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Who are Law Enforcement Chief Executives? An Examination of Current Police Chiefs in Texas

Introduction

Civil liability violations by law enforcement personnel are of concern to law enforcement chief executives [1]. When public incidents of police misconduct occur, the public, media, and politicians tend to hold the entire police agency accountable. However, during these incidents, the focus usually narrows to the actions of the law enforcement chief executive within that agency when measuring the response of the law enforcement agency. Law enforcement chief executives have one of the most visible and volatile public positions in the United States.

The law enforcement chief executive position carries the responsibility of meeting the demands of the public, local politics, unions and employees, and special interest groups [2]. The chief executive must possess the leadership skills to effectively manage the stressful situations that are brought before them. Because of the constant administrative and social demands being placed on the law enforcement chief executive position, it is important for law enforcement executives to have a solid foundation of education, training, and mentorship for the organizational and community-based leadership role they currently fulfill.

Prior Research

Law enforcement chief executives must be dynamic in their leadership styles to oversee a multitude of individuals, many who are often strong-willed, opinionated, and skeptical. It is up to the law enforcement chief executive to motivate their officers to action and in a direction that best meets the needs of the community and the department. The law enforcement chief executive must be viewed as both a leader in the community and within their department to be effective in the leadership position.

Leaders must display effective communication and a strong customer focus [3]. Leaders must also create a climate of reciprocal trust, fearless loyalty to do what is right for both the company and customer, magnify only upward communication, persuasive personality, critical thinkers, emphasize speed, are candid communicators, and inspire and motivate through action [3]. Other behaviors of a great leader as effective communication, being decisive, willingness to take risks, committed to self-improvement, and the ability to motivate others [4]. These qualities move an organization forward through vision, communication, and trust.

According to Gibson and Weber, a leader should be able to keep the central issue of a problem in sight, choose their words carefully while communicating with others, be open to criticism or opinions from their subordinates, and place the right people in positions of authority. Because of the demands and pressures in the chief executive role, a law enforcement chief executive must have the leadership skills to effectively manage the difficult situations that are brought before them [4].

Through the years of modern law enforcement, police administrators have become more educated, better trained, and informed which has helped meet the needs of the public [5]. Although more education training, and information may have helped law enforcement chief executives, society appears to change their demands on a regular basis which indicates law enforcement chief executives should also possess the ability to adapt and cope with new and changing social pressures.

Law enforcement chief executives understand the positive impact education will have on their employees and the citizens they serve. Over the course of several decades, police leadership, politicians, and communities have pushed for higher education within the law enforcement profession. According to Polk & Armstrong, (2001), since the 1930's there have been several commission reports and other documents from well-established organizations which have called for police officers to have a higher education. Law enforcement chief executives with an advanced education, have solid credentials, experience, and skills related to meeting the needs of their department and the demands from the public and politicians. Modern law enforcement executives have become more educated, better trained, and informed, helping meet the evolving needs of the public.

The higher the police officer's education level the more likely they will rise through the ranks within their department [6]. According to Krimmel and Lindenmuth, law enforcement chief executives not possessing some college education or experience suffered in leadership and performance; while those with a higher education, had no issues in these areas. This indicates that a police officer who desires to promote through the ranks should obtain a higher education [5].

Druskat and Wheeler found to accomplish the goal of an effective work environment, the law enforcement chief executive must build a relationship with employees providing a different perspective of the organization when making decisions. By possessing strong relationships and keen political awareness, the law enforcement chief executive is able to make decisions that will meet the needs of the organization and community while directing the employees to behave in a manner that will increase the department's effectiveness [7]. These communication and leadership skills need to be passed to the next generation of leaders.

To develop future law enforcement executives, departments should develop a mentorship program to help develop employees to fulfill the organizational and social mission. Mentorship allows the mentee to envision the future while receiving sound advice through the wisdom of experience from a mentor (Johnson, 2007). Sosik and Godshalk found supervisors, who act as mentors, tend to protect the mentee from organizational negativity and provide them with assignments that will enhance their professional development [9]. Mentors are important in many aspects of a successful organization. An ideal mentor for a newly hired law enforcement chief executive may

be a supervisor who has a great understanding for the police culture and environment in which the chief executive inherited [10].

Generational Differences

Perhaps the most significant impact on law enforcement chief executive leadership is the necessity of adapting to supervise personnel from different generations. While there is no real agreement on an exact age range of each generation in the literature, there are some basic attributes that help classify generations in the United States. Mensik describes the Baby Boomer generation as people born between 1943 and 1960, Generation X as including individuals born between 1961 and 1981, and Generation Y as those born between 1982 and 2000 [11, p. 483]. Lancaster and Stillman describe the following generations: Traditionalists are born prior to 1946, Baby Boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964, Generation X are individuals born between 1965 and 1981, and Generation Y individuals were born from 1982 to 2000 [12, p. 5].

Society is in a transition period where the millennial generation (Generation Y) is entering the workforce, and many are already in supervisory and leadership positions. This change is significant compared to the change between the Baby Boomer generation and their children, Generation X. Generation X has been filling the roles of company executives while the millennial generation, Generation Y has slowly begun to enter the workforce. Because of this, there is a need for law enforcement chief executives to adapt their management style to manage these generations together [13].

Generations are sometimes described by what they witnessed or characteristics they developed. Baby Boomers (1943-1960) witnessed the Cold War, many were veterans of the Vietnam War, and were also affected by World War II and Korea. Baby Boomers are typically described as possessing highly adaptive behaviors to stress, discipline, and authority [14, p. 79]. The Baby Boomer generation may be leaving the workforce for retirement; however, some remain as law enforcement chief executives.

According to Lub, Bal, Blomme, and Schalk, the Baby Boomer generation are optimistic, have a strong work ethic and job involvement during a time where there was abundant prosperity in the United States [15]. According to Boveda & Metz (2016), the Baby Boomers gained a sense of fulfillment, including self-worth and social belonging, through work which may have caused them to remain in the workforce longer. The Baby Boomer generation is slowly moving out of the workforce through bridge employment while others are pursuing other careers after obtaining more training and education [16].

Generation X grew up in a culture of globalization, economic crisis, organizational downsizing, and increased divorce rates [15]. Generation X may be content with social fulfillment of the job through hard work, coupled with, recognition and communication from the employer [15]. Generation X (1961-1981) individuals have been exposed to a world of liberalism, egalitarianism, and individualism [14]. McCafferty (2003) describes that Generation X as motivated by pleasure (p. 82), while describing the primary motivation for Baby Boomers as money (p. 81).

Generation X may not be fully committed to employers because they seem to change jobs frequently and prefer to work alone rather than in teams [17]. Generation X appears to be more technically savvy than the Baby Boomers, more educated, and seem to enjoy their work [17]. According to Masibigiri and Nienaber, to retain Generation X in the workplace, their salary should meet their value. Generation X also desires to be recognized for their hard work, have career advancement opportunities, and respect the current leadership of the organization [18]. This generation may also prefer communication through email, voicemail, or other electronic forms [17]. Members of Generation X in law enforcement, overall display a high rating of job satisfaction, but feel the pay is below their educational attainment and desire to be included on the decision-making process [19].

Understanding generational differences among law enforcement personnel may be a key to effective police recruiting and retention. Messer warned that a major source of applicants for entry-level police officers for the next 20 to 30 years will come from Generation X and law enforcement agencies should start developing plans and initiatives intended to capitalize on this shift in generations in law enforcement [20]. Charrier has indicated that law enforcement employers must market their opportunities differently if they are going to attract the Generation X applicant. Charrier also points out that Generation X has different concerns and motivations than previous applicant pools from different generations [21].

It is in the best interest of companies and organizations to recognize the differences of each generation and create strategies to bring them to their organization while managing them in a way that will develop a strong team capable of attaining incredible results [13], [22]. Employers have been warned that they may need to change strategies to retain employees, and that generations may need to work together to find common ground in their differences so they can help their organization be successful [23]. This is certainly true for law enforcement organizations which are facing unprecedented recruiting and retention challenges. It is imperative that organizations recruit and retain personnel, especially those who may be future law enforcement chief executives. Understanding possible generational differences will help law enforcement agencies develop appropriate recruitment and retention efforts as well as training and mentorship for personnel, especially personnel identified as possible future law enforcement chief executives.

