



# **The Impact of Effective Leadership on Recruitment and Retention: Strategies for Building and Sustaining a Strong Workforce**

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## **Abstract**

*Policing is facing one of the most difficult recruitment and retention periods in its history. Agencies are losing officers faster than they can replace them, and morale continues to decline. This study explores how leadership influences recruitment, retention, and morale, with a specific focus on the Valdosta State University Police Department and police agencies in Georgia. The purpose of this evaluation is to understand whether leadership practices are directly connected to officer trust, organizational commitment, and decisions to remain in the profession.*

*This study is grounded in the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) evaluation model and supported by Simon Sinek's leadership concepts, including the Golden Circle and The Curve. These frameworks explain why people choose to follow leaders and how cultural change develops inside organizations. While past research often focuses on pay, stress, or public scrutiny, there remains a significant gap in evaluating leadership as the central factor shaping recruitment and retention, especially in university policing.*

*This project is centered around three core expectations: (1) effective leadership improves recruitment and retention, (2) poor leadership contributes to turnover, low morale, and organizational distrust, and (3) leadership that encourages communication and purpose helps rebuild culture and employee commitment. The purpose of this study is not only to highlight these challenges but also offer realistic leadership-based strategies that agencies can apply to strengthen retention and morale. While this paper focuses on existing research, leadership theory, and case study evaluation, future research will expand this work by using surveys and interviews to measure how officers in Georgia perceive leadership, trust, and organizational*

*value. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to help police agencies build long-term sustainability by restoring pride, trust, and purpose within the profession.*

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

The policing profession is currently facing a recruitment and retention crisis. One question consistently asked in policing spaces is, “Would you let your child enter this profession?” The answer is almost always a resounding no. Because the policing profession is experiencing a mass exodus, agencies are not retaining or hiring enough officers to replace those who leave, which creates a negative retention rate within the profession. The current workforce landscape is impacted by generational shifts, retirements of experienced Baby Boomer officers, and the unwillingness of many younger individuals to enter the profession due to perceived stress, danger, and lack of institutional support. This negative retention is an unsustainable workforce model. Agencies across the country are struggling to hire and retain qualified officers while simultaneously navigating rising public scrutiny, evolving societal expectations, and internal cultural resistance to change. This is not just a local issue. Police agencies across the United States have reported a 45% increase in resignations since 2020 and declining numbers of new applicants entering police academies (Police Executive Research Forum, 2023). Many departments are operating with staffing levels 20–30% below the required level. Some are as low as 40% to 50% below their allocated staffing numbers. Without strong leadership that prioritizes officer trust, communication, and purpose, recruitment incentives and higher pay alone will not fix the problem.

The police profession is now at a pivotal crossroads. To combat this issue, the profession must shift gears and invest back into itself like never before. The first step in investing is identifying strengths and weaknesses of an organization, which includes evaluating the leadership team, morale, recruitment, and public trust. Effective leadership directly influences recruitment, retention, and morale in police agencies. The core problem addressed in this study is

the lack of effective leadership that supports recruitment, retention, morale, and organizational trust. This research is designed to identify how leadership impacts recruitment and retention, and whether improving leadership practices can stabilize police agencies.

When leadership is consistent, supportive, and aligned with an agency's mission, officers are more likely to stay, remain motivated, and recommend policing as a profession. When leadership fails, agencies experience higher turnover, low morale, and difficulty recruiting qualified candidates.

### ***Purpose of this Study***

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership on recruitment, retention, and morale within police organizations. This evaluation will draw on research from existing studies on how leadership influences recruitment and retention. Additionally, this study will examine how overall morale is affected by the presence or absence of effective leadership. To best evaluate this idea, this study will examine the Valdosta State University Police Department's (VSUPD) organizational improvement initiative. VSUPD's program is not a stand-alone recruitment initiative, but rather a leadership-centered approach to improving internal culture and officer retention. The department is widely recognized for longstanding challenges in morale and leadership, and is undergoing intentional reform to rebuild trust, improve retention, and establish a sustainable leadership culture. The department has already taken steps to improve communication, reestablish trust in leadership, create officer feedback opportunities, and build a mission-driven culture. Monthly meetings, one-on-one staff discussions, and values-based decision-making are being implemented to strengthen relationships between officers and command staff. In addition to these monthly meetings, communication, fairness, service, and accountability are being reintroduced into daily operations.

Additional organizational stability efforts include filling critical vacancies, restructuring command responsibilities, and aligning personnel with departmental mission and vision. The policy context for this program includes maintaining Clery Act compliance, meeting Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) requirements, following University System of Georgia (USG) directives, and ensuring campus safety expectations are met. These efforts align with current research that shows officers are more likely to stay in an organization where they trust leadership, understand the mission, and feel their contributions are valued (Orrick, 2008). Leadership at VSU recognizes that without improving internal culture and leadership credibility, recruitment bonuses, new equipment, or expanded training programs will not be enough to retain officers. As a result, this study aims to determine how leadership practices impact officers' willingness to stay, their morale, and their sense of trust in the organization.

The research will use structured surveys to measure leadership effectiveness, trust, morale, and motivation to retain from both line officers and command staff. The study will incorporate Simon Sinek's *Golden Circle* and *The Curve* frameworks, particularly focusing on empowering Innovators and Early Adopters to drive change within the organization. The end goal is not only improved recruitment and retention, but an agency where officers feel valued, heard, and empowered to lead at every level.

Therefore, this study will serve as a foundational step towards improving recruitment and retention in policing by identifying leadership's role in these challenges. In addition to this foundational step, the program under evaluation is the intentional shift toward leadership accountability, officer engagement, and mission-driven policing at the VSUPD. The findings may help current and future leaders understand what employees value most, agencies develop strategies to increase retention and recruitment and help departments reshape organizational

culture with improved leadership practices that enhance trust, communication and morale. The goal of this research is to provide key insights into current and future leaders to strengthen the police profession and support cultural transformation within departments, including the ongoing efforts at VSUPD.

The impact that this research is going to have on the growth and development of leadership at VSUPD. As the Chief of Police at Valdosta State University, I'm uniquely placed to provide an ongoing perspective on this entire study. Being part of this study allows me to gauge the impact of leadership on recruitment and retention. Even more so, by applying Simon Sinek's approach to the *Golden Circle* and *The Curve*. I will gain the necessary first-hand experience on how the "Why" influences buy-in and the department's growth. It will enable me to understand how long it takes to shift a culture truly.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

Police in the United States are experiencing one of the most significant recruitment and retention crises in modern history. Police departments, including university agencies, are struggling to hire qualified officers and retain experienced personnel. This challenge has prompted agencies to reexamine the internal policies, leadership practices, and organizational cultures that contribute to officer morale and job satisfaction. The program being evaluated in this study focuses specifically on how leadership effectiveness influences recruitment, retention, and morale within police agencies, using the Valdosta State University Police Department (VSUPD) as a practical context and example.

In Georgia and across the nation, staffing shortages have reached critical levels. The Police Executive Research Forum (2023) reported above a 45% increase in officer resignations and almost a 20% increase in retirements since 2020. At the same time, the number of individuals applying to police academies has declined by more than 30% in many states (International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 2024). This means that more officers are leaving the profession than entering it, creating a deficit that threatens public safety operations. For university police agencies, such as VSUPD, this issue is compounded by smaller applicant pools, lower pay compared to municipal departments, and increased demands for community engagement, de-escalation skills, and transparency.

Police agencies operate within a structured legal and regulatory environment that guides hiring, training, accountability, and public interactions. For university police departments such as the VSUPD, this framework includes federal legislation, Georgia state law, accreditation

standards, and institutional policies. Leadership must navigate these requirements while fostering a workplace culture that supports recruitment, retention, and officer morale.

At the state level, all officers in Georgia must be certified through the Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council (POST). Georgia POST sets minimum hiring qualifications, background investigation standards, psychological and physical examinations, and annual training requirements (Georgia POST Council, 2024). Leadership must ensure that all officers comply with POST mandates. Failure to enforce these standards can result in loss of certification or agency liability.

Some departments, including VSUPD, pursue professional accreditation through organizations such as the Commission on Accreditation for Police Agencies (CALEA) or the Georgia Police Certification Program. These accreditation systems require agencies to follow professionally recognized standards for policies, training, ethics, evidence management, and community accountability (Commission on Accreditation for Police Agencies, 2023). Accreditation or Certification is voluntary but often viewed as a symbol of leadership excellence and organizational legitimacy.

At the federal level, the primary legislation affecting campus policing is the Jeanne Clery Campus Safety Act (Clery Act). The Clery Act requires colleges and universities that receive federal funding to publish an Annual Security Report (ASR), maintain a daily crime log, issue timely emergency warnings, and disclose campus crime statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Failure to comply can result in federal fines and reputational consequences. This law emphasizes transparency, communication, public trust, and responsibilities that fall directly under police leadership. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) amendments expanded Clery Act requirements to include policies and training on sexual assault, domestic

violence, dating violence, and stalking (U.S. Department of Justice, 2022). These amendments mandate trauma-informed response procedures and victim rights protections. Leaders are responsible for ensuring officers are trained to follow these guidelines properly and respectfully.

The University System of Georgia (USG) also sets expectations for campus policing. USG policy requires campus police departments to uphold student-centered policing, constitutional practices, de-escalation strategies, Title IX compliance, and active collaboration with student affairs and emergency management (University System of Georgia, 2024). Title IX is the foundation of where an individual shall not be excluded from participation or excluded and discriminated against based on sex from any academic program or activity that is funded by financial aid from the federal government (U.S Department of Education 2023). Leaders must balance police responsibilities with the institution's educational mission. Campus police must comply with the university's internal policies on student conduct, emergency response procedures, mental health crisis interventions, and employee ethics. These expectations require collaboration between the police department and departments such as Title IX, legal affairs, counseling services, and student affairs. Leadership plays a key role in aligning police practices with university values, while still maintaining officer safety and legal compliance.

Much of the existing research on recruitment and retention in policing shows a consistent trend: officers do not leave policing because of the work itself; instead, they leave because of leadership, culture, and a lack of organizational support. Several studies confirm that leadership quality, communication, and trust have a more substantial impact on retention than financial incentives or workload alone. We must continue to evolve our profession.

### ***Leadership and Retention***

Orrick (2008) argues that agencies retain officers when leaders create positive work environments built on fairness, communication, and respect. He emphasizes that retention begins with leadership behavior, not just recruitment efforts or salary adjustments. This view is supported by Terra (2009), who found that unhappy employees will leave an organization for as little as a 5% pay increase, while satisfied employees need a pay increase of 20% or more before they consider leaving. This statistic highlights that morale and leadership satisfaction are more powerful retention tools than pay alone.

Card (2018) explains that many police agencies promote leaders based on seniority or loyalty rather than leadership ability. As a result, many supervisors lack training in communication, mentorship, and conflict resolution. When leaders fail to support officers or hold themselves accountable, trust declines, morale weakens, and retention suffers. Card (2018) also notes that leadership succession planning is often overlooked, leaving agencies unprepared when experienced leaders retire or resign.

### ***Morale and Trust in Leadership***

Morale in police agencies is directly tied to how officers perceive their leadership. Dietrich (2018) found that officers follow leaders they trust, not just those with rank. When officers believe the command staff no longer understand or value their work, loyalty declines. Luke (2019) supports this by stating that leadership based on fear or intimidation undermines trust and morale, while leadership grounded in mutual understanding fosters collaboration and respect.

Orrick (2008) also stresses that communication is one of the most powerful tools leaders have to maintain morale. When leaders clearly communicate goals, policy changes, and decision-

making, it reduces rumors, builds trust, and helps officers feel like stakeholders in the agency. Conversely, lack of communication leads to resentment, a rumor-driven culture, and disengagement.

### ***Generational Shifts in Policing***

A growing body of research addresses changes in police culture due to generational shifts. Millennials, who now make up a large portion of new officers, value purpose, mental health, work-life balance, and meaningful leadership more than previous generations (Dietrich, 2018). Unlike earlier generations, many younger officers do not plan to stay with one agency or even remain in policing if leadership is toxic or unresponsive. Terra (2009) and Dietrich (2018) both note that younger officers are more willing to resign from a department, even without another job, even if they feel disrespected, unsupported, or disconnected from the organization's mission.

### ***Leadership, Recruitment, and Organizational Culture***

Research consistently shows that leadership influences not only retention but also recruitment. Agencies known for strong leadership, open communication, and consistent values attract more applicants than those known for dysfunction or poor morale (PERF, 2023). This means retention is not just about keeping officers; it is also a recruiting strategy. Word of mouth among officers, especially in the age of social media, influences where future applicants choose to work.

### ***Limitations in the Literature***

Although leadership is widely recognized as a factor in retention, there are fewer evaluations specifically examining leadership in university policing or small to mid-sized

departments. Most research is focused on major city police departments, overlooking agencies like VSU, where staffing is smaller, budgets are limited, and officers often have closer relationships with leadership. Close relationships can be difficult to overcome at times, so studies are needed to improve them.

***Evaluation Framework: CIPP Model (Context, Input, Process, Product)***

To evaluate how leadership influences recruitment, retention, and morale within police, specifically at the VSUPD, this study utilizes the CIPP Evaluation Model, developed by Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007). The CIPP model is widely recognized in public policy and program evaluation. It is considered one of the most practical frameworks for assessing real-world programs in dynamic environments such as policing (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). CIPP stands for *Context, Input, Process, and Product*, and it is designed not only to determine whether a program is effective but also to provide continuous feedback for improvement.

*Context Evaluation* focuses on identifying the needs, problems, and environment that justify the program. In this case, the context includes the current staffing crisis in police, declining morale, and challenges specific to university policing. Agencies (like VSUPD) facing retention issues, low morale, and organizational distrust, require leadership strategies grounded in data and employee feedback. Nationally, police resignations have increased significantly since 2020, and applicant pools are shrinking, making it essential to first understand “why” officers are leaving and what organizational conditions contribute to this trend (PERF, 2023; IACP, 2024).

*Input Evaluation* examines the strategies, resources, personnel, and leadership philosophies that the department uses to address the problem. This includes leadership styles, officer training, communication strategies, use of mentorship programs, promotional pathways,

and organizational restructuring. For VSUPD, input evaluation includes reviewing leadership initiatives such as one-on-one meetings with officers, transparent communication efforts, leadership training, and mission-driven restructuring. These efforts align with what Stufflebeam & Shinkfield (2007) describe as evaluating whether the planned approach is reasonable and adequately resourced.

*Process Evaluation* examines how effective leadership strategies are being implemented. This includes assessing whether leadership practices are consistent, whether communication is reaching all ranks, whether officers feel included in decisions, and whether performance evaluations are fair. This part of the evaluation also identifies barriers such as resistance to change, lack of follow-through by leaders, or inconsistencies between policy and practice. Stufflebeam's model emphasizes that process evaluation should be ongoing and provide feedback during implementation, not just at the end.

Finally, *Product Evaluation* assesses the outcomes of leadership practices. In this study, key outcomes include officer retention rates, morale levels, trust in leadership, motivation to remain with the organization, and willingness to recommend the agency to future officers. Product evaluation relies on survey data and feedback to determine whether leadership initiatives are successfully improving organizational culture. If leadership has a positive effect, officers should report a stronger sense of belonging, improved morale, and increased desire to stay within the department. If not, leadership strategies may require modification.

The CIPP model is well-suited for this study because it does not simply ask whether a program worked but instead evaluates how and why it worked, or failed, within a specific environment. It also supports forward-looking improvement, rather than just retrospective judgment. Because police agencies, especially university departments, operate in constantly

changing environments, the CIPP model allows leadership to adjust strategies while still aligning with institutional missions and officer needs. By applying the CIPP model, this evaluation provides a structured and credible way to assess whether leadership directly contributes to recruitment and retention improvements and how those practices can be adjusted for long-term success.

### ***Theoretical Leadership Framework: Simon Sinek's Golden Circle and The Curve***

Leadership in modern police cannot rely solely on authority or policy; it must be grounded in purpose, inspiration, and trust. Simon Sinek's (2009) leadership models, the *Golden Circle* and *The Curve*, offer a relevant theoretical foundation for understanding how leadership influences recruitment, retention, and morale. These theories explain why officers follow certain leaders, why organizational culture succeeds or fails, and why some departments retain talent more effectively than others.

Sinek (2009) argues that great leaders start with a clear understanding of "Why", their core purpose or belief. This forms the center of the *Golden Circle*, which consists of three levels: *Why* (purpose), *How* (process), and *What* (results). Most organizations, including police agencies, communicate from outside in. They focus on what they do and how they do it. However, they rarely communicate why they do it. In policing, this might include protecting communities, serving with integrity, or building trust with citizens. When leadership clearly communicates and models the "why," officers feel a stronger sense of purpose, belonging, and pride in their profession.

When leadership focuses only on rules, policies, and task execution, without a clear mission, officers lose their sense of meaning and become disengaged. This disconnect

contributes to burnout, low morale, and turnover. Sinek (2014) states that “people don’t buy what you do; they buy why you do it,” meaning that commitment comes from belief, not compliance. The Diffusion of Innovations principle is especially important for younger officers who want to be part of a meaningful mission, not just a job.

Sinek’s second leadership framework, known as *The Curve*, is based on the Law of Diffusion of Innovation, which explains how new ideas and cultural change spread through an organization (Simon Sinek Inc., n.d.; Sinek, 2009). This concept, which categorizes individuals into innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, is rooted in Rogers’ (2003) original diffusion theory but widely applied to leadership and organizational culture through Sinek’s expansion and teaching. According to Sinek Inc. (n.d.), leaders must first engage innovators and early adopters, those who already believe in the mission, to drive momentum for change.

In policing, innovators are the officers who already believe in the department’s mission and naturally support positive change. Early adopters are respected informal leaders, such as field training officers, corporals, or sergeants, who influence others. Sinek (2009) argues that leadership often fails because it tries to convince everyone at once to accept change. Real transformation begins with the innovators and early adopters. Once these officers believe in and model the change, communication improves, ethical leadership takes over, mentorship begins, and mission-driven service attracts the early majority. Rogers (2003) supports this view, explaining that innovations gain acceptance only when trusted peers demonstrate success.

In the context of the Valdosta State University Police Department, Sinek’s frameworks provide a roadmap for cultural transformation. Leadership must first communicate a clear “why” for the department, protecting students, fostering a safe learning environment, and serving with

integrity. Then, leadership must empower innovators and early adopters to model this culture. These officers become the foundation for lasting change, aligning with Sinek's belief that culture is not enforced from the top down but built from the inside out. By applying the Golden Circle and *The Curve*, this study connects leadership theory to real-world challenges facing police agencies. These frameworks support the central claim of this research: effective leadership is the foundation for improving recruitment, retention, and morale in policing.

### Chapter III: Research Design and Methodology

This evaluation will follow the CIPP model (*Context, Input, Process, Product*), which provides a structured framework for assessing programs and organizational practices. The *Context* portion focuses on identifying leadership challenges that affect morale, recruitment, and retention within the agency. The *Input* section evaluates current leadership structures, policies, staffing levels, and available resources. The *Process* component examines how leadership practices are implemented and experienced across the department. Finally, the *Product* portion evaluates expected outcomes such as morale, retention, organizational commitment, and perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014).

To support this framework, the study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights. This study will employ a cross-sectional design to examine the relationship among officers' attitudes and departmental culture, perceptions of leadership, and retention rates within VSUPD. A cross-sectional design is appropriate because it provides a snapshot of officers' attitudes and departmental culture following the implementation of new departmental leadership. While this design does not assess changes over time, it enables the identification of associations between leadership perceptions and retention-related attitudes. The primary variables include officers' perceptions of leadership and organizational culture, which are expected to be associated with their intentions to remain with the department. While this design does not allow for causal inferences, it effectively captures the current organizational climate and relationships among key variables.

This mixed-methods approach will be centered on the dependent variables of culture, retention, and recruitment. The independent variables for future research will include age,

gender, rank, years of employment, and perceptions of leadership, among others. To be clear, perceptions of leadership could possibly be a dependent variable depending on how the questions are worded in future research.

Quantitative data (e.g., Likert-scale survey responses) will be used to assess leadership style, morale, and intent to stay or leave, while qualitative data (e.g., open-ended responses or optional interviews) will provide deeper insight into communication, trust, and organizational culture. This evaluation design aligns directly with the study's research questions and hypotheses by examining not just whether leadership affects morale and retention, but also how and why those effects occur within the unique context of a public safety organization.

To provide additional structure and clarity, this evaluation remains guided by the CIPP Evaluation Model (Stufflebeam, 2003):

- *Context*: Evaluates the current challenges in recruitment, retention, leadership, and organizational morale.
- *Input*: Examines leadership strategies, organizational resources, and theoretical frameworks such as Simon Sinek's *Golden Circle* and *The Curve* to explain how leaders inspire trust and purpose.
- *Process*: Outlines how data will be collected through surveys and optional interviews, distributed through the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police (GACP) or similar professional networks.
- *Product*: Focuses on practical outcomes, how leadership impacts morale, recruitment, and retention, and whether leadership development contributes to long-term sustainability within police departments.

This study also supports ongoing reform efforts within the Valdosta State University Police Department by establishing a structured process to measure whether current leadership practices are effective, trusted, and aligned with organizational goals. Because this is a proposal, data collection and analysis will occur in future research phases. However, this chapter provides a clear roadmap for how the evaluation will be conducted, why these methods were selected, and how findings will be used to inform leadership development and organizational change in policing.

### ***Evaluation Criteria***

This evaluation uses specific criteria to determine how leadership affects recruitment, retention, and morale in policing. Because this is a future-focused evaluation proposal, these criteria establish how success and outcomes will be measured once data is collected.

Relevance asks whether this study addresses a real problem in public safety. Policing is currently experiencing a national crisis in recruitment and retention, with agencies reporting fewer applicants, higher resignations, and growing challenges to morale (Police Executive Research Forum [PERF], 2023). Most research focuses on large municipal agencies, leaving major gaps in understanding leadership's impact on university police departments, which operate under academic structures and face different pressures (Sloan, 2020). This makes the evaluation both timely and necessary.

Effectiveness examines whether leadership practices produce positive outcomes such as trust in command staff, communication, organizational support, and willingness to stay with the agency. Prior research has shown that officers are more likely to remain in departments with ethical, trustworthy, and engaged leadership, even when higher pay is offered (Orrick, 2008;

Dietrich, 2018). This study evaluates whether strong leadership contributes to internal improvements in recruitment, retention, and morale.

Efficiency looks at whether leadership strategies, such as mentorship, transparent communication, or leadership training, produce meaningful results without unnecessary cost or wasted resources. Instead of focusing solely on financial incentives such as bonuses or salary increases, this study evaluates whether leadership-focused strategies provide greater long-term benefits for recruitment and retention (Card, 2018). This criterion will compare leadership efforts to more traditional retention strategies.

Impact measures how leadership influences departmental culture and stability. This includes reduced turnover intention, improved morale, stronger alignment with the agency's mission, and increased trust between officers and supervisors. The impact of leadership will also be analyzed through Simon Sinek's Golden Circle and *The Curve*, which explain how cultural innovators and early adopters adopt change before spreading across an organization (Sinek, 2009; Simon Sinek Inc., n.d).

Sustainability evaluates whether leadership strategies can create long-term change rather than temporary improvements. This includes whether officers believe leadership practices will continue beyond current administrators and whether future leaders are being mentored and developed to carry those values forward. Research supports that agencies with leadership development and succession planning are more resilient and retain officers longer (Card, 2018; Orrick, 2008). These criteria align with the CIPP Model, which evaluates the current condition of policing (*Context*), leadership practices and resources (*Input*), future survey and interview processes (*Process*), and expected outcomes such as improved morale, retention, and trust (*Product*) (Stufflebeam, 2003).

### ***Population and Sampling***

The population for this evaluation consists of sworn police personnel at various ranks within the agency, including both frontline officers and command staff. This dual-group approach ensures that the evaluation captures multiple perspectives on leadership, morale, and retention. Frontline officers represent those most directly influenced by leadership decisions, while command staff provide insight into how leadership practices are developed, implemented, and perceived internally.

Sampling will be conducted using a combination of voluntary response and purposive sampling methods. Frontline officers will be invited to participate through departmental communication channels or professional associations such as the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police (GACP). Command staff participants, including sergeants, lieutenants, captains, assistant chiefs, and chiefs, will be purposefully selected based on their supervisory or administrative responsibilities. This approach ensures representation from individuals responsible for both carrying out and shaping leadership practices within the agency.

Participation will be completely voluntary, and all responses will remain anonymous. No identifying information such as name or badge number will be collected. The goal of this sampling strategy is not to generalize findings to all agencies but to explore patterns and perspectives within the specific organizational context. This focus aligns with the CIPP model's Context and Process components, enabling the study to assess how leadership operates across multiple organizational levels and how these dynamics influence morale, retention, and culture.

### ***Data Collection Methods***

Data for this evaluation will be collected using a mixed-methods approach that includes confidential surveys and, if needed, follow-up interviews. The goal is to collect honest feedback from both frontline officers and command staff without creating fear of retaliation or disciplinary action. Surveys will be distributed electronically via a secure platform such as Microsoft Forms or Qualtrics, allowing participants to respond privately from their computers or mobile devices. This method is commonly used in public safety research because it increases response rates and protects confidentiality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Before the survey begins, participants will receive an informed consent statement that explains the purpose of the study, that participation is voluntary, and that no names, or badge numbers will be collected. Officers and command staff will receive the same core set of survey questions, though command staff will also receive additional questions on supervision, administrative responsibility, and organizational barriers to leadership. This approach allows for comparison between how leadership is experienced and how it is intended, which aligns with the Process and Product elements of the CIPP model (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014).

If participants are willing, optional follow-up interviews may be conducted either in person or virtually to gain a deeper understanding of survey responses. These conversations would follow a semi-structured format, focusing on leadership communication, morale, trust, retention concerns, and organizational challenges. Interviews are commonly used to strengthen mixed-methods research by providing context and depth to survey results (Patton, 2015). All interviews will be recorded with permission and transcribed for accuracy. This data collection process is designed to protect employees, encourage honesty, and make sure both officers and command staff have a voice in the evaluation. It also supports the overall goal of determining whether the leadership practices are working or if change is needed.

### ***Secondary Data Sources***

Secondary data will be used to support and validate findings from survey results. These sources include:

- Existing academic literature on police recruitment, retention, morale, and leadership.
- Agency policies and organizational documents, such as mission statements, promotional guidelines, leadership development programs, or retention strategies.
- Publicly available data from organizations like the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), and Bureau of Justice Statistics, which provide national data on staffing trends and officer attrition.

These secondary sources help establish the broader context of leadership challenges in police and ensure that findings from this study can be compared to national trends.

### ***Data Collection Instruments***

The primary tool used to collect data for this evaluation will be a structured survey designed to measure perceptions of leadership, morale, job satisfaction, and intent to stay or leave the agency. The survey will include a combination of Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice demographic items, and optional open-ended responses. This format allows officers and command staff to answer honestly and efficiently, while also giving space for explanation if they choose. Using a structured survey is consistent with public safety research and helps ensure consistency across responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To ensure both perspectives are captured, the survey will include two versions, one for frontline officers and one for command staff. Most questions will be identical so that results can

be compared between groups. However, the command staff survey will include additional questions on supervision, policy enforcement, staffing limitations, and barriers that affect leadership decisions. This supports both the Input and Process components of the CIPP model by examining not only what leadership looks like from the officer's perspective, but also the realities of leading from an administrative position (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014).

The survey will measure key variables using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Sample items may include:

- “My supervisor communicates expectations clearly.”
- “Leadership at this agency treats employees fairly.”
- “I feel supported by command staff during difficult situations.”
- “I plan to stay with this agency for the next two years.”

Optional open-ended questions will allow respondents to expand on their answers. Examples may include:

- “What leadership behaviors improve morale within your agency?”
- “What changes in leadership would make you more likely to stay in this profession?”
- “What prevents you (command staff) from leading the way you believe is most effective?”

Questions that are officer-focused include:

- How does leadership style influence officer morale within the agency?

- What is the relationship between leadership behavior and an officer's intention to stay or leave the organization?
- Are officers more likely to remain with the agency when leadership is supportive, communicates clearly, and invests in employee development?
- How do officers perceive leadership's role in shaping organizational culture and job satisfaction?
- What leadership traits or practices do officers identify as most effective in improving morale, retention, and commitment to the agency?
- To what extent does leadership impact the agency's ability to recruit and retain qualified personnel?

Questions that are command staff-focused include:

- How do command staff perceive their role in influencing officer morale, retention, and overall organizational culture?
- What challenges or barriers do command staff face that may limit their ability to lead effectively, support personnel, or improve retention?
- Do command staff believe their leadership practices align with what officers expect or need from their leaders? Why or why not?

If interviews are conducted, they will follow a semi-structured interview guide based on the same topics as the survey: leadership effectiveness, morale, retention, communication, and organizational trust. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility while still ensuring all key

topics are covered (Patton, 2015). This combination of structured survey items and optional qualitative responses aligns with the study's mixed-methods design and supports a fuller understanding of how leadership impacts morale and retention within a public safety organization.

### ***Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness***

To make sure the results of this evaluation are dependable and taken seriously, it is important that the data is both consistent and accurate. Reliability focuses on whether the data would stay the same if the study was repeated under similar conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For surveys or questionnaires, internal consistency will be checked using Cronbach's alpha. A score of .70 or higher is generally accepted as reliable in social science research (Taber, 2018). If more than one person is helping review or score data, interrater reliability will also be used to make sure responses are coded the same way across evaluators (Field, 2018).

Validity ensures that this evaluation measures what it claims to measure. To support content validity, each survey question and variable is intentionally linked to the research questions, the program's goals, and prior literature. This helps ensure that the data collected is relevant and aligned to the purpose of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Construct validity will be supported by using survey items grounded in established leadership theories and existing research on morale, retention, and organizational trust in policing. If time permits, a pilot test will be conducted to identify unclear wording, missing variables, or potential bias in questions before full distribution of the survey instrument (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014).

For qualitative responses, such as interviews or open-ended survey questions, trustworthiness is the standard rather than reliability and validity. Trustworthiness includes

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility will be strengthened by comparing data from multiple sources (triangulation), having peers review the process, and keeping clear documentation of decisions made during analysis.

Transferability will be supported by providing detailed descriptions so others can decide if these findings apply to their environments. Dependability will be ensured by maintaining an audit trail showing how data was collected, coded, and analyzed. Confirmability will be supported by keeping personal bias out of the process through reflective notes and documentation (Patton, 2015). Overall, these steps ensure the results are accurate, fair, and based on real data rather than assumptions. This matters because the findings may inform policy, training, leadership decisions, and future research.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Ethics are essential to this evaluation because the goal is to gather honest information from participants while fully protecting their rights and privacy. Before any surveys or interviews take place, the study will undergo Institutional Review Board (IRB) or equivalent review to ensure it meets all requirements for research involving human subjects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Everyone who participates will do so voluntarily. They will receive an informed consent form that clearly explains the purpose of the study, what they are being asked to do, how their information will be used, and that they can stop participating at any time without any consequences. These protections align with the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice established in *The Belmont Report* (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). No data will be collected unless consent is given.

Confidentiality will be taken seriously. No names, employee numbers, or other identifying information will be connected to anyone's responses. Instead, participants will be

assigned an anonymous code so their identity cannot be linked to their results. All electronic data will be stored on password-protected devices, and any printed information will be kept in secure storage. Only summarized data or anonymous quotes will be used in reports or presentations to make sure no one can be singled out (Patton, 2015).

While this study presents minimal risk, some participants might still feel hesitant to answer questions about leadership, supervision, or their work environment. To reduce that concern, participants will be reminded that their responses are confidential, and nothing will be shared in a way that identifies them. They can skip any question or withdraw from the study if they don't feel comfortable. This study follows the core ethical principles of the Belmont Report, respect for individuals, not to harm, and fairness to ensure that the research not only protects people but also leads to improvements in leadership, policy, and practice (Belmont Report, 1979).

### *Hypotheses*

Based on existing literature, public safety leadership models, and professional experience, this study will explore the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Officers who perceive their leadership as supportive, fair, and consistent will report higher morale than those who view leadership as authoritarian or disengaged.

**H2:** There is a significant relationship between leadership quality and an officer's intention to stay or leave the agency. Poor leadership will correlate with higher turnover results.

**H3:** Officers who feel supported, valued, and included in communication and decision-making are more likely to remain with the agency, even when challenges such as staffing shortages or lower pay are present.

**H4 (Command Staff Perspective):** Command staff will report that they actively attempt to support and develop personnel; however, they may identify institutional constraints, such as budget limits, staffing shortages, policies, or administrative pressure, that affect their ability to lead in the way officers expect.

## Chapter IV: Results

This chapter presents the expected findings of this evaluation based on the methodology outlined in Chapter 3, previous research, and observed outcomes within the VSUPD. Since formal data collection and statistical analysis have not yet occurred, the results discussed here reflect anticipated trends grounded in existing leadership research, practical experience in police, and real improvements already seen at VSUPD after applying Simon Sinek's leadership principles, specifically *The Curve*.

VSUPD has already begun to experience measurable change since shifting toward a leadership model centered on trust, communication, purpose, and people-focused decision-making. For the first time in nearly ten years, the department is fully staffed. Morale has increased, internal communication has improved, and officers report feeling more supported and included in organizational decisions. These early improvements align with existing research showing that strong, values-based leadership has a direct impact on retention, morale, and organizational commitment in policing (Blumberg, Papazoglou, & Schlosser, 2019; Schafer, 2010).

The rationale for using *The Curve* as the foundation of this evaluation is reinforced not only by what is happening locally at VSUPD, but also by successful leadership outcomes in other industries. A well-known example is CEO Bob Chapman and the Barry-Wehmiller Company, which transformed its culture and performance by prioritizing people over profit, investing in employee well-being, and building trust at every level of the company. Chapman's approach to "truly human leadership" mirrors Sinek's ideas of building environments where people feel safe, valued, and connected to a purpose larger than themselves (Chapman & Sisodia, 2015; Sinek, 2014). Their success demonstrates that when leaders focus on trust, empathy, and

shared purpose, organizations perform better. VSUPD's early progress shows that the same leadership principles can be applied effectively in policing.

Throughout this chapter, we will describe what the data would likely show if the evaluation were conducted, beginning with descriptive results, then expected patterns aligned with each evaluation question, and concluding with a summary of key outcomes. While actual numbers are not being presented, these anticipated findings provide a realistic preview of how leadership, morale, and retention intersect within a university policing environment.

### ***Presentation of Expected Data***

The expected results of this evaluation can be reasonably projected based on current progress within VSUPD, existing leadership research, and the methodology outlined in Chapter 3. If survey data were collected, it would likely show descriptive trends such as years of service, rank, and officer attitudes toward leadership, morale, and retention. Based on the changes already implemented under values-based leadership practices, it is expected that most officers will report improved morale, greater trust in leadership, and a stronger intention to remain with the department. This is supported by the fact that VSUPD is currently fully staffed for the first time in nearly ten years, an outcome that aligns with prior research linking effective leadership to increased retention, job satisfaction, and morale in policing (Blumberg, Papazoglou, & Schlosser, 2019; Schafer, 2010).

If comparative statistical analysis were conducted, it would likely reveal a positive relationship between leadership style and morale as well as between leadership and intent to stay with the agency. Officers who believe leadership communicates well, supports their development, and follows through on expectations would likely score higher in morale and

organizational commitment. Similarly, officers who feel disconnected from leadership or unsupported may express higher intent to leave. These trends align with Simon Sinek's theory of *The Curve*, which suggests that belief, connection, performance, and loyalty occur when people feel valued and have purpose within the organization (Sinek, 2014). Command staff may report similar beliefs about communication and employee well-being, but they may also express ongoing challenges, such as budget constraints, staffing limitations, university policy, or political pressures, suggesting a possible gap between leadership intentions and officer perceptions. These types of perception gaps between officers and command staff are consistent with prior police studies (Schafer, 2010).

If open-ended survey responses or interviews were analyzed, common themes would likely emerge involving communication, trust, leadership visibility, fairness, burnout, overtime demands, and appreciation for newer leadership efforts focused on mentorship and employee well-being. Officers would likely comment that leadership has become more accessible and engaged, while still identifying concerns about workload and campus-related demands. Command staff may acknowledge that implementing cultural change takes time and requires consistency across shifts, policies, and expectations. These anticipated themes mirror successes seen outside of policing as well. For example, CEO Bob Chapman and the Barry-Wehmiller organization demonstrated that when leadership invests in people, builds trust, and leads with empathy, organizations experience long-term loyalty, higher morale, and stronger retention, outcomes that reflect the same core principles found in Sinek's work (Chapman & Sisodia, 2015).

If this evaluation were fully conducted, the expected analysis would be interpreted using the CIPP Evaluation Model and *The Curve*. From a CIPP perspective, the *Context* would reflect

the historically present recruitment and morale crisis in policing and at VSUPD. The *Input* would reflect leadership strategies already being implemented, including restructuring, improved communication, applying Sinek's *Curve*, and values-based leadership practices. The *Process* would focus on how officers and command staff receive, experience, and respond to those strategies. Finally, the *Product* would focus on outcomes such as full staffing, improved morale, stronger retention, reduced turnover, and higher employee engagement. Through the lens of *The Curve*, VSUPD appears to be progressing through the stages of belief and connection, which are the foundation for improved performance and long-term loyalty. These expected results illustrate that leadership practices grounded in trust, purpose, and accountability are already producing measurable organizational change at VSUPD and would likely be supported if formal evaluation data were collected.

### ***Expected Findings by Evaluation Question***

The expected findings of this evaluation are based on leadership theory, prior research, and real improvements already observed within VSUPD. One of the most important takeaways from both research and practice is that leadership only works when people understand the why behind it. When leadership communicates purpose rather than just issuing orders or policies, officers are more likely to trust the process, buy into the mission, and remain loyal to the department. This is even with Simon Sinek's concept that people don't follow leaders because of authority; they follow leaders because they believe in their "why" (Sinek, 2014). After applying this approach at VSUPD through *The Curve*, focusing on belief, connection, performance, and loyalty, we have already seen morale improve and staffing stabilize. Based on this foundation, the following are the expected findings for each evaluation question:

#### **Evaluation Question 1: How does leadership style influence officer morale?**

- Expected finding: Morale is higher when leadership explains the why behind decisions, treats people with respect, and operates with transparency and fairness.
- Evidence at VSUPD: Since shifting from task-focused leadership to purpose-driven leadership, officers report higher morale and stronger trust in command.
- Research support: Studies show that transformational and servant leadership styles significantly increase morale and job satisfaction in policing (Blumberg et al., 2019).

**Evaluation Question 2: What is the relationship between leadership behavior and officers' intent to stay or leave?**

- Expected finding: Leadership behavior is a significant factor influencing whether officers stay or leave, more than salary in many cases.
- Evidence at VSU: Full staffing was achieved for the first time in 10 years after leadership focused on communication, purpose, and officer development.
- Research support: Positive leadership reduces turnover and increases commitment in police (Schafer, 2010).

**Evaluation Question 3: Are officers more likely to stay when leadership communicates, supports, and invests in them?**

- Expected finding: Yes. Officers who feel seen, heard, and supported by leadership are far more likely to stay with the department.
- Evidence at VSU: Voluntary resignations decreased, and officers reported stronger commitment to the agency after leadership began investing in their growth.
- Supports *The Curve*: Connection and belief lead directly to loyalty (Sinek, 2014).

**Evaluation Question 4: How do officers perceive leadership's role in shaping agency culture and job satisfaction?**

- Expected finding: Officers see leadership as the single biggest influence on agency culture, good or bad.
- Evidence at VSU: As leadership became more intentional, communication improved and negative culture began to shift into pride and accountability.
- Research support: Leadership sets the tone for organizational culture in policing (Stickle, 2020).

**Evaluation Question 5: What leadership traits or behaviors do officers believe improve morale and retention?**

- Expected finding: Officers value fairness, consistency, follow-through, mentorship, and leaders who explain decisions rather than simply enforce them.
- Evidence at VSU: Officers responded positively to leadership being visible, honest, and willing to have tough conversations with a clear purpose.
- Research support: Respectful, people-centered leadership, similar to Bob Chapman's Barry-Wehmiller model, increases retention and loyalty (Chapman & Sisodia, 2015).

**Evaluation Question 6: To what extent does leadership impact recruitment and retention efforts?**

- Expected finding: Leadership plays a critical role in recruitment and retention because it shapes how the department is perceived internally and externally.

- Evidence at VSU: The department reached and maintained full staffing, not because pay increased, but because culture and leadership improved.
- Research support: Departments with strong leadership attract and keep officers even under high-stress conditions (Tullis & Violanti, 2020).

### **Command Staff-Focused Evaluation Questions**

#### **Evaluation Question 7: How do command staff perceive their role in influencing morale, retention, and culture?**

- Expected finding: Command staff recognize that leadership directly impacts morale and retention, but leadership pressure often outweighs authority.
- Evidence at VSU: Command staff acknowledge they must lead people, not just manage policy, and have actively supported leadership restructuring.

#### **Evaluation Question 8: What barriers do command staff believe limit their ability to lead effectively?**

- Expected finding: Command staff are likely to point to limited staffing, university policies, budget constraints, and competing expectations between administration and frontline officers.
- Evidence at VSU: Leaders report that cultural change is working, but it requires consistency and support from higher administration to sustain.

#### **Evaluation Question 9: Do command staff believe their leadership approach matches what officers need? Why or why not?**

- Expected finding: Command staff generally believe their intent is to support officers, but some admit that communication gaps, delayed decisions, or unclear expectations may affect how officers perceive leadership.
- Evidence at VSU: Officers acknowledge progress but still want more feedback, transparency, and inclusion in decision-making.
- Importance of this question: This difference between leadership intent and officer perception is exactly why this evaluation matters.

### ***Summary of Key Expected Outcomes***

Based on existing research, practical experience in policing, and the leadership changes already implemented at the VSUPD, several key outcomes are expected if this evaluation were fully conducted. The most critical anticipated finding is that leadership, specifically leadership that explains the why behind decisions, values people, and builds trust. This has a direct impact on morale, organizational culture, and retention. This is already being observed at VSUPD. By applying Simon Sinek's *Curve* and leading with purpose and transparency rather than authority alone, the department has reached full staffing for the first time in nearly ten years and has seen measurable improvements in morale, communication, and internal trust. These early results support what previous studies have found: leadership matters more than any single policy, piece of equipment, or salary adjustment when it comes to sustaining a healthy police organization (Blumberg et al., 2019; Schafer, 2010).

If data were collected, it would likely show that officers who trust leadership and understand the reason behind decisions report higher morale and lower intent to leave the

agency. It is also expected that leadership traits such as fairness, consistency, mentorship, and follow-through would be rated as most effective in improving officer well-being and job satisfaction. Qualitative results would likely highlight themes such as communication, visibility of command staff, burnout, the need for recognition, and an appreciation for leadership that treats employees as people first, not just badge numbers. These findings mirror the success seen in organizations like Barry-Wehmiller, where CEO Bob Chapman demonstrated that people-centered leadership can transform culture, increase loyalty, and improve performance (Chapman & Sisodia, 2015).

The expected outcomes would not be limited to frontline officers. Command staff would likely recognize their influence on agency culture, but may also report barriers such as staffing levels, administrative constraints, and competing demands from the university. There may also be a gap between leadership intent and officer perception, meaning leaders believe they are supporting officers, but employees may still feel disconnected or left out of decisions. This gap is common in policing and is exactly why this evaluation is necessary. It allows both sides to assess whether leadership is effective.

Overall, the expected findings reinforce that leadership is not only a contributing factor to retention but also the foundation. The results would support the idea that officers stay where they feel valued, where they believe their work has meaning, and where leadership operates with integrity and purpose. VSUPD's recent progress shows that this approach is not theoretical work. These outcomes provide a direct transition into Chapter 5, which will focus on what these findings mean for policy, leadership development, long-term sustainability, and how departments like VSUPD can continue building a culture where people want to serve, stay, and lead.

## Chapter V: Discussion and Practical Implications

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss what the expected findings of this evaluation mean for leadership, officer morale, and retention in the policing profession, with a specific focus on VSUPD. This study was designed as an evaluation proposal rather than a completed analysis, so the discussion is based on projected results from Chapter 4, past research, and real changes already taking place within VSUPD. While no numerical data has been collected yet, early organizational outcomes, such as higher morale, stronger communication, and being fully staffed for the first time in nearly a decade, support the idea that leadership directly affects whether officers stay, how they perform, and how they feel about the badge they wear.

This chapter does not interpret statistical findings, but it does connect the expected results to the broader questions this evaluation seeks to answer, specifically, how leadership influences morale, retention, culture, and organizational trust. These expected findings are reinforced by leadership frameworks such as Simon Sinek's *The Curve*, which emphasizes starting with belief and purpose before expecting performance or loyalty, and by real-world models like Bob Chapman and the Barry-Wehmiller company, who proved that leading with trust and respect transforms organizations from the inside out (Sinek, 2014; Chapman & Sisodia, 2015). The progress already seen at VSUPD offers a preview of what intentional leadership can do in a university police department when it is consistent and centered on people rather than just policy.

The chapter explains what these expected findings mean for police as a profession, especially in an era when recruiting and retaining officers has become one of the biggest challenges in public safety. It discusses how leadership practices should change, what policies should follow, and what steps should be taken at VSUPD and beyond. It will also identify

limitations of this evaluation proposal and offer recommendations for future research and implementation. In short, this chapter answers the question: now that we know leadership matters, what do we do about it?

### *Interpretation of Expected Findings*

The expected outcomes strongly suggest that leadership is one of the most influential factors impacting morale, trust, and retention within police agencies. The first evaluation question asked how leadership style affects officer morale. Based on both research and actual progress at VSUPD, morale improves when leadership is clear about the purpose, the why behind decisions. When officers feel their leaders are authentic, they explain decisions rather than hide behind policy, and treat people with respect regardless of rank, morale rises. This reinforces Simon Sinek's argument that people do not follow what an organization does, but why it does it (Sinek, 2014). It also confirms what policing scholars like Blumberg, Papazoglou, and Schlosser (2019) have found, that supportive leadership reduces burnout and improves psychological well-being in officers.

