

# Leadership and Innovation in Criminal Justice: A National Survey



# 5 Questions

1

How innovative are criminal justice leaders?

2

What role does data play in informing their decisions?

3

How do they obtain information about new ideas in criminal justice?

4

Have they experienced failure and how have they responded?

5

What characteristics do innovative leaders share?

# Who

Surveyed 600+  
senior agency leaders nationally

Police Chiefs

Heads of Prosecuting Agencies

Community Corrections & Juvenile Justice Officials

Chief Judges & State Court Administrators

(Average 27 years on the job)

First of its kind survey of attitudes toward  
innovation among senior criminal justice leaders.

# Defining “Innovation”

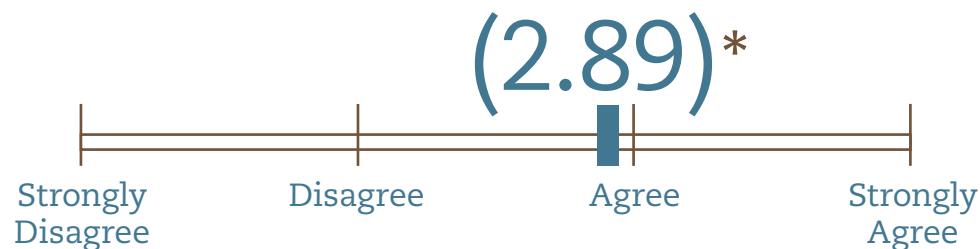
Seven statements aimed to assess  
“innovation at work”

1. I work to create an agency climate where failure is openly discussed.
2. I rely on research and evidence to make programmatic decisions in my work.
3. I regularly share my agency’s data with other partner agencies.
4. I almost always use data when identifying priorities or crafting programs and policies.
5. I encourage my staff to take risks.
6. Driving system change is an important part of my job.
7. I routinely seek out consultants or technical assistance to help plan new initiatives.

All items on a four-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4)

# Finding:

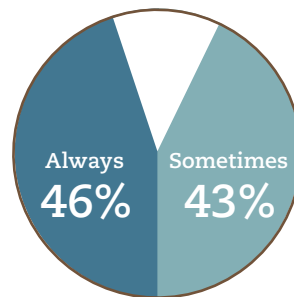
Criminal justice leaders engage in a wide range of innovative practices



\*Answers to seven-item index combined into a single score.

# Finding:

## Use of evidence



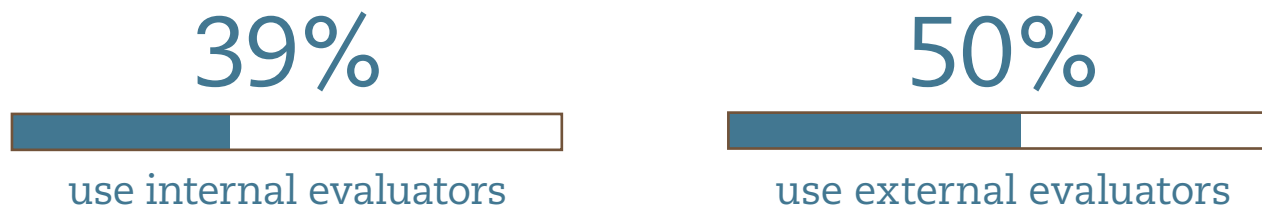
89% reported that they looked to research and data to guide decisions.

This is a sign that efforts to encourage the adoption of “evidence-based” practices are making a difference.

# Finding:

## Use of evidence

Do criminal justice leaders use internal or external evaluators to guide their work?



### WIDE AGENCY VARIATIONS:

Court administrators and community corrections are most likely to use evaluators.  
Prosecutors are least likely to use evaluators.

# Finding:

## Sources of information about new ideas

77%



rely on conferences  
and meetings of  
professional associations.

94%



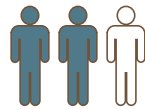
would be interested in  
reading a publication about  
new ideas in criminal justice.

This highlights the mismatch between supply and demand.



# Finding:

## Experience with trial and error



Two-thirds of criminal justice leaders have been involved with a program or initiative that did not work.

### Common Barriers to Innovation

Lack of funding	3.28
Not enough buy-in from front-line staff	2.93
Political pressure and bureaucracy	2.92
Stakes are too high to test brand-new ideas	2.84
Trying new things could cost me my job if they are unsuccessful	2.77

All items on a four point-scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4)

# Finding:

Experience with trial and error

# #1

## Response to Failure:

make changes to the program and continue  
(versus shutting it down or continuing without changes)

This is a sign that trial and error is part of everyday  
professional life in criminal justice.

# Finding:

Portrait of a 21st century  
criminal justice leader

“The complexity and uncertainty of the modern world means that the old ‘heroic’ models of leadership no longer work.”

Harvard Professor Robert Kegan

# Finding:

## Portrait of a 21st century criminal justice leader

**Bill Bratton**

Former police chief in Los Angeles, New York City, and Boston

“I’ve always described my departments as laboratories. I want everyone to know that they are encouraged to test new ideas. An essential component of that is creating an atmosphere for taking risks.”

(from [Daring to Fail](#))

Bratton most cited by respondents as an example of an innovative leader in criminal justice.

# Finding:

## Portrait of a 21st century criminal justice leader

Respondents who rated themselves as innovative at work  
were more likely to report that they have:

- Operated a failing program
- Responded by changing the program  
to make it work better
- Embraced research

# Finding:

Most “exciting” ideas + practices  
(by number of mentions)

Technology and  
Data Sharing

Problem-Solving  
Courts

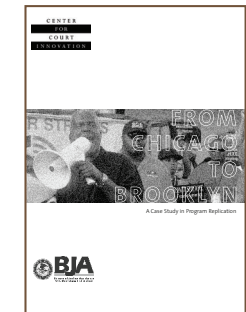
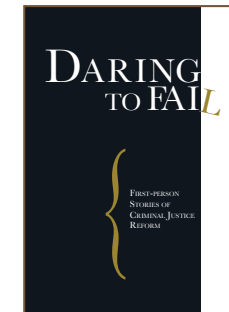
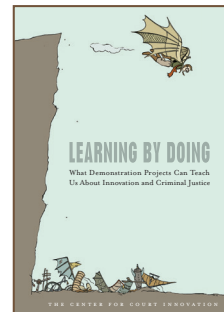
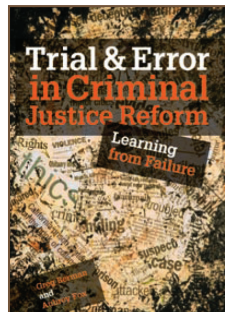
Evidence-Based  
Practices

Intelligence-Based  
Practices

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# Trial & Error Initiative

[www.courtinnovation.org/topic/trial-and-error](http://www.courtinnovation.org/topic/trial-and-error)



In partnership with the US Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance

