

Compliance-Centered Police Policy Systems: An Integrative Analysis of Structural, Cognitive, Linguistic, Training, and Digital Implementation Failure in Municipal Police Directives

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Abstract

Municipal police agencies increasingly rely on extensive Directive systems to demonstrate legal compliance, satisfy accreditation expectations, manage liability exposure, and regulate Officer conduct. Yet recurring operational failures continue in agencies that possess written policies, electronic acknowledgment records, accreditation proofs, and digital policy management systems. This paper argues that the central problem is not merely the absence of policy, but the design of compliance centered policy systems that prove formal rule existence while failing to function as human centered legal decision systems. Synthesizing a series of subordinate mechanism papers, this analysis integrates structural fragmentation, linguistic instability, cognitive load, passive dissemination, weak comprehension validation, supervisory deficiency, digital completion tracking, and legal evidentiary risk into a unified explanation of municipal police policy failure. The paper demonstrates that decentralized drafting and legacy accumulation produce fragmented Directive architecture, inconsistent modal language weakens obligation signals, and these defects increase cognitive burden under operational stress. When agencies then rely on passive dissemination, electronic acknowledgment, or dashboard completion without validating comprehension, the Directive may remain an administrative artifact rather than becoming operational knowledge. Weak supervisory reinforcement and disconnected corrective feedback further allow implementation drift to persist. The result is a policy system that may appear compliant while degrading policy fidelity, destabilizing decision making, and producing inconsistent Directive application in the field. This paper does not argue that every policy defect creates municipal liability or that policy architecture alone explains police failure. Rather, it establishes that policy architecture is an underexamined system variable that can shape cognition, training transfer, supervision, correction, and legal defensibility. The paper concludes that meaningful police policy reform requires more than additional rules, periodic revision, or digital distribution. It requires rebuilding police Directives as coherent, cognitively usable, legally grounded, training integrated, supervision connected, and feedback driven decision systems designed to support lawful action under stress.

I. INTRODUCTION

Municipal police agencies operate inside increasingly dense Directive environments. Modern Directives are expected to satisfy constitutional law, statutory requirements, Attorney General Directives, accreditation standards, civil liability concerns, internal accountability requirements, municipal oversight expectations, and public demands for lawful and professional policing. Written policy is therefore one of the principal mechanisms through which agencies attempt to define authority, structure discretion, regulate Officer conduct, assign supervisory responsibility, and demonstrate institutional accountability. That role is legally and administratively significant because municipal liability doctrine recognizes that policy, custom, training, supervision, and institutional omission may become relevant when constitutional harm is alleged (*City of Canton v. Harris*, 1989, *Connick v. Thompson*, 2011, *Monell v. Department of Social Services*, 1978).

Yet the existence of a Directive does not prove that the Directive functions. A policy manual may be current, searchable, electronically distributed, mapped to accreditation standards, and acknowledged by personnel while still failing to guide lawful decision making under operational pressure. This distinction is the starting point of the present synthesis. Existing police policy systems often prove that a rule was written, distributed, stored, reviewed, or acknowledged. They much less reliably prove that the rule was coherent, cognitively usable, trained, understood, supervised, corrected, and revised after warning signs. Prior work in this series described that distinction as the difference between policy existence and policy effectiveness, and argued that municipal police policies are often designed as compliance artifacts while being used operationally as instructional decision systems (Bremer, 2025a).

The central problem is therefore not simply whether an agency has Directives. The deeper problem is whether the Directive system operates as a human centered legal decision system. Officers do not apply policy in quiet reading conditions. They apply internalized policy knowledge while processing threat cues, citizen behavior, legal thresholds, communication demands, tactical movement, environmental uncertainty, documentation duties, and supervisory expectations. Street level bureaucracy scholarship has long recognized that frontline public servants do not implement policy mechanically, but interpret and operationalize formal rules through discretion under practical constraints (Lipsky, 1980, Maynard Moody & Musheno, 2003). Police decision making research similarly shows that operational judgment often occurs under time pressure, uncertainty, and incomplete information, where personnel rely on recognition, experience, and rapidly accessible mental models rather than slow analytical reconstruction (Kahneman, 2011, Klein, 1998). A Directive system that cannot be retrieved, understood, and applied under those conditions is not fully functioning as operational policy.

This paper defines a Compliance Centered Police Policy System as a Directive architecture designed, maintained, and evaluated primarily to prove formal policy existence, standards conformity, administrative completion, and legal defensibility, while insufficiently ensuring that Directives operate as coherent, cognitively usable, training integrated, supervision connected, and feedback driven decision guidance. This definition does not suggest that compliance is unimportant. Compliance is necessary. Agencies must satisfy legal requirements, accreditation obligations, documentation duties, and professional standards. The problem arises when compliance becomes the dominant design logic and displaces the operational function of policy. A police Directive must satisfy law, but it must also help human beings make lawful decisions under stress.

The mechanism papers synthesized here show that this failure is not one defect. It is an interacting system. Fragmented Policy Systems showed that decentralized drafting, legacy

accumulation, layered revision, and the absence of centralized architectural control predictably generate redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment across related Directives (Bremer, 2024a). That finding matters because police agencies do not operate through isolated policies. They operate through interdependent Directive systems. A single Directive may appear legally current and professionally written when reviewed alone while still contributing to system incoherence when read against related Directives. Public administration scholarship supports this distinction by separating compliance, coordination, coherence, and integration as related but different conditions (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). The result is a compliance coherence gap in which an agency may prove that required policy topics exist without proving that the Directive system speaks with one internally consistent operational voice.

Language then becomes the next failure point. From Language to Action argued that modal verbs in police Directives function as decision triggers rather than stylistic choices (Bremer, 2024b). Words such as must, may, and should communicate obligation, discretion, and expected practice. If those terms are used inconsistently, weakened by vague qualifiers, or applied without a controlled drafting protocol, they distort the perceived obligation level of the Directive. Legal drafting authorities and legal interpretation scholarship have long recognized that mandatory and permissive language can carry substantive consequences (Scalia & Garner, 2012, Tiersma, 1999). In the operational policing context, that linguistic instability becomes more than a drafting concern. It affects how Officers understand what is required, what is prohibited, what is permitted, and what must be justified.

Structural fragmentation and linguistic instability matter because they increase cognitive burden. Cognitive Load in Police Policy argued that Directives function as cognitive input systems, and that policy complexity, ambiguity, structural inconsistency, information density, and redundancy increase the processing demands imposed on Officers (Bremer, 2025b). Cognitive Load Theory explains why this matters. Human working memory is limited when processing novel, complex, or interacting information, and performance degrades when instructional systems impose unnecessary extraneous load (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988, Sweller et al., 1998). Under operational conditions, Officers already face intrinsic load from the encounter itself. When the Directive system adds unnecessary interpretive load through fragmented structure, unstable terminology, branching complexity, or cross reference dependency, it competes with the Officer's ability to perceive, comprehend, prioritize, and act.

The same cognitive principle appears outside ordinary municipal policy analysis. Policy as a Cognitive System extended the argument into presidential protection and municipal police operations, describing policy as a cognitive operating system that shapes perception, role assignment, threat recognition, communication, prioritization, and action under stress (Bremer, 2026). Situation awareness research supports this cross domain point by showing that effective action depends on perception of relevant elements, comprehension of their meaning, and projection of their future status (Endsley, 1995). Recognition based decision making similarly depends on clear cues and stable schemas (Klein, 1998). When operational systems leave personnel with unresolved threat variables, fragmented communication, role ambiguity, excessive decision branching, and compressed engagement timelines, decision degradation becomes predictable rather than surprising. Municipal Officers face the same cognitive architecture, often in less controlled environments.

The training system often fails to correct this problem because policy dissemination is treated as policy implementation. Policy Without Comprehension argued that many agencies rely on email distribution, electronic acknowledgment, policy portal posting, learning management completion, and limited roll call notification without validating whether Officers actually understand, retain, or

can operationally apply revised Directives (Bremer, 2025c). Learning science supports that concern. Retrieval practice research shows that active recall, practice testing, distributed review, and application produce stronger retention than passive rereading or exposure alone (Dunlosky et al., 2013, Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). Training evaluation literature also distinguishes between delivery, learning, transfer, behavior, and results, which means a record of distribution or attendance does not establish operational competence (Arthur et al., 2003, Baldwin & Ford, 1988, Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Acknowledgment may prove exposure. It does not prove comprehension.

Digital policy systems can either discipline this implementation process or conceal its weakness behind polished records. Digitized Compliance argued that PowerDMS and similar platforms are not the cause of legacy policy failure, but they may amplify the agency's existing policy culture (Bremer, n.d.). Used well, such systems can support version control, review cycles, policy linked training, testing, supervisory follow up, corrective action, and revision. Used passively, they can document assignment, acknowledgment, dashboard completion, proof mapping, and archival readiness without proving meaningful implementation. Implementation science reinforces this distinction because adoption of a system is not the same as implementation fidelity. Effective implementation requires organizational capacity, competency development, leadership support, feedback systems, and sustained use in practice (Durlak & DuPre, 2008, Fixsen et al., 2005, Nilsen, 2015). A digital platform can support implementation. It cannot substitute for it.

The legal consequence is that the policy system may become evidence of institutional failure when it proves presence without proving function. Legacy Police Policy Systems as Evidence of Failure to Train and Failure to Supervise Liability argued that outdated, fragmented, passively disseminated, electronically acknowledged, or poorly supervised policy systems may become legally significant when they help show what the agency knew, what it trained, what it supervised, what it corrected, and what it ignored (Bremer, 2026b). The argument must remain legally restrained. Not every imperfect Directive creates municipal liability. Monell liability requires municipal fault and causation, and failure to train or failure to supervise claims require more than proof that an agency could have done better (Board of County Commissioners v. Brown, 1997, City of Canton v. Harris, 1989, Connick v. Thompson, 2011). But when warning signs appear and the agency fails to revise, retrain, supervise, discipline, or correct, the same Directive system that appeared to prove compliance may become evidence that the agency failed to operationalize constitutional standards.

This synthesis integrates those subordinate mechanisms into one system level explanation. Compliance centered production creates Directive systems that prioritize proof of rule existence, standards mapping, policy distribution, and administrative completion. Decentralized drafting and legacy accumulation create fragmentation. Fragmentation weakens system coherence. Inconsistent modal language destabilizes obligation signals. Structural and linguistic instability increase Policy Cognitive Load. Elevated cognitive load degrades comprehension, recall, schema activation, and recognition based decision making. Passive dissemination fails to validate whether the Directive became operational knowledge. Weak supervision fails to detect and correct implementation drift. Digital systems may document completion without proving implementation. When warning signs accumulate and the agency does not revise, retrain, supervise, discipline, or correct, the policy system may shift from evidence of compliance to evidence of municipal failure.

This paper does not argue that policy architecture alone explains police failure. Leadership, staffing, training quality, resources, agency culture, supervision, discipline, individual conduct, political environment, and community conditions all matter. Nor does it argue that every policy

defect has legal consequence. The claim is narrower. Policy architecture is an underexamined system variable that shapes interpretation, cognition, training transfer, supervision, feedback, and legal defensibility. A strong Supervisor still needs a coherent Directive to supervise against. A training unit still needs policy language that can be converted into operational schemas. A digital system still needs an implementation doctrine to determine when acknowledgment is insufficient. A liability defense still needs evidence that the policy functioned, not only that it existed.

The contribution of this paper is to relocate the analysis of police policy failure from policy presence to policy function. The central question is not whether the agency has a manual, a digital platform, an accreditation file, or an acknowledgment record. The central question is whether the agency has built a coherent legal decision system capable of supporting lawful action under operational stress. That system must be legally grounded, architecturally coherent, cognitively usable, linguistically controlled, training integrated, comprehension validated, supervision connected, digitally supported, feedback driven, and revision capable.

The paper proceeds by developing that synthesis in stages. Section II defines the Compliance Centered Police Policy System and distinguishes compliance from coherence, distribution from comprehension, acknowledgment from training, and policy presence from policy function. Section III analyzes structural fragmentation and the compliance coherence gap. Section IV examines linguistic instability and decision signal failure. Section V explains Policy Cognitive Load and Directive misapplication. Section VI treats policy as cognitive operating architecture under stress. Section VII analyzes passive dissemination and the failure of comprehension validation. Section VIII examines supervisory failure and the missing control layer. Section IX analyzes digital compliance and implementation amplification. Section X explains how legacy policy systems become legal and evidentiary risk. Section XI presents the integrated causal model. Section XII identifies implications for human centered legal decision systems. The conclusion returns to the paper's central claim: the future of police policy reform is not the better management of manuals, but the construction of Directive systems designed to support lawful human decision making before and during high risk encounters.

II. THE COMPLIANCE CENTERED POLICY SYSTEM

A Compliance Centered Police Policy System is a Directive architecture designed, maintained, and evaluated primarily to prove formal rule existence, standards conformity, administrative completion, and legal defensibility, while insufficiently ensuring that Directives operate as coherent, cognitively usable, training integrated, supervision connected, and feedback driven decision guidance. The concept does not mean that compliance is unnecessary. Compliance is essential. Police agencies must maintain lawful policies, satisfy accreditation expectations, preserve records, document review, and demonstrate that personnel received governing standards. The defect arises when the policy system is built mainly to prove that the agency has addressed a subject, rather than to ensure that Officers and Supervisors can use the Directive system to make, evaluate, and correct lawful decisions under operational conditions.

This distinction is necessary because police policy performs two different functions at the same time. Administratively, policy is a record of institutional position. It demonstrates that the agency has adopted written guidance, aligned local practice with legal or professional standards, and created a formal basis for accountability. Operationally, however, policy is a decision system. It tells Officers what is prohibited, what is mandatory, what is permitted, what is expected, when discretion begins, when discretion ends, what must be documented, what Supervisors must review, and what consequences follow when the rule is violated or misunderstood. A Directive

that succeeds as an administrative record may still fail as operational guidance if it cannot be understood, retrieved, applied, supervised, and corrected under field conditions.

The first conceptual distinction is compliance versus coherence. Compliance asks whether the agency can show that a required policy, standard, proof, or record exists. Coherence asks whether related Directives operate together as one internally consistent system of guidance. A policy may satisfy a standard when reviewed alone while still conflicting with another Directive, repeating a rule differently, using inconsistent terminology, or assigning supervisory duties unevenly across related procedures. Prior work in this series described this as the compliance coherence gap, where formal standards review may validate policy presence without necessarily evaluating the relational architecture of the Directive system as a whole (Bremer, 2024a). Public administration scholarship supports this distinction by treating coordination, coherence, and integration as related but distinct conditions in complex policy systems (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019).

The compliance coherence gap is especially important in municipal policing because police operations rarely implicate one Directive at a time. A single encounter may involve use of force, arrest authority, search and seizure, body worn camera activation, evidence handling, medical aid, reporting, supervisory review, internal affairs notification, and documentation requirements. If those Directives do not share definitions, thresholds, reporting sequences, and review duties, the agency may have a complete policy collection without having a coherent policy system. The defect is not merely stylistic. It affects how Officers interpret authority and how Supervisors evaluate conduct. When the written architecture does not speak with one consistent voice, field personnel must reconcile the system themselves.

The second conceptual distinction is distribution versus comprehension. Distribution proves that policy was made available. Comprehension asks whether personnel understood, retained, and could operationally apply the Directive. Many agencies rely on email transmission, policy portal posting, learning management completion, electronic acknowledgment, or roll call notice to implement policy changes. Those methods may produce useful evidence of notice, but they do not establish durable learning. Prior work in this series argued that passive dissemination creates an evidentiary illusion of implementation because it verifies exposure while leaving comprehension, retention, retrieval, and application largely unmeasured (Bremer, 2025c). Learning science supports that conclusion. Retrieval practice research demonstrates that active recall and practice testing produce stronger long term retention than passive review or rereading, and training evaluation literature distinguishes training delivery from learning, transfer, behavior, and organizational results (Arthur et al., 2003, Dunlosky et al., 2013, Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006, Roediger & Karpicke, 2006).

The distribution comprehension distinction is central to police policy because Officers do not usually consult the full text of a Directive during a fast moving encounter. They act from internalized understanding developed through prior training, supervisory reinforcement, experience, and memory. If the agency can prove only that the Directive was sent, opened, or acknowledged, it has not shown that the Directive became operational knowledge. This matters most for high liability subjects such as use of force, vehicle pursuits, search and seizure, prisoner handling, duty to intervene, mental health response, and body worn camera activation. These Directives require more than awareness. They require accurate retrieval and application under stress.

The third conceptual distinction is acknowledgment versus training. Acknowledgment is an administrative act. Training is an instructional process. Acknowledgment may show that an

Officer received a Directive, opened a document, or certified review. Training should show that the agency taught the rule, explained the decision point, reinforced the legal threshold, required application, corrected misunderstanding, and created a record of learning. The difference is not academic. Failure to train doctrine focuses on whether the agency adequately prepared personnel for recurring constitutional tasks, not merely whether written material existed somewhere in the organization (*City of Canton v. Harris*, 1989, *Connick v. Thompson*, 2011). A signature may be relevant evidence of notice, but it is weak evidence of comprehension when standing alone.

This distinction also explains why digital completion can be misleading. A policy platform can generate organized records showing assignment dates, acknowledgment dates, reminders, overdue notices, completion percentages, standards mapping, and archived versions. Those records are valuable when they are part of a broader implementation system. They are incomplete when they substitute for that system. The PowerDMS mechanism paper argued that digital platforms are legally neutral but operationally consequential infrastructure. They can support disciplined implementation when agencies connect policy distribution to training, testing, supervisory review, corrective action, and revision. They can also amplify weak implementation when agencies use them mainly to collect signatures and clear dashboards (Bremer, n.d.). Implementation science supports this distinction because adoption of a program or platform is not the same as implementation fidelity, and effective implementation depends on organizational capacity, training, leadership, feedback, and sustained use in practice (Durlak & DuPre, 2008, Fixsen et al., 2005, Nilsen, 2015).

The fourth conceptual distinction is legal sufficiency versus operational usability. A Directive may be legally accurate and still difficult to use. Legal sufficiency asks whether the policy states the correct rule, incorporates the relevant authority, and avoids facial inconsistency with controlling law. Operational usability asks whether the policy communicates the rule in a form that Officers and Supervisors can understand, retrieve, apply, review, and correct under realistic conditions. Cognitive Load Theory explains why this matters. Human working memory is limited when processing complex and interacting information, and instructional design can either reduce or increase the cognitive burden placed on the user (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988, Sweller et al., 1998). A Directive that contains accurate legal content but presents that content through dense language, unstable terminology, excessive cross references, or poorly sequenced decision rules may satisfy legal review while still increasing operational risk.

Legal sufficiency can also conflict with usability when policies become increasingly layered. Agencies often add provisions in response to litigation, legislation, accreditation, audits, critical incidents, public controversy, or risk management advice. Each addition may be defensible in isolation. Over time, however, the Directive system may become more difficult to use. The Instructional Systems Failure paper described this as compliance accretion, where new rules and procedural additions are layered onto existing policy architecture without first redesigning the system for coherence, cognition, and operational retrieval (Bremer, 2025a). Pressman and Wildavsky's implementation work supports the broader principle that policy failure can emerge through accumulated complexity, coordination burden, and implementation friction even when formal objectives are clear (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973).

The fifth conceptual distinction is policy presence versus policy function. Policy presence means the agency can show that a Directive exists. Policy function means the Directive actually performs its institutional job. A functioning Directive should define the legal standard, clarify the operational decision, assign duties, communicate obligation levels, connect to training, support supervision, require documentation, trigger correction, and feed lessons back into revision. A

nonfunctioning Directive may still appear complete because it has a title, revision date, approval signature, standards map, electronic acknowledgment record, and storage location. The liability paper in this series described this as false completeness, where the manual, platform, and accreditation file create the appearance of policy control without proving that the agency operationalized the Directive (Bremer, 2026b).

Policy function must be evaluated across the life of the Directive, not merely at the moment of publication. A Directive begins as written language, but it must move through training, comprehension, supervision, field application, review, correction, discipline when necessary, and revision after warning signs. This is why a Compliance Centered Police Policy System is structurally incomplete. It tends to measure what is easiest to document: the policy exists, the policy was assigned, the policy was acknowledged, the proof was uploaded, the dashboard cleared, and the accreditation file is ready. It does not necessarily measure what matters most: whether the Directive produced lawful, consistent, and supervised decision making in practice.

The concept of a Compliance Centered Police Policy System therefore does not attack policy, accreditation, electronic management, or documentation. Those elements are necessary parts of modern police governance. The critique is that they are insufficient when treated as substitutes for decision system design. Accreditation can improve structure but cannot by itself prove cross Directive coherence. Digital platforms can improve recordkeeping but cannot by themselves prove comprehension. Acknowledgment can prove notice but cannot by itself prove training. Legal review can improve substantive accuracy but cannot by itself prove cognitive usability. Supervisory titles can identify authority but cannot by themselves prove correction. Each component has value. The failure occurs when the system treats those components as complete evidence of implementation.

This definition also clarifies why the paper treats policy failure as a system problem rather than an individual problem. Officers may misapply Directives for many reasons, including misconduct, poor judgment, weak training, stress, habit, peer norms, or inadequate supervision. Those individual and organizational causes matter. But the Directive system itself may contribute to misapplication when it gives personnel fragmented structure, unstable language, excessive cognitive burden, passive training, weak supervisory triggers, and no meaningful feedback loop. Systems theory supports examining these latent conditions because visible failures often emerge from deeper organizational structures that shaped the conditions under which frontline action occurred (Perrow, 1984, Reason, 1990, Vaughan, 1996).

A Compliance Centered Police Policy System therefore has several identifiable features. It prioritizes proof of policy existence over proof of operational use. It treats standards conformity as evidence of system coherence. It treats distribution as evidence of learning. It treats acknowledgment as evidence of understanding. It treats digital completion as evidence of implementation. It treats legal accuracy as evidence of usability. It treats supervisory authority as evidence of supervisory control. It treats revision dates as evidence of organizational learning. Each assumption may appear reasonable in isolation. Together, they create a policy system that is administratively visible but operationally uncertain.

This section establishes the definitional foundation for the remainder of the paper. The following sections examine the major mechanisms through which compliance centered policy systems fail. Structural fragmentation explains how the Directive architecture becomes incoherent. Linguistic instability explains how obligation signals become unreliable. Policy Cognitive Load explains how structure and language impose excessive processing demands under stress. Passive dissemination explains why policy exposure is mistaken for comprehension.

Supervisory failure explains why implementation drift is not corrected. Digital compliance explains how completion records may amplify the appearance of implementation. Legal analysis explains how these conditions may become evidence of institutional failure when warning signs appear and the agency does not revise, retrain, supervise, discipline, or correct. The central claim is direct: a police agency does not need only compliant Directives. It needs a Directive system that functions as a human centered legal decision system.

III. STRUCTURAL FRAGMENTATION AND THE COMPLIANCE COHERENCE GAP

The first mechanism in a Compliance Centered Police Policy System is structural fragmentation. Fragmentation occurs when a police agency's Directive system appears complete when individual Directives are reviewed separately, but becomes inconsistent, duplicative, misaligned, or unstable when the Directives are examined as an integrated architecture. This distinction is essential because police agencies do not operate through isolated documents. They operate through interdependent Directive systems. A single operational event may implicate use of force, arrest, search and seizure, body worn cameras, evidence handling, medical aid, report writing, supervisory review, internal affairs, discipline, and training. If those Directives do not operate together, the agency may have policy presence without policy coherence.

Prior work in this series identified fragmentation as a predictable result of decentralized policy production rather than a random drafting defect (Bremer, 2024a). In many municipal police agencies, Directives are drafted, revised, inherited, imported, amended, and maintained by multiple actors over time. Command Staff, accreditation personnel, legal advisors, specialized Units, Supervisors, committees, vendors, consultants, and prior administrations may each contribute language to the policy system. Each actor may be competent within a local role. The problem is not necessarily lack of expertise. The problem is that local expertise does not automatically produce system wide coherence. Organizational theory has long recognized that differentiated organizational functions require integration mechanisms when their outputs are interdependent (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, Thompson, 1967). A Directive system with multiple authors and multiple owners therefore requires an architectural control function. Without that function, fragmentation is predictable.

This problem begins with the difference between a policy collection and a policy system. A policy collection is a set of written Directives. A policy system is an integrated architecture of rules, definitions, thresholds, duties, permissions, prohibitions, reporting requirements, supervisory responsibilities, training connections, and corrective feedback. Compliance centered systems tend to evaluate the collection. They ask whether the agency has a policy on the required topic, whether the policy was reviewed, whether it was approved, whether it was distributed, and whether proof exists for accreditation or internal documentation. A human centered legal decision system must evaluate the architecture. It must ask whether related Directives produce one coherent operational answer when Officers and Supervisors must act under pressure.

Public administration scholarship supports this distinction. Cejudo and Michel (2017) distinguish among coordination, coherence, and integration, explaining that government action may contain multiple policy instruments without those instruments operating as an internally coherent system. Trein et al. (2019) similarly show that policy integration requires attention to how policy instruments interact, not merely whether they exist within the same administrative field. Applied to municipal policing, this means an agency may coordinate policies around required accreditation subjects and still fail to integrate the Directives into a coherent operational architecture. The agency may have the required pieces. The pieces may not work together.

This produces the compliance coherence gap. Compliance asks whether required policy content exists. Coherence asks whether the Directive system produces internally consistent guidance across related operational, supervisory, documentation, and accountability domains. Accreditation and compliance review can improve professional structure, require written guidance, and create valuable administrative discipline. The analytical limitation is that standards based validation does not necessarily equal relational coherence testing. A Directive may satisfy a standard and still use a different definition, threshold, sequence, or supervisory duty than a related Directive. As the fragmentation paper argued, compliance can validate policy presence without necessarily detecting cross Directive inconsistency (Bremer, 2024a).

The first fragmentation mechanism is redundancy. Redundancy occurs when the same rule, definition, approval requirement, reporting duty, documentation obligation, or supervisory responsibility appears in multiple Directives. Redundancy is not always harmful. In safety systems, some redundancy may reinforce important expectations or create backup protection (Reason, 1997). The problem is uncontrolled redundancy. When repeated provisions are drafted, revised, and maintained separately, they may begin to differ in wording, scope, timing, threshold, or procedure. One Directive may require immediate notification. Another may require notification before the end of the shift. A form may require information that the Directive does not mention. A training bulletin may describe the same duty differently. The result is not reinforcement. It is multiple versions of organizational authority.

The second mechanism is contradiction. Contradiction occurs when two or more Directives impose incompatible instructions for related circumstances. A contradiction may arise when one policy permits action that another restricts, when one Directive requires Supervisor approval that another does not mention, or when a later legal update is inserted into one Directive while related Directives retain older language. Complex systems theory explains why this can remain hidden. Perrow (1984) argued that system failures often emerge from interactions among components rather than from one defective component viewed alone. In a police Directive system, each individual Directive may appear reasonable when reviewed separately. The contradiction becomes visible only when the Directives are tested together.

The third mechanism is drift. Drift occurs when related Directives gradually separate because they are revised on different timelines or in response to different pressures. A use of force Directive may be revised after a new legal standard, a body worn camera Directive may be revised after a technology change, a reporting Directive may be revised after an accreditation review, and a supervisory review Directive may remain unchanged. No single revision may appear defective. The defect develops across time. Historical institutionalist literature explains this pattern. Pierson (2000) and Mahoney (2000) describe how institutional arrangements become path dependent once actors adapt to existing structures. Streeck and Thelen (2005) describe gradual change through layering and drift, where new rules are added or old structures remain while their environment changes. Police Directive systems are vulnerable to the same process. Old and new policy assumptions begin to coexist.

The fourth mechanism is layering. Layering occurs when new rules, exceptions, definitions, reporting duties, review requirements, or procedural additions are placed on top of existing Directives without reconstructing the surrounding architecture. This is common in compliance centered systems because adding language is faster than rebuilding the system. A lawsuit produces one addition. An Attorney General Directive produces another. An accreditation standard produces another. A critical incident review produces another. Each addition may be rational in isolation. Over time, the Directive becomes dense, uneven, and harder to use. Meyer

and Rowan (1977) explain that formal structures often serve legitimacy functions by demonstrating conformity to institutional expectations. In the police policy context, added language may show responsiveness while also increasing complexity when it is not integrated into the total Directive system.

The fifth mechanism is misalignment. Misalignment occurs when related Directives do not directly contradict each other but fail to coordinate definitions, duties, thresholds, reporting sequences, supervisory responsibilities, documentation standards, or review processes. Misalignment is often more difficult to detect than contradiction because nothing in the system appears expressly incompatible. The Directives simply do not fit together. A use of force Directive may define a reportable force event one way. A Supervisor review Directive may organize review around another trigger. A body worn camera Directive may require activation based on a different threshold. An internal affairs procedure may classify the event differently. Each rule may be defensible in its own context. The system still fails to produce one coordinated operational pathway.

These mechanisms interact. Redundancy creates multiple locations where later contradictions can develop. Drift allows old and new assumptions to separate over time. Layering adds new material without reconciling existing material. Misalignment hides system incoherence because the Directives appear to address separate subjects even when they govern the same event. This is why fragmentation should be treated as a system property rather than a drafting inconvenience. The defect exists in the relationships among documents, not merely inside one sentence or one paragraph. Systems theory supports this understanding because latent conditions often remain embedded in organizational structures until operational pressure exposes them (Perrow, 1984, Reason, 1990).

Fragmentation also persists because approved policy language acquires institutional legitimacy. Once a Directive has been adopted, signed, published, trained, mapped to accreditation, or used as proof of compliance, the organization may treat it as valid because it has already passed through a formal process. That legitimacy can stabilize the language even when the language is structurally misaligned with related Directives. Meyer and Rowan (1977) describe formal structures as legitimacy bearing arrangements that may become loosely coupled from actual operational practice. In municipal policing, a Directive may therefore continue to function as proof of institutional compliance even after its relationship to the rest of the policy system has degraded.

Fragmentation can also scale across agencies through borrowing, templates, model policies, vendor libraries, accreditation examples, and prior agency language. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explain that organizations within a field tend to become more similar through coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures. In policing, agencies often look to model policies, accredited agencies, consultants, professional associations, and vendor systems because policy development is legally demanding and administratively burdensome. Borrowing can improve professionalization. It can also reproduce structural weakness if imported provisions are inserted without architectural integration. The issue is not whether external policy materials are improper. The issue is whether they are rebuilt into the receiving agency's Directive architecture.

This scaling problem is closely related to the instructional systems failure framework. Prior work in this series described Architectural Replication Failure as the process by which structurally limited policy models are reproduced across agencies before being redesigned for instructional usability, cognitive load, training alignment, and operational retrieval (Bremer, 2025a). That concept is important because it prevents the analysis from becoming purely local. Similar policy

problems may appear across agencies not because every agency makes the same individual drafting mistake, but because agencies often inherit similar production models. Compliance centered architecture can be copied. Fragmentation can be imported. Drift can begin before the local agency ever revises the language.

The operational consequence is inconsistent formal guidance. Officers and Supervisors may face a Directive system that requires them to reconcile overlapping rules at the point of action or review. The burden of integration shifts from the architecture to the user. This is particularly dangerous in high liability areas because the Officer may be operating under stress while the Supervisor later evaluates conduct through a policy system that does not provide one stable standard. Written policy is supposed to structure discretion and create reviewable expectations (Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018). Fragmentation weakens that function because the standard becomes distributed, uneven, or internally unstable.

The legal consequence is equally important, although it must be stated carefully. Fragmentation does not automatically create municipal liability. Monell liability requires municipal fault and causation, and failure to train or failure to supervise claims require more than proof that the agency could have written a better policy (Board of County Commissioners v. Brown, 1997, City of Canton v. Harris, 1989, Connick v. Thompson, 2011). But fragmented Directives may become relevant when they help explain why Officers were not given coherent guidance, why Supervisors applied standards inconsistently, why training did not match policy, or why repeated warning signs failed to produce correction. In that setting, fragmentation may become evidence that the policy system did not operate as a functioning constitutional control structure.

The central point is that structural fragmentation precedes the other failures analyzed in this paper. Before the Officer experiences cognitive load, before modal verbs distort perceived obligation, before passive dissemination fails to validate comprehension, and before digital systems record completion, the Directive architecture may already be unstable. If the system itself contains redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment, then downstream training and supervision are being asked to operationalize incoherence. A training unit cannot easily teach a system that does not speak with one voice. A Supervisor cannot consistently enforce a standard that appears differently across Directives. A digital platform cannot cure fragmentation by storing it more efficiently.

A human centered legal decision system must therefore begin with architectural coherence. The agency must know which Directives interact, which definitions control, which thresholds trigger action, which duties belong to Officers, which duties belong to Supervisors, which documentation requirements apply, and which review processes follow. The Directive system must be designed as an integrated operating structure rather than an accumulated policy archive. Compliance remains necessary, but coherence is what makes compliance usable.

The compliance coherence gap is therefore the first major failure of the Compliance Centered Police Policy System. The agency may be able to prove that it has policies. It may be able to prove that those policies correspond to standards. It may be able to prove that the policies were distributed. But if related Directives do not operate together as one coherent legal decision system, the agency has not solved the policy problem. It has preserved policy presence while leaving policy function unresolved.

IV. LINGUISTIC INSTABILITY AND DECISION SIGNAL FAILURE

The second mechanism in a Compliance Centered Police Policy System is linguistic instability. Structural fragmentation explains how the Directive architecture becomes incoherent across documents. Linguistic instability explains how the words inside those Directives fail to communicate stable operational meaning. This matters because police policy language does not merely describe organizational expectations. It functions as the immediate interface between formal authority and human action. The words used in a Directive tell Officers what is mandatory, what is prohibited, what is permitted, what is expected, what must be justified, and what Supervisors must review. When that language is unstable, the Directive system becomes unstable at the point where policy is supposed to become conduct.

Prior work in this series argued that modal verbs in police Directives function as decision triggers rather than stylistic choices (Bremer, 2024b). Terms such as must, must not, may, and should communicate different levels of obligation and discretion. Must signals a mandatory duty. Must not signals a prohibition. May signals authorized discretion. Should signals expected practice unless circumstances justify deviation. These distinctions are not academic. They determine how an Officer classifies the rule at the point of decision. A Directive that uses obligation language inconsistently does not merely read poorly. It distorts the perceived level of duty imposed by the agency.

Legal interpretation scholarship supports this point. Scalia and Garner (2012) recognized that words of obligation and permission carry substantive interpretive consequences in legal texts. Tiersma (1999) similarly explained that legal language often generates interpretive difficulty when formal terms are used inconsistently or without clear drafting discipline. Federal plain language drafting guidance has long discouraged unclear modal usage, especially the traditional use of shall where must provides a clearer statement of obligation (Office of the Federal Register, 2017). The lesson for police Directives is direct. When the agency intends to impose a mandatory duty, the language should say so clearly. When the agency intends to permit discretion, the language should say so clearly. When the agency intends to establish a preferred practice that allows justified deviation, the language should communicate that status consistently.

This distinction becomes especially important in operational policing because Officers do not interpret Directive language under courtroom conditions. They interpret policy through training memory, supervisory reinforcement, local practice, and rapid recognition during encounters marked by uncertainty, stress, incomplete information, and compressed time. Cognitive Load Theory explains that ambiguity increases extraneous cognitive load by forcing the user to devote working memory to interpreting the instruction rather than performing the task (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988). Police decision making research likewise shows that personnel operating under pressure often rely on recognition based judgment and accessible schemas rather than slow analytical reasoning (Kahneman, 2011, Klein, 1998). If the Directive does not provide a stable obligation signal before the encounter, the Officer may be forced to resolve the meaning of the rule during the encounter.

The first form of linguistic instability is modal inconsistency. Modal inconsistency occurs when a Directive uses different obligation words to describe the same level of expected conduct. For example, one section may state that an Officer shall notify a Supervisor, another may state that the Officer should notify a Supervisor, and a related section may state that the Officer may notify a Supervisor. If the agency intended the same duty in all three places, the language has created three different signals. If the agency intended different levels of obligation, the Directive has failed unless it clearly explains why the duty changes. In either case, the Officer must infer the intended obligation level. That inference increases interpretive variability.

Modal inconsistency also creates supervisory instability. Supervisors evaluate conduct against the Directive language. If the language does not clearly establish whether an action was mandatory, discretionary, or expected, the Supervisor must interpret both the rule and the conduct. This increases the risk of inconsistent review across shifts, Units, and incidents. One Supervisor may treat a should provision as a strong expectation requiring justification for noncompliance. Another may treat the same term as advisory. One Supervisor may treat a may provision as broad discretion. Another may read it as conditional permission. The policy system then fails to provide stable review criteria. Organizational control depends on clear standards, and unclear standards weaken the ability to enforce expectations consistently (March & Simon, 1958, Simon, 1947).

The second form of linguistic instability is vague qualification. A Directive may appear to impose a clear duty but then weaken that duty with language such as when feasible, when practical, if possible, as appropriate, or when circumstances permit. Such qualifiers are sometimes necessary. Police work occurs in variable conditions, and some rules must preserve operational judgment. The problem arises when qualifiers are used without defining who decides feasibility, what facts justify deviation, whether deviation must be documented, and what standard Supervisors must use during review. In that setting, the qualifier does not clarify discretion. It transfers the burden of rule construction to the Officer and the Supervisor after the fact.

This transfer of interpretive burden is especially dangerous in high liability Directives. Use of force, vehicle pursuits, search and seizure, prisoner handling, duty to intervene, body worn camera activation, domestic violence response, and mental health encounters often require immediate judgment. When a Directive says that an Officer should take an action when feasible, the policy must define the operational meaning of feasibility. Does feasibility depend on safety, distance, number of Officers, active resistance, environmental hazard, medical emergency, command direction, or time available? If the Directive does not answer that question, then Officers may develop different thresholds for the same duty. The result is not individualized judgment within a clear policy framework. It is interpretive drift created by unclear language.

The third form of linguistic instability is undefined or variably defined terminology. Police Directives often rely on terms such as reasonable, immediate, necessary, threat, serious injury, active resistance, supervisory notification, reportable force, intervention, de escalation, exigent circumstances, and custodial care. Some of these terms carry legal meaning. Others carry operational meaning. Some carry both. If the Directive does not define the term, or defines the same term differently across related Directives, the language becomes unstable. The Officer may apply the term based on prior training, local practice, peer norms, or personal experience. The Supervisor may evaluate the same term differently during review. The agency may then discover during litigation or audit that its own policy language did not produce one shared understanding.

Sensemaking theory helps explain this process. Weick (1995) argued that individuals construct meaning from organizational cues when operating in ambiguous situations. In the absence of clear signals, personnel rely on context, experience, and local interpretation to decide what the organization expects. That is precisely what unstable Directive language invites. If the policy does not clearly communicate the duty, personnel must make sense of the duty in context. In policing, that sensemaking occurs not only during calm review, but during encounters where action, safety, law, and accountability converge. The Directive should reduce ambiguity before the event. It should not require personnel to solve the agency's drafting problem during the event.

The fourth form of linguistic instability is inconsistent hierarchy. A Directive may contain general principles, mandatory duties, discretionary factors, exceptions, supervisory requirements, and documentation rules without clearly identifying which provision controls when they interact. For example, a pursuit Directive may state that Officers may pursue under certain conditions, should consider listed risk factors, must terminate when danger outweighs the need for immediate apprehension, and must comply with Supervisor termination orders. If the hierarchy is not clear, the Officer may not know which provision controls when factors compete. A human centered legal decision system should make hierarchy explicit. Prohibitions should be unmistakable. Mandatory termination triggers should be separated from discretionary considerations. Supervisor authority should be clearly stated. Documentation duties should follow the decision pathway.

This hierarchy problem also affects training. Training cannot easily convert unstable language into stable operational schemas. Recognition based decision making depends on recognizable cues and established response patterns (Klein, 1998). If the Directive uses inconsistent verbs, undefined qualifiers, and unclear hierarchy, the training unit must either teach the ambiguity, simplify the policy informally, or create operational rules that are clearer than the written Directive. Each option creates risk. Teaching the ambiguity preserves confusion. Simplifying informally may produce a gap between training and policy. Creating clearer training rules may improve field performance but leave the written Directive behind. The better solution is to write the Directive so that the decision signals are stable enough to train.

The fifth form of linguistic instability is passive or indirect responsibility language. Legacy Directives often state that certain actions should occur, reports should be completed, Supervisors should be notified, or reviews should be conducted, without clearly assigning responsibility. This wording weakens organizational control because it does not identify who must act. A Directive designed as a legal decision system should identify the actor. The Officer must notify. The Supervisor must review. The Watch Commander must determine. The Training Function must assign remedial instruction. The Internal Affairs Function must refer identified policy confusion for review. Responsibility should not be implied when operational accountability depends on knowing who owns the duty.

The operational consequence of linguistic instability is decision signal failure. Decision signal failure occurs when the Directive does not reliably communicate the level of obligation attached to an action. The Officer therefore cannot quickly classify the rule as mandatory, prohibited, discretionary, or expected. The Supervisor cannot consistently classify the conduct as compliant, justified deviation, or violation. The training unit cannot reliably convert the language into scenario based instruction. The legal reviewer cannot easily show that the agency communicated a clear standard. The policy language has failed as a decision system even if the topic is covered and the document appears complete.

Decision signal failure also expands discretion unintentionally. Police discretion is unavoidable and often necessary. The issue is not whether Officers should have discretion. The issue is whether the agency controls the boundaries of discretion. Street level bureaucracy scholarship recognizes that frontline personnel exercise discretion under institutional and practical constraints (Lipsky, 1980). A well written Directive structures that discretion by defining prohibited conduct, mandatory duties, permissible options, and expected practices. Unstable language does the opposite. It expands discretion by making the boundaries harder to identify. The Officer is not merely choosing within agency defined discretion. The Officer is helping define the scope of the rule.

This is why linguistic instability must be understood as a system defect rather than a grammar problem. In ordinary writing, imprecise language may reduce clarity. In police Directives, imprecise language may alter authority, duty, discretion, supervision, training, discipline, and legal defensibility. The Directive is not a narrative document. It is a control instrument. It must communicate legal and operational meaning with enough precision that similarly situated personnel derive the same obligation from the same language. If different Officers can reasonably read the same provision and reach different conclusions about whether action is required, permitted, or discouraged, the policy system has introduced variability into the decision environment.

The legal consequence must again be stated carefully. Ambiguous language does not automatically create municipal liability. Constitutional liability requires more than proof that better drafting was possible. *Monell, City of Canton, Connick, and Brown* require municipal fault, notice where applicable, causation, and a close connection between the institutional deficiency and the injury (*Board of County Commissioners v. Brown, 1997, City of Canton v. Harris, 1989, Connick v. Thompson, 2011, Monell v. Department of Social Services, 1978*). But unstable language may become relevant when it helps show that the agency failed to give clear guidance on a recurring constitutional decision point, failed to train the standard, failed to supervise application, or failed to correct confusion after warning signs appeared. In that setting, language becomes evidence of system design.

A human centered legal decision system should therefore use controlled obligation language. Must should be reserved for mandatory duties. Must not should be reserved for prohibitions. May should be used for authorized discretion. Should should be used for expected practice that permits justified deviation. Qualifiers should be defined where they affect high liability decisions. Terms should be consistent across related Directives. Responsibility should be assigned to specific actors. Hierarchy should be clear. Exceptions should be separated from rules. Documentation duties should be tied to decision points. Supervisory review standards should match the Officer duties being reviewed.

This approach does not make Directives simplistic. It makes them operationally disciplined. Some police decisions are legally and factually complex, and Directives must sometimes preserve judgment. But preserving judgment is not the same as tolerating vague drafting. A well designed Directive can preserve discretion while still making the type, scope, conditions, and documentation of discretion clear. It can tell Officers where judgment exists and where it does not. It can tell Supervisors what must be reviewed and what must be corrected. It can tell trainers what decision signals must be reinforced. It can tell the agency what evidence is needed to prove implementation.

Linguistic instability therefore functions as the bridge between structural fragmentation and cognitive overload. Fragmentation makes the Directive architecture unstable across documents. Linguistic instability makes the decision signal unstable inside the document. Together, they require Officers and Supervisors to interpret the system rather than apply it. The next mechanism follows from that burden. When the policy system is fragmented and the language does not produce stable obligation signals, the Directive imposes unnecessary cognitive load on the personnel required to use it. Under operational stress, that load can degrade comprehension, recall, recognition, and lawful decision making.

V. POLICY COGNITIVE LOAD AND DIRECTIVE MISAPPLICATION

The third mechanism in a Compliance Centered Police Policy System is Policy Cognitive Load. Structural fragmentation explains how the Directive system becomes incoherent across documents. Linguistic instability explains how the words inside a Directive fail to communicate stable obligation signals. Policy Cognitive Load explains how those defects become operational misapplication. The failure occurs because Officers and Supervisors do not process Directives as static documents. They process policy as information under conditions of limited working memory, uncertainty, time pressure, stress, competing cues, and operational risk.

Prior work in this series defined police Directives as cognitive input systems rather than mere administrative artifacts (Bremer, 2025b). This framing is necessary because a Directive imposes processing demands on the personnel who must use it. A Directive may require the Officer to identify a legal threshold, distinguish mandatory action from discretionary authority, recognize exceptions, apply reporting requirements, notify a Supervisor, document facts, preserve evidence, and comply with related Directives. When these requirements are clear, stable, and integrated, they can support operational judgment. When they are fragmented, ambiguous, dense, cross referenced, or structurally inconsistent, they increase cognitive burden at the point of use.

Cognitive Load Theory provides the foundation for understanding this mechanism. Human working memory is limited when processing novel, complex, or interacting information, while long term memory supports performance through schemas that organize information into usable patterns (Baddeley, 1992, Cowan, 2001, Sweller, 1988, Sweller et al., 1998). Cognitive Load Theory distinguishes intrinsic load, which arises from the inherent complexity of the task, from extraneous load, which is created by the way information is designed and presented, and germane load, which supports schema construction and meaningful learning (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller et al., 1998). This distinction is central to police policy. Police work is inherently complex. The question is whether the Directive system adds unnecessary complexity that interferes with decision making.

Policy Cognitive Load is the cognitive burden imposed by Directive structure, fragmentation, ambiguity, terminology instability, branching complexity, cross reference dependency, information density, redundancy, and policy training misalignment during interpretation, recall, and operational decision making. It is not the same as the inherent difficulty of policing. A domestic violence call, vehicle pursuit, use of force encounter, search decision, mental health crisis, or prisoner handling event may be intrinsically difficult. A well designed Directive cannot eliminate that difficulty. It can, however, reduce unnecessary interpretive burden by clearly defining decision thresholds, duties, prohibitions, discretion, documentation, supervisory review, and follow up. A poorly designed Directive does the opposite. It adds extraneous load.

The first load inducing condition is structural inconsistency. When related Directives use different definitions, thresholds, terminology, reporting duties, or supervisory responsibilities, the Officer must reconcile the policy system before applying it. That burden may be manageable during classroom review, but it becomes much less manageable under operational pressure. The fragmentation paper identified redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment as structural mechanisms that destabilize Directive architecture (Bremer, 2024a). In cognitive terms, those mechanisms force the user to integrate multiple unstable elements at the same time. Working memory research shows that performance degrades when interacting elements exceed processing capacity (Baddeley, 1992, Cowan, 2001). A fragmented Directive system therefore increases cognitive load before the Officer ever reaches the specific field decision.

The second load inducing condition is ambiguity. Ambiguity requires interpretation. When policy language does not clearly define the rule, threshold, actor, exception, or level of obligation, the Officer must supply meaning from context, experience, training memory, or local practice. That process consumes cognitive resources. The modal verbs paper described this problem as decision signal failure, where inconsistent use of must, may, should, and related qualifiers distorts the perceived level of obligation (Bremer, 2024b). Cognitive Load Theory explains why that matters. Ambiguity increases extraneous load because the user must devote working memory to resolving uncertainty created by the policy's presentation rather than by the operational task itself (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988).

Ambiguity also produces interpretive divergence. Different Officers may resolve the same unclear language differently. One Officer may treat should as a strong obligation requiring justification for deviation. Another may treat it as a weak recommendation. One Supervisor may treat when feasible as a narrow safety exception. Another may treat it as broad discretionary language. Decision science has long shown that uncertainty often leads individuals to rely on heuristics, prior experience, and context dependent judgment (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011, Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). In policing, that means ambiguous Directive language can produce different actions from Officers who are attempting to follow the same policy.

The third load inducing condition is policy complexity. Complexity increases when a Directive contains multiple conditions, exceptions, cross references, definitions, approval rules, reporting requirements, and supervisory review steps that must be processed together. Some complexity is unavoidable because policing involves law, discretion, constitutional standards, safety concerns, and case specific facts. The problem is not complexity itself. The problem is unmanaged complexity. A complex Directive can be cognitively usable if it is organized around clear decision pathways and stable schemas. A less lengthy Directive can still be cognitively difficult if it is vague, poorly sequenced, or structurally inconsistent.

Complexity becomes operationally dangerous when it disrupts recognition based decision making. Klein's recognition primed decision model explains that experienced personnel in time constrained environments often make decisions by recognizing patterns and matching them to workable responses rather than comparing options through slow formal analysis (Klein, 1998, Klein, 2008). Police Officers frequently operate in precisely those conditions. They must act while information is incomplete and events are changing. If the Directive system cannot be internalized into stable schemas, the Officer may be forced to analyze policy during the encounter. That is usually the wrong moment for policy reconstruction.

The fourth load inducing condition is information density. Information density occurs when a Directive compresses too much legal, procedural, operational, supervisory, and documentation material into a single processing space. Dense policy language may appear thorough because it contains many requirements, but thoroughness is not the same as usability. Human factors research shows that dense and poorly structured information environments increase workload, reduce attention, and increase error risk (Wickens, 2008, Wickens et al., 2015). In police policy, dense provisions may cause Officers to remember a general rule while omitting exceptions, conditions, reporting triggers, or supervisory notification requirements. The result may be partial compliance rather than policy fidelity.

The fifth load inducing condition is redundancy. Redundancy may support reinforcement when deliberately designed, but uncontrolled redundancy increases load when repeated provisions differ across Directives. The user must process multiple versions of the same duty and decide whether the differences matter. If a reporting requirement appears in a use of force Directive,

body worn camera Directive, supervisory review Directive, and internal affairs Directive, but each version is worded differently, the Officer and Supervisor must reconcile the variations. This is not useful redundancy. It is extraneous load.

These conditions interact rather than operate separately. A Directive may be complex but usable if written clearly and integrated with related Directives. Ambiguity becomes more damaging when combined with complexity. Redundancy becomes more damaging when repeated language drifts over time. Structural inconsistency becomes more damaging when training materials simplify the policy differently than the written Directive. Policy Cognitive Load therefore accumulates. It is the combined burden produced by the architecture, language, organization, training alignment, and operational context of the policy system.

The cognitive consequences follow a predictable pathway. Excessive load first produces reduced comprehension. When working memory cannot hold and integrate all relevant elements, the Officer may understand some parts of the Directive while missing others. This is especially likely when the policy contains multiple interacting requirements. Reduced comprehension may not feel like confusion. The Officer may believe the rule is understood because a familiar portion of the policy was recognized. But recognition of a general concept is not the same as accurate operational comprehension. The cognitive load paper described this as fragmented understanding caused by working memory saturation (Bremer, 2025b).

The second consequence is impaired recall. Officers do not carry the manual into most field encounters. They carry memory. If the Directive has not been converted into stable schemas through coherent writing, training, retrieval, and reinforcement, the relevant rule may not be available when needed. Retrieval failure is not merely a training problem. It is also a policy architecture problem. A Directive that is too fragmented, ambiguous, or dense is harder to encode and retrieve. Cognitive science supports this point because durable performance depends on schema construction and accessible long term memory structures (Chi et al., 1981, Sweller et al., 1998). If the policy system does not support schema formation, field application becomes less reliable.

The third consequence is schema disruption. A schema is a structured mental model that allows a person to process complex information efficiently. In policing, a usable policy schema might tell an Officer: this conduct is prohibited, this condition requires Supervisor notification, this force level requires a report, this exception must be documented, and this event triggers review. Structural inconsistency disrupts schema formation because the policy system does not present stable patterns. Ambiguous language disrupts schema activation because the Officer cannot quickly classify the duty. Excessive branching disrupts schema use because too many conditional paths compete at once. The result is not simply poor memory. It is breakdown of the policy as an operational decision model.

The fourth consequence is interpretive divergence. When comprehension is incomplete, recall is impaired, and schemas are unstable, different Officers may apply the same Directive differently. One Officer may prioritize officer safety. Another may prioritize de escalation. One may interpret a threshold as mandatory. Another may view it as discretionary. One may document because training emphasized documentation. Another may omit documentation because the Directive did not clearly connect the event to a reporting trigger. These variations may be treated after the fact as individual judgment differences. The synthesis advanced here argues that some of that variation is structurally induced by the policy system itself.