The second and third evaluation questions focused on whether leadership affects an officer's intent to stay or leave the agency and whether leadership communication and support impact retention. The expected answer is yes, leadership plays a direct role in whether officers remain, even when pay, workload, and benefits stay the same. The best evidence for this is what has already been seen at VSUPD. Without significant salary changes or signing bonuses, the department reached and maintained full staffing for the first time in nearly 10 years. That shift did not come from recruiting alone; it came from leadership earning buy-in from their own people, building internal trust, and fostering a sense of belonging and stability. This aligns with research showing that officers are more likely to stay when they feel respected, heard, and part of

a larger mission (Schafer, 2010). In many cases, people do not leave policing; they choose to leave poor leadership.

The fourth and fifth evaluation questions asked how officers view leadership's impact on culture and which leadership traits they find most effective. Expected findings suggest that culture reflects leadership and morale combined. Culture does not change because of a memo, it changes because leadership consistently models the behavior they expect. Officers tend to value leadership traits such as fairness, accountability, approachability, mentorship, and follow-through. They want leaders who are present, not hidden in offices. They want direction and support, not just discipline. These expectations align with both Sinek's leadership model and Bob Chapman's "truly human leadership," which emphasizes that people perform better when they feel safe, respected, and valued (Chapman & Sisodia, 2015).

The sixth evaluation question asked how leadership affects recruitment and retention efforts. Expected findings suggest it affects both more than any external factor. Pay, benefits, and equipment are essential, but they cannot make people stay in a toxic environment. Departments with strong leadership reputations tend to attract applicants, even when they cannot offer the highest salary. This has been the case at VSUPD, where officers are telling others this is a place they want to work. That shift in reputation is a direct reflection of internal culture changing first.

The final three evaluation questions addressed command staff perspectives, how they see their role, what barriers they face, and whether they believe their leadership aligns with what their officers need. It is expected that command staff understand their responsibility for shaping morale and retention, but they also feel pressure from limited staffing, university policies, budget constraints, and institutional expectations. Some may believe they are doing everything they can, but officers may still feel left out of decisions or disconnected from reasoning. This gap between

leadership intent and officer perception is common in policing and is precisely why this evaluation is needed. Command staff may believe they are supporting officers, but if the why is not communicated, officers may not see or feel it.

### ***Implications for Public Safety Policy and Practice***

The expected results of this evaluation carry significant implications for both public safety policy and police leadership practice. Suppose leadership truly influences morale, retention, and organizational trust as strongly as prior research and VSUPD's experience suggest. In that case, leadership development is not optional, it is a critical strategy for stabilizing police departments in a time when recruitment and retention are at a national crisis level. Public safety agencies can no longer rely solely on pay increases, new uniforms, or recruitment bonuses. Without strong, purpose-driven leadership at every level of the organization, from shift supervisors to command staff, departments will continue to lose experienced officers faster than they can hire them.

One of the most important policy implications is that agencies must begin to measure leadership and culture with the same seriousness that they measure crime trends, response times, or budget performance. The traditional policing metrics, arrests, calls for service, and citations issued, do not capture officer morale, trust in leadership, or intent to stay. Yet, these internal factors are often what determine whether a department can even function effectively. Agencies should consider implementing leadership evaluations, internal climate surveys, and employee feedback systems as part of their routine assessment process. This aligns with the CIPP model, particularly the Process and Product components, which emphasize examining not only what an organization does but also how people experience it and what outcomes emerge from it.

Another implication is for training and leadership development. Most police supervisors are promoted because they are good officers, not because they were trained to lead people. As a result, many learn leadership through trial and error or by copying behavior they have seen before, whether good or bad. If the expected findings are correct, agencies should invest in leadership programs that focus on communication, emotional intelligence, purpose, decision-making, and the concept of explaining why, not just teaching policy and discipline. Models such as Simon Sinek's *Curve* and Bob Chapman's *truly human leadership* provide real examples of how leadership built on trust, purpose, and accountability creates healthier organizations. This is not about making policing softer. It is about making it sustainable.

For the policing profession, this evaluation suggests that leadership should be treated as a retention tool rather than just a command responsibility. Agencies that build strong leadership cultures are more likely to attract recruits, reduce burnout, prevent misconduct, improve community relations, and retain experienced officers. In university police departments like VSUPD, the implications extend beyond policing itself. Leadership directly affects student safety, campus morale, parent confidence, and institutional reputation. When leadership is strong and officers feel respected, they perform better, communicate more effectively with students, and represent the university in a way that builds trust instead of fear.

This also has implications for upper administration and university leadership. Police departments do not operate in isolation. When universities or local governments support leadership development, embrace internal evaluation, and remove barriers that prevent change, departments are more likely to thrive. When those systems resist change, sustaining leadership improvement becomes difficult. What we have already seen at VSUPD is proof that cultural

change is possible, but it must be supported by policy, training, and consistent leadership behavior at every level.

### ***Recommendations for Policy or Program Improvement and Action***

Based on the expected findings of this evaluation and the progress already seen within the VSUPD, several practical recommendations can be made to support leadership development, improve retention, and strengthen morale within university policing and public safety organizations. These recommendations are action-focused and designed to be realistic, sustainable, and grounded in both research and field experience.

#### **1. Formalize Purpose-Driven Leadership (*The Curve*) as the Agency's Leadership Framework**

VSUPD's early success using Simon Sinek's *Curve*, focusing on belief, connection, performance, and loyalty, should be formalized into training, policy, and promotional standards. Leadership expectations should include explaining why decisions are made, modeling ethical behavior, and prioritizing trust over authority. This model should be included in supervisor training, command staff meetings, performance evaluations, and field training officer (FTO) programs so that leadership is taught and practiced consistently across ranks.

#### **2. Implement an Annual Leadership and Culture Assessment**

To sustain progress and hold leadership accountable, VSUPD and similar agencies should conduct annual morale, leadership, and climate surveys. These assessments should collect input from both officers and command staff to identify gaps between leadership intent and employee perception. Results should be reviewed by command staff, shared transparently with personnel,

and used to develop measurable improvement plans. This aligns with the CIPP model's *Process* and *Product* phases and shifts leadership accountability from assumption to measurable practice.

### **3. Create Structured Mentorship and Career Development Pathways**

One of the most consistent complaints in policing is the lack of mentorship and clear career development. VSUPD should develop a structured mentorship program where senior officers and supervisors mentor new officers and aspiring leaders. This helps reduce turnover, increases job satisfaction, and prepares/develops future supervisors. Leadership advancement should no longer rely solely on tenure or test scores. Officers should also demonstrate emotional intelligence, communication skills, and alignment with agency values.

### **4. Train Supervisors in People-Focused Leadership, Not Just Policy and Procedure**

Most frontline supervisors learn leadership either by imitating what they experienced or by figuring it out on their own. VSUPD should establish leadership training that includes conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, communication, and how to explain decisions without compromising authority. These skills can be taught through POST-approved courses, university leadership development programs, or through partnerships with models such as Barry-Wehmiller or Simon Sinek's leadership framework. Future sergeants, lieutenants, and captains should be expected to lead people, not just manage schedules and reports.

### **5. Integrate Leadership and Morale Accountability into University Administration**

#### **Support**

Campus police departments do not operate in isolation. University leadership, Human Resources, Student Affairs, Finance, Legal, Public Relations, must understand that leadership stability and officer well-being directly impact student safety, campus morale, and institutional

reputation. The university should continue supporting VSUPD leadership efforts through funding, policy flexibility, mental health support, and trust in the command staff to manage internal culture. When university administration defends strong leadership rather than undermines it, officers feel supported and breakthroughs like full staffing become possible.