While there are studies on generational differences within the law enforcement profession, few focus on law enforcement chief executives specifically [10], [14], [19], [21], [24]–[26]. This research will add to the body of knowledge on generational differences among current and future law enforcement chief executives by examining a group of Texas law enforcement chief executives with a focus on their attraction to the profession, experience and education, mentorship, preparation for promotion, and generational differences.

Method

The purpose of this research was to examine characteristics and qualities among current Texas law enforcement chief executives that may identify future leaders in the profession. The professional profiles of Texas law enforcement chief executives who operate under a municipal style of policing were examined. This cross-section survey

research project was geographically limited to law enforcement chief executives in the state of Texas. Respondents were administered a survey comprised of 32 questions which asked about their attraction to law enforcement, mentorship, preparation for the law enforcement chief executive position, professional reflection, and demographics.

Definitions

Law Enforcement Chief Executive. For purposes of this study, a law enforcement chief executive is defined as the highest-ranking individual for a state of Texas law enforcement organization. Typical positions identified as a law enforcement chief executive are Chiefs of Police, County Sheriffs, Constables, Marshalls (Fire and Police), and the Director of the Department of Public Safety for the State of Texas.

Law Enforcement Agency. Municipal police agencies were defined as organizations which provide uniformed police services, which includes daily patrol duties and investigates criminal acts within their jurisdiction. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) oversees all law enforcement agencies within the state of Texas. According to TCOLE, there are a total of 2,646 law enforcement agencies in Texas. For purposes of this study district courts and district attorney offices were excluded, resulting in 2,408 municipal police agencies.

Generation. Generation is an independent variable. Because there is no consensus in the literature of specific age-ranges constitute certain generations, for purposes of this study, divided Generation was divided into three age group categories: 32 years-old and younger, 33 years-old to 51 years-old, 52 years-old and older. Generation X is also defined as individuals in the age category 33 years-old to 51 years-old and the Baby Boomer generation is defined as individuals in the age category 52 years-old and older.

Respondents

Of the 2,408 surveys disseminated to municipal police agencies, a total of 387 individuals responded. The majority of the respondents were predominantly male (97 %, 3 % were female) and Caucasian (86 %), followed by Hispanic (10 %), African American (4 %), and Indian (1 %). As noted in Table 1, the majority of the respondents were from the Baby Boomer generation, 52 years-old and older (52 %), followed by those who were Generation X, 33 years-old to 51 years-old (45 %). Only 3 % of the respondents were age 32 years-old and younger.

According to TCOLE, peace officers in the state of Texas must hold at least a high school diploma or equivalent. The majority of those who were surveyed reflected the minimum requirement as their highest level of education (30 %), followed by respondents with a Bachelor's Degree (27 %), Master's Degree (24 %), Associate's Degree (17 %), and Doctorate (2 %). Table 1 reflects other respondent demographics and characteristics.

Table 1

Respondent characteristics

Question #/Variable	Responses	<i>n</i>	%
Q28 Birth Order	Only child	28	8
	Oldest child	129	35
	Middle child	111	30
	Youngest child	100	27
Q29 Birthplace	Texas	244	67
	Other U.S. State	112	31
	Outside the United States	9	2
Q30 Childhood Household Type	Both parents	259	70
	Blended Family	47	13
	Single parent family (Mother)	40	11
	Single parent family (Father)	4	1
	Grandparents	8	2
	Other	12	3
Q31 Childhood Family Income	\$0-\$24,000	76	21
	\$25,000-\$49,000	154	42
	\$50,000-\$74,000	77	21
	\$75,000-\$99,000	33	9
	\$100,000 +	26	7
Q32 Current Political Belief	Conservative	276	75
	Liberal	6	2
	Moderate	59	16
	None of the Above	27	7

Survey

The survey was built and disseminated through Qualtrics survey software. Email addresses for potential respondents were obtained through an open records request to TCOLE. Of the 2,408 email surveys sent, 152 were returned as “undeliverable.” The number of surveys completed and returned was 387 with a 17% response rate.

