

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”

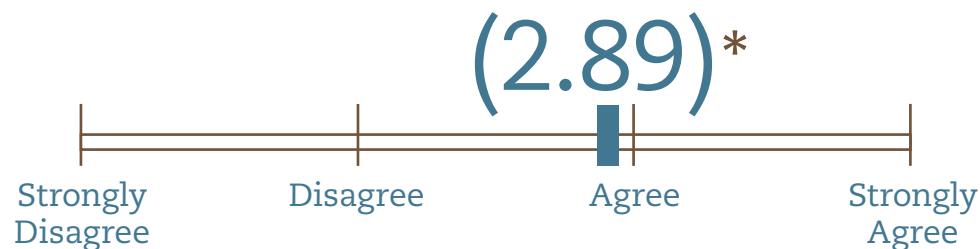
Seven statements aimed to assess “innovation at work”

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:

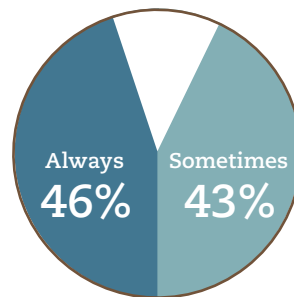
Criminal justice leaders engage in a wide range of innovative practices



*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%

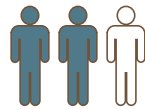


would be interested in
reading a publication about
new ideas in criminal justice.

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

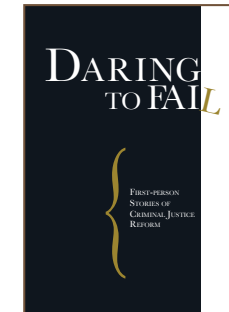
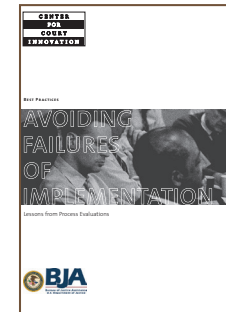
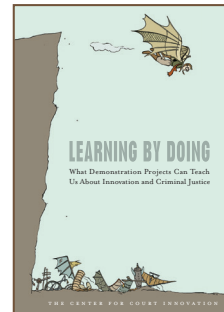
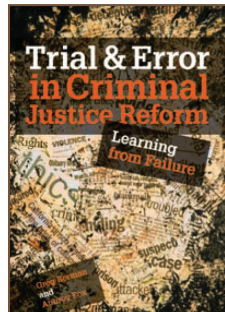
Evidence-Based
Practices

Intelligence-Based
Practices

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