## **6. Expand Evaluation Beyond VSUPD (Regional or Statewide Application)**

Once this evaluation is completed internally, VSUPD should consider partnering with the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police (GACP), the University System of Georgia (USG), or the Georgia POST Council to replicate the study across other university police departments or municipal agencies facing similar retention challenges. This could help identify statewide leadership and morale trends, benchmark successful practices, and create standardized leadership expectations for public safety agencies across Georgia.

### ***Limitations of the Evaluation Proposal***

Although this evaluation is built on a structured framework, leadership theory, and real progress observed within VSUPD, several limitations should be acknowledged. First and most importantly, this is an evaluation proposal, not a completed study. That means no actual survey data has been collected or analyzed. The results discussed in Chapter 4 reflect expected findings, informed by research and experience, rather than empirical evidence. While these projections are realistic and supported by both literature and early observations at VSUPD, they still require formal validation through data collection before conclusions can be considered definitive.

A second limitation is the reliance on self-reported perceptions as the primary source of evaluation data. When surveys and interviews are eventually conducted, officers and command staff may choose to withhold information or provide responses they believe are politically or

professionally safe, especially in a rank-driven environment like policing. Even with anonymity, some employees may worry about how leadership will use the results. This introduces the potential for response bias, social desirability bias, or fear of retaliation, which could affect the accuracy of the evaluation.

Another limitation is related to generalizability. This evaluation proposal is centered on VSUPD, a university police department with a specific size, culture, and relationships with campus administration. Leadership challenges in municipal, county, state, or federal agencies may look different depending on staffing, call volume, collective bargaining rights, community expectations, or political pressure. The exact outcomes may not be directly transferable to every policing environment.

Additionally, because the evaluation uses *The Curve* and *people-first leadership* approaches, some critics may argue that these philosophies are not traditionally “police-based” and were initially developed in the corporate or organizational leadership world. While this is true, real-world evidence from Bob Chapman’s Barry-Wehmiller leadership model and similar research demonstrates that people-centered leadership improves performance across sectors, including police. However, implementation in policing may face resistance from those who believe leadership should remain strictly hierarchical or command-driven.

Finally, organizational change takes time, and this evaluation proposal does not include a long-term measurement plan. While VSUPD has already seen improvements in morale and staffing, it is too early to determine if these changes are sustainable over multiple years, across leadership transitions, or during major incidents, campus crises, or administrative turnover. Long-term follow-up will be necessary to determine whether leadership-driven improvements are temporary or permanent.

Despite these limitations, this evaluation proposal still provides a structured, realistic, and research-supported path forward. These limitations do not weaken the need for this work; they highlight why it is crucial. Understanding where leadership is working, where it is failing, and how officers actually feel is the first step in building a police department where people want to stay, lead, and serve.

### ***Suggestions for Future Research and Evaluation Needs***

Because this study serves as an evaluation proposal rather than a completed analysis, future research will be essential to validate the expected findings and expand upon them. The first and most immediate step is to implement the full evaluation plan outlined in Chapter 3, using surveys and optional interviews across all sworn personnel and command staff within the Valdosta State University Police Department (VSUPD). Collecting actual data will allow the department to determine whether the assumptions made in this proposal, particularly about leadership, morale, and retention, are accurate. Once data is gathered, statistical analysis (descriptive and comparative) should be used to determine whether leadership practices based on *The Curve* and relational policing are directly associated with higher morale and reduced turnover.

Future research should also include a longitudinal follow-up, meaning the same survey should be administered again over time, ideally every 12 to 18 months. This will allow VSUPD to track whether improvements in morale, trust, and staffing are temporary or sustained. Leadership changes, university administration shifts, or major incidents could influence whether progress continues or declines, and longitudinal data will provide a more complete understanding of departmental trends. Additionally, qualitative data through confidential interviews or focus groups could provide deeper insight into issues that survey questions may not fully capture, such

as burnout, leadership trust, favoritism, or whether officers feel connected to the department's mission.

This evaluation approach could also be expanded beyond VSUPD. The University System of Georgia (USG), Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police (GACP), or POST Council could consider adopting this framework to study leadership, morale, and retention across multiple university or municipal departments in the state. By collecting similar data across multiple agencies, it would be possible to identify statewide patterns, compare agencies of different sizes, and create benchmarks for leadership effectiveness. Eventually, this could lead to the creation of a state-level leadership development initiative or certification for supervisors, field training officers, and command staff, based on communication, purpose-driven leadership, and officer wellness, not just policy knowledge or tenure.

## Chapter VI: Conclusion

The purpose of this evaluation proposal was to examine how leadership influences officer morale, retention, and organizational culture within a public safety agency, specifically in the context of university policing. Police agencies across the country are facing record-low staffing levels, burnout, and increasing resignations, not only because of pay or workload, but because officers no longer feel connected to their leadership or purpose. This proposal responds directly to that problem. It aims to evaluate whether leadership grounded in purpose, communication, and trust, such as Simon Sinek's *The Curve*, can make a measurable difference in morale and retention, using the CIPP (*Context, Input, Process, Product*) evaluation model to guide assessment. The core issue addressed throughout this paper is simple but significant: people do not leave policing, they leave poor leadership.

Based on expected findings, several key outcomes are anticipated. First, leadership clearly communicates the why behind decisions, not just the what or the how. It will help improve officer morale. When leaders are visible, fair, and consistent, and when officers feel respected and informed rather than managed or dismissed, morale improves. Second, retention is directly influenced by leadership behavior. Officers are more likely to stay in agencies where they feel valued, heard, and connected to a larger mission. Third, expected results suggest that leadership does more than affect individual morale; it shapes organizational culture. Culture reflects how leadership behaves when no one is watching, how decisions are made, and how people are treated. Lastly, early indicators from real-world practice support these expectations. Agencies that have adopted purpose-driven leadership models, such as those inspired by *The Curve* or by Bob Chapman's *human-centered leadership* at Barry-Wehmiller, are already seeing improved morale, lower turnover, and stronger officer buy-in.

The significance of this evaluation extends beyond a single department or university campus. Suppose leadership truly has this level of influence on staffing, morale, and trust. In that case, leadership development must be treated as a strategic priority in public safety, not an optional workshop or a checkbox requirement. This proposal contributes to the profession by offering a measurable, actionable way to connect leadership behavior to tangible outcomes, such as retention and staffing stability. It reframes leadership not as a soft skill, but as a form of operational readiness. When leaders explain their decisions, invest in their people, and hold themselves to the same standard they expect of others, officers respond with loyalty, effort, and pride. This has direct implications for policymakers, university administrators, police chiefs, and training academies. Leadership must be evaluated the same way departments evaluate the use of force, crime data, or response times. If morale and retention matter, they must be measured, and leaders must be held accountable for them.

Although this is a proposal and not a completed evaluation, the path forward is clear. Agencies should implement the survey and evaluation tools outlined in Chapter 3, gather data from both officers and command staff, and use the results to drive leadership training, policy updates, and accountability systems. Leadership models like *The Curve* should be integrated into supervisory training, promotional processes, field training programs, and command-level expectations. Departments should also consider conducting follow-up evaluations every year to measure progress in morale, leadership trust, and retention, treating internal health the same way we treat external safety. This is how culture changes, from measurement to action, from intention to accountability.

The future of policing depends on leadership that earns trust, not just compliance. The agencies that will thrive are the ones that understand that badges, policies, and procedures are not

held together by authority. They are held together by purpose. If public safety leaders want officers to stay, serve with pride, and bring others into the profession, then leadership must start by answering one simple question: Why should they follow us? Until that question is answered with clarity, honesty, and consistency, recruitment and retention will remain a struggle. But when leadership is rooted in purpose, people, and accountability, everything changes.

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