The survey instrument was designed to explore the generational differences in Texas law enforcement chief executives. Specifically, questions were designed to gather information about: attraction to the profession, experience and education, mentorship, and preparation for leadership position. Questions 1 - 6, focused on what attracted law enforcement chief executives to policing. Questions 8 and 23 focused on experience and education. Questions 7 and 9 focused on mentorship (both as the mentee and mentor). Questions 10 through 16, and 23 focused on the respondent’s preparation for promotion to be a law enforcement chief executive. Questions, 24 - 31

gathered respondent's demographic and descriptive information. Question 32 focused specifically on the political ideologies of the respondent. From a standpoint of the United States, conservative means right leaning or holding traditional values politically. The term liberal is loosely defined as holding left leaning or progressive values in the U.S. and moderate is considered in the middle of the political spectrum with overlap to both conservative and liberal ideologies.

The survey instrument solicited responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale with the following values: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Somewhat Agree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Somewhat Disagree, and 5 = Strongly Disagree. A high mean would indicate attitudes or perceptions closer to the strongly disagree or disagree end of the continuum. A low mean would indicate general agreement with the statement.

Hypotheses and Variables

It was hypothesized that there is a difference between Generation X and the Baby Boomer generation law enforcement executives' beliefs in attraction to the profession, experience and education, mentorship, and preparation for promotion. The independent variable (IV) is Generation. The dependent variable (DV) Attraction to the Profession is measured by the respondents' answers to the survey instrument questions 1-6. The DV Experience and Education is measured by the respondents' answers to questions 8 and 23. Mentorship is measured by the respondents' answers to the survey instrument questions 7 and 9. The DV Preparation for Promotion is measured by the respondents' answers to the survey instrument questions 10-15, and 23.

Results

It was hypothesized that there is a difference between Generation X and the Baby Boomer generation law enforcement executives in what attracted them to the profession. As indicated in Table 2, the *t*-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in desire to become a Chief of Police (Q4) between Generation X ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.360$) and Baby Boomers ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.340$), $t(354) = -2.375$, $p < .05$. Baby Boomer law enforcement executives were more likely to disagree that they had always wanted to become a police chief, while Generation X law enforcement executives were slightly less likely to disagree. It is important to note, that the results in Table 2 also indicate marginal statistically significant in differences between the generations on knowing that they would become a chief of police. Generation X law enforcement executives were slightly more likely to agree with this statement than Baby Boomer law enforcement executives who showed higher disagreement.

It was also hypothesized that there is a difference in the generations of law enforcement executives on their opinions on experience and education. Table 3 indicates that Baby Boomer law enforcement executives ($M = 1.91$, $SD = 1.093$) were slightly less likely to agree that they enjoyed the experience of having a key role in major criminal investigations (Q8) than Generation X law enforcement executives ($M = 1.70$, $SD .927$), $t(355.98) = -2.013$, $p < .05$. It was also theorized that there would be a difference between the generations of law enforcement executives in their belief that education is important for a law enforcement executive career.

Table 2

Independent Samples T-Test on Law Enforcement Executive Generational Differences on Attraction to the Profession

Attraction to Profession Questions (1-6)	Generation X <i>n</i> M(SD)	Baby Boomer <i>n</i> M(SD)	<i>t</i> - value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Q1. Before I became an adult, I wanted to be a police officer.	165 2.55(1.408)	193 2.72(1.471)	- 1.109	356	.268
Q2. In deciding to become a police officer, I was heavily influenced by an external source (i.e. Parent, Friend).	165 2.61(1.442)	193 2.81(1.410)	- 1.298	356	.195
Q3. What source influenced you the most in becoming a police officer?	164 3.77 (1.942)	191 4.15(1.803)	- 1.861	335.812	.064
Q4. I always wanted to become Chief of Police.	164 3.09(1.360)	192 3.43(1.340)	- 2.375	354	.018*
Q5. I knew I would be Chief of Police.	165 3.33(1.322)	193 3.60(1.267)	- 1.953	356	.052
Q6. I have always wanted to be part of the good that prevails over evil.	165 1.47(.801)	192 1.59 (.887)	- 1.354	354.135	1.76

