondents reflect the entire sample. While the mean score was somewhat less (mean difference = .58) and the standard deviation higher, it does not seem that much different from the favorable aspect of reducing crime ($M = 6.93; SD = 2.619$) (see Table 1). Additionally, 52.7% of respondents believed that Compstat is excellent at improving management effectiveness (see Table 8). Thus, while there may be specific instances of Compstat's inefficiency, it does not seem to be department-wide phenomena.

| Table 8. The Effect of Compstat on Improving Management Effectiveness Categorized |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------|--------|-----------------|
| Score                         | Frequency| Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| low                           | 42       | 13.5   | 13.5            |
| medium                        | 105      | 33.8   | 47.3            |
| high                          | 164      | 52.7   | 100.0           |
| Total                         | 311      | 100.0  |                 |

| Missing                      | System   | 12 |
| Total                        | 323 |

Note. Frequency refers to the number of responses in that category; low is a score of 1–3, medium is 4–7, high is 8–10. Valid percent refers to those responding and not missing.

Overall, the quantitative analyses confirm the negative themes of Compstat with respect to top-down management as well as hierarchical pressure. As far as commander morale, abuse, and embarrassment is concerned, low morale and embarrassment were confirmed, but abuse was borderline. Lastly, organizational inefficiency was not confirmed.

Discussion

Four basic themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the survey responses of retired NYPD officers and their experience with Compstat: top-down management; hierarchical pressure; commander morale, abuse, and embarrassment; and organizational inefficiency. We conclude tentatively that there is at least some quantitative
support for the existence of the first three within Compstat (although abuse is borderline),
while inefficiency is not confirmed. These NYPD findings appear somewhat similar to the
conclusion of the national survey (which excluded New York City) that Compstat
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In addition to the overlap issues of bureaucratization and centralization (i.e., top-down
management), our study suggests additional avenues for future analyses. For example,
the national survey concluded that “agencies that had adopted Compstat programs were
much less likely to focus on improving the . . . morale of street level officers” (Weisburd et
al., 2006, p. 293 ). Similarly, our study found a lack of strong support for the view that
Compstat improved teamwork among the rank and file. This low level teamwork may well
be associated with lower morale. Future research should explore this possible linkage.

Perhaps even more importantly, our respondents had divergent opinions on the issue
of teamwork at the different hierarchical levels. In contrast to their views on low level
teamwork, our respondents expressed stronger support for the view that Compstat
improved teamwork within management.

It is our view that these contrasting views on teamwork are wholly consistent with our
overall findings of Compstat as shoring up the bureaucratic top-down centralized style of
police organization and management. When Compstat’s top-down management promotes
hierarchical pressure to decrease index crime, it filters down to rank-and-file activities
whether it is through increased use of quotas or discouraging crime reports. This top-
down pressure is bound to affect street level morale and widen the gulf between higher
and lower levels in the police department. This is certainly the view of the union that
represents the rank and file of the NYPD, the Patrolman’s Benevolent Association:

It was a great idea that has been corrupted by human nature. The
Compstat program that made NYPD commanders accountable for
controlling crime has degenerated into a situation where the police
leadership presses subordinates to keep numbers low by any means necessary. The department's middle managers will do anything to avoid being dragged onto the carpet at the weekly Compstat meetings. They are, by nature, ambitious people who lust for promotions, and rising crime rates won't help anybody's career. So how do you fake a crime decrease? It's pretty simple. Don't file reports, misclassify crimes from felonies to misdemeanors, under-value the property lost to crime so it's not a felony, and report a series of crimes as a single event (Zink, 2004, 1).

This is not the first time that a distinct organizational fault line separating upper management from street level New York City police has been observed. An in-depth study of two precincts in the late 1970s found deeply seated street cop resentment and alienation from what they perceive as the more educated, self-serving upper echelons who are motivated by rationalistic efficiency criteria that appease politicians, the media, and the courts. The precinct cop viewed upper levels as impersonal and neither understanding nor sympathetic to the necessities of daily police activity (Reuss-Ianni, 1983).

With a glaring parallel to current day Compstat pressures, precinct level cops were put off by what they perceived as contemporary incarnations of managerial imposition in the guise of Management by Objectives, which measured and held them accountable for their production. Upper level innovations were viewed as burdensome, abstract, and impersonal in the tradition of bureaucratic administration (Reuss-Ianni, 1983).

As with any study, this study has some limitations. Most of these are tradeoffs due to key features of the method, namely, the use of anonymity and the need to keep the questionnaire brief. If the questionnaire had been longer, for example, scales could have been developed by using multiple questions. Such tradeoffs are typical, and future research will have to address those issues that are beyond the scope of this study. We are, however, very confident that the analyses completed here accurately reflect respondents' views of Compstat as practiced by the NYPD.

Our study, therefore, raises several issues that are relevant to not only the practice of Compstat but also the functioning operations of the NYPD and other police performance management systems. The issues that we have raised—top-down management, hierarchical pressure, commander moral, abuse, and embarrassment, and organizational inefficiency—are important because Compstat's success is much heralded and well known, but its downside needs further research, exposure, and public discussion.

The results of additional research will also shed light on Compstat's overall effect on the management, organizational arrangements, leadership style, morale, and functioning.
of the New York City Police Department. Surely a management system that has been enshrined in New York and elsewhere for 16 years warrants a full exploration of all its dimensions and their potential linkage with other police performance management systems.

Notes

1. The category of “others” includes, for example, those who may have risen to higher ranks but maintained their membership in the Captains Endowment Association (CEA).

2. Based on statements made by the CEA president to us regarding the percentages.

References


Eterno and Silverman