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 3
Independent Samples T-Test on Generational Differences in Law Enforcement Executive Experience and Education

Experience and Education Questions (8, 23)	Generation X <i>n</i> M(SD)	Baby Boomer <i>n</i> M(SD)	<i>t</i> -value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Q8. As a police officer, I enjoyed having a key role in major criminal investigation	165 1.70(.927)	193 1.91(1.093)	-2.013	355.98	.045*
Q23. I believe education is important for a successful career as a Chief of Police.	165 1.53(.866)	189 1.71(.937)	-1.885	352	.060

Note. **p* < .05.

Table 4
Independent Samples T-Test on Generational Differences in Law Enforcement Executive Mentorship

Mentorship Questions (7, 9)	Generation X <i>n</i> = M(SD)	Baby Boomer <i>n</i> = M(SD)	<i>t</i> -value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Q7. As a police officer, I had a mentor who guided me towards being a supervisor	165 2.32(1.357)	191 2.67 (1.334)	-2.441	354	.015*
Q9. My peers often asked me for guidance in situations related to law enforcement	165 1.57(.843)	191 1.81(.882)	-2.576	354	.01*

Note. **p* < .05.

The independent samples *t*-test results, $t(352) = -1.885$, $p = .06$, as shown in Table 4 showed that there was a marginally statistically significant difference on belief in educational importance (Q23) between Generation X ($M = 1.53$, $SD = .866$) and Baby Boomers ($M = 1.71$, $SD = .937$). Generation X law enforcement executives were more likely to agree that education was important for a successful career as a law enforcement executive.

It was also hypothesized that there is a difference between Generation X and the Baby Boomer generation law enforcement executives on mentorship. An independent samples *t*-test was used to test the differences between Generation X and Baby Boomers in their perceptions of mentorship. As illustrated in Table 4, the *t*-test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between Generation X ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.357$) and Baby Boomers ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.334$) on whether or not they believed they had a supervisory mentorship (Q7), $t(354) = -2.441$, $p < .05$. Generation X law enforcement executives were more likely to agree that they had supervisory mentorship than Baby Boomer law enforcement executives. Results also indicated that Generation X law enforcement executives ($M = 1.57$, $SD = .843$) were more likely to agree that peers sought guidance from them (Q9) than Baby Boomer law enforcement executives ($M = 1.81$, $SD .882$), $t(354) = -2.576$, $p < .05$.

Finally, it was hypothesized that there is a difference between Generation X and the Baby Boomer generation law enforcement executives in their attitudes on preparation for promotion. As indicated in Table 5, the *t*-test showed that there was a highly statistically significant difference on cultivation of beneficial relationships for promotion (Q10) between Generation X (*M* = 1.77, *SD* = .982) and Baby Boomers (*M* = 2.27, *SD* = 1.216), $t(354.109) = -4.306$, $p < .001$. Generation X law enforcement executives were more likely to agree that they cultivated relationships that would aid in their advancement than Baby Boomer law enforcement executives.

It was anticipated that there would be a difference between Generation X and the Baby Boomer generation law enforcement executives in their opinion on the amount of time they spent building relationships that would help them become an effective supervisor (Q11). Table 5 indicates that that there was a statistically significant difference on beliefs on cultivation of beneficial relationships for effective supervision (Q11) between Generation X (*M* = 1.78, *SD* = .957) and Baby Boomers (*M* = 2.17, *SD* = 1.130), $t(353.864) = -3.487$, $p < .05$. Generation X law enforcement executives were more likely to agree that they cultivated relationships that would help them become more effective supervisors than Baby Boomer law enforcement executives.

It was hypothesized that there would be a difference between Generation X and the Baby Boomer generation law enforcement executives in the amount of time they dedicated towards promotion. As shown in Table 5, the results indicated, $t(352) = -2.256$, $p < .05$, that there was a statistically significant difference on the belief that they dedicated a significant amount of time to promotion (Q15) between Generation X (*M* = 2.52, *SD* = 1.341) and Baby Boomers (*M* = 2.84, *SD* = 1.352). Generation X law enforcement executives were more likely to agree that they spent more time working towards promotion than Baby Boomer law enforcement executives.

Table 5

Independent Samples T-Test on Generational Differences in Law Enforcement Executive Promotion Preparation

Promotion Preparation Questions (10, 11, 15, 23)	Generation X <i>n</i> <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Baby Boomer <i>n</i> <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t-value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Q10. As a supervisor, I cultivated relationships that would assist me in advancing my career.	164 1.77(.982)	193 2.27(1.216)	-4.306	354.10 9	.000**
Q11. I dedicated a significant amount of time building relationships that would help me in becoming an effective supervisor.	165 1.78(.957)	191 2.17(1.130)	-3.487	353.86 4	.001*
Q15. I dedicated a significant amount of time towards becoming a Chief of Police.	164 2.52(1.341)	190 2.84(1.352)	-2.256	352	.025*

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research explored generational differences in Texas law enforcement chief executives. Findings suggest there is statistically significant difference between Generation X and Baby Boomer generations on what factors influenced their decision to enter law enforcement. Baby Boomer respondents were primarily driven by a desire to make a difference, while Generation X respondents concluded that personal relationships drove their desire to enter the profession. The study also indicated that Generation X respondents had more of a desire and belief they would become a law enforcement chief executive while the Baby Boomer respondents did not feel as strongly about obtaining this position.

While only marginally significant, Generation X indicated education was more vital to their preparation to be a law enforcement chief executive than Baby Boomers. While Baby Boomers felt education was part of their growth into a leadership position, education was not as much of a priority when compared to Generation X. This finding indicates a potential change in mentality over the generations on the importance of education within the workforce. Baby Boomers were less likely than Generation X to invest in building relationships to help them advance in their career and serve as effective supervisors.

The importance Generation X places on career development is well exposed in the findings. Law enforcement should begin to develop their employees through educational classes which promote their career development. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) requires each licensed peace officer to receive 40 hours of continuing training and education within a two-year period. However, the required training may not provide the necessary courses to develop younger officers towards a leadership role. Law enforcement agencies should consider providing their employees the opportunity to attend courses which are relevant to career development.

The necessity of mentorship through the career of a Generation X law enforcement officer is also revealed as important. Baby Boomers believed in the importance of developing officers for the future. This indicates that mentorship within the law enforcement community for the upcoming Generation X is important. For Baby Boomers to mentor Generation X, they need to understand the needs and motivations of Generation X. Through this research there is a clear indication that Generation X values the importance of mentorship. Law enforcement chief executives should begin to create an atmosphere where they can develop the rising and current leaders in Generation X.

While mentorship is a significant aspect to this result, these findings must also be considered in the context of current social issues in the United States as well as globally. With increased scrutiny of interactions between law enforcement and the communities they serve, there has been widespread calls for better training and higher education requirements for people in the law enforcement field. Generation X will be taking over the leadership positions. With this changing of leadership, the needs and motivations of Generation Y or Generation Z will require understanding.

Generation Y is now entering the workforce in large percentages. Members of this generation are seeking advanced degrees and accepting leadership positions in

civic governments and organizations. Generation Y is now starting to enter higher education. The application of generational differences must also be applied to these new and vast populations. This is needed to recruit and retain quality candidates that can serve and promote to leadership positions in the future while addressing the social challenges of racial bias and equality in justice.

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S U M M A R Y

This paper focuses on generational differences of law enforcement chief executives within the state of Texas. The survey presented law enforcement chief executives within the state of Texas with questions that explored their attraction to law enforcement, experience and education, mentorship, promotion preparation and demographical information. Authors identified developmental characteristics of individuals within the Baby Boomer and Generation X law enforcement chief executives. There has been some research on the process of searching and hiring a law enforcement chief executive but little research into the type of individual who accepts this role. The discussion provides insight for future law enforcement chief executive searches and provides current insight on the type of personnel they may develop as a future leader within their agency.

Keywords: police chiefs, law enforcement executive, leadership, generational differences.