The fifth consequence is heuristic substitution. When formal policy is too complex, ambiguous, or inaccessible to apply in the moment, personnel may rely on simpler substitutes. Those substitutes may include prior practice, informal norms, field training memory, peer behavior, Supervisor preference, experience based rules, or perceived agency culture. Heuristics are not always wrong. They are often necessary in time compressed environments. The problem arises when informal heuristics replace formal legal decision architecture. If Officers must rely on informal substitutes because the Directive system is not cognitively usable, policy fidelity has already weakened.

The sixth consequence is decision delay. Some policies fail by allowing too much action. Others fail by creating hesitation. When an Officer cannot quickly determine what the Directive requires, permits, or prohibits, the Officer may pause, reassess, seek clarification, or delay action. In some contexts, delay may be appropriate. In others, delay may increase risk to the Officer, another person, or the public. The problem is not that Directives should force automatic action. The problem is that high liability Directives should define decision triggers clearly enough that Officers are not required to solve avoidable policy ambiguity during an urgent event.

Operational stress amplifies all of these effects. Stress narrows attention, reduces cognitive flexibility, and increases reliance on dominant responses or familiar patterns (Easterbrook, 1959, Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). High workload also reduces the ability to allocate attention across multiple tasks (Wickens, 2008). In police encounters, the Officer may be processing danger, movement, radio traffic, citizen statements, partner location, legal thresholds, tactical options, and policy obligations at the same time. The effective capacity available for Directive interpretation is therefore reduced. A policy that might be understandable in a classroom can become unusable under stress if it requires excessive real time processing.

This is why the synthesis paper treats Directive misapplication as a human performance problem embedded in policy architecture. Misapplication is not always willful refusal to follow the rule. It may be the predictable outcome of a policy system that imposes more cognitive burden than the operational environment permits. Reason's work on human error is instructive because it distinguishes active failures from latent conditions embedded in systems (Reason, 1990, Reason, 2000). In this framework, an Officer's field error may be the visible endpoint of a deeper policy architecture failure. The Directive system may have created latent cognitive conditions that increased the probability of omission, misinterpretation, delay, or substitution.

This does not eliminate individual responsibility. Officers remain responsible for lawful conduct. Supervisors remain responsible for review and correction. Agencies remain responsible for training and discipline. The point is not to excuse misconduct. The point is to identify an underexamined source of predictable failure. A system that repeatedly produces misapplication across personnel, shifts, Units, or incidents should not explain every event only through individual deficiency. Human factors research asks whether the task environment made error more likely (Wickens et al., 2015). In police policy, the Directive system is part of that task environment.

Policy Cognitive Load also explains why compliance centered reform can fail. When an incident occurs, agencies often add more policy language. They add another factor, another reporting step, another review requirement, another definition, another cross reference, another exception, or another acknowledgment assignment. Each addition may respond to a real problem. But if the additions are layered onto an already fragmented system, they may increase extraneous load. The agency becomes more compliant on paper while making the policy harder

to retrieve and apply. The Instructional Systems Failure paper described this as a central feature of compliance accretion and Policy Architecture Drift (Bremer, 2025a).

A human centered legal decision system must therefore manage cognitive load intentionally. It should reduce unnecessary fragmentation by consolidating related duties. It should stabilize terminology across Directives. It should control obligation language. It should separate prohibitions, mandatory duties, permitted discretion, expected practices, exceptions, and documentation requirements. It should make decision thresholds visible. It should align policy structure with training structure. It should use consistent sequences so Officers and Supervisors can form stable schemas. It should reduce unnecessary cross reference dependency. It should convert high liability Directives into usable decision pathways.

The goal is not to make policy simplistic. The goal is to make policy cognitively compatible with the conditions under which it must be used. Some police decisions will always require judgment. Some legal standards will always require case specific analysis. Some operational situations will always be ambiguous. But the Directive system should not add avoidable ambiguity, unstable structure, and unnecessary processing burden to already difficult decisions. Policy should reduce uncertainty where it can, define discretion where it must remain, and preserve reviewable standards after the event.

Policy Cognitive Load is therefore the central bridge in the integrated causal model. Structural fragmentation creates incoherent architecture. Linguistic instability weakens decision signals. Those defects increase cognitive burden. Elevated burden degrades comprehension, recall, schema activation, recognition based decision making, and consistent application. The result is Directive misapplication that may appear as individual error but may partly originate in the policy system itself. This mechanism connects written policy to field performance. It shows why compliance centered policy systems may appear complete while failing the human beings required to use them under operational stress.

VI. POLICY AS COGNITIVE OPERATING ARCHITECTURE UNDER STRESS

The prior section explained how fragmented structure and unstable language increase Policy Cognitive Load. This section extends that argument by treating policy as cognitive operating architecture under stress. A Directive does not merely tell personnel what the agency expects. It shapes how personnel perceive an event, classify risk, assign responsibility, communicate information, identify decision thresholds, prioritize action, and justify conduct after the fact. In that sense, policy is not only an administrative record. It is part of the operating system through which personnel convert uncertainty into lawful action.

This point is especially important in high risk encounters. Operational stress changes the way policy is used. Officers and protective personnel do not usually pause during a critical incident to interpret policy from the beginning. They act from prior training, mental models, rehearsed expectations, recognizable cues, role assignments, and supervisory commands. Policy architecture either supports those processes or interferes with them. A Directive system that creates clear roles, stable language, prioritized actions, and recognizable decision triggers reduces cognitive burden. A Directive system that leaves unresolved variables, unclear roles, vague thresholds, fragmented communications, and excessive branching conditions increases cognitive burden at the moment when cognitive resources are already constrained.

The cross domain paper in this research series argued that recent presidential protection failures illustrate the same cognitive mechanism that appears in municipal policing: operational

systems degrade when unresolved uncertainty, role ambiguity, fragmented information flow, excessive decision branching, and compressed timelines converge under stress (Bremer, 2026a). The value of that comparison is not that presidential protection and municipal patrol are identical. They are not. The value is that both domains require personnel to process threat information, legal authority, communication demands, role expectations, environmental risk, and timing pressure while making high consequence decisions. If elite protective systems can degrade when cognitive demand exceeds manageable limits, municipal police systems should be examined with even greater attention to Directive architecture because municipal Officers often operate in less controlled, less resourced, and more ambiguous environments.

Situation awareness theory provides the conceptual bridge. Endsley (1995) defined situation awareness as the perception of relevant elements in the environment, comprehension of their meaning, and projection of their future status. Operational failure can occur at any of those stages. Personnel may fail to perceive a relevant cue. They may perceive it but misunderstand its meaning. They may understand it but fail to project what is likely to happen next. Shared situation awareness becomes even harder when multiple actors hold partial information without an effective integration mechanism (Endsley & Garland, 2000). Police Directives therefore matter because they can structure perception, communication, role assignment, and escalation before the incident occurs. If the Directive system does not clarify what information must be transmitted, who assumes command, what conditions trigger action, and what roles exist during multi Officer response, personnel may enter the incident with fragmented operational understanding.

Recognition Primed Decision Making theory adds a second layer. Klein (1998) showed that experienced personnel in time constrained environments often make decisions by recognizing patterns and matching those patterns to plausible responses. This process is fast because it does not require comparing every possible option. But it depends on stable cues, prior experience, and accessible schemas. A Directive system that creates clear decision triggers supports recognition based action. A Directive system that relies on vague balancing language, undefined thresholds, unstable obligation verbs, or excessive conditional pathways weakens recognition because the Officer must interpret the rule while interpreting the event. Under stress, that can produce hesitation, inconsistent action, or reliance on informal practice.

The Butler, Pennsylvania assassination attempt illustrates the operational significance of unresolved variables. Public investigations and reporting identified failures involving site security, communication, coordination, planning, and responsibility allocation before the attack. From a cognitive systems perspective, the most important lesson is that overload did not begin when shots were fired. It accumulated before the visible crisis. An unsecured elevated position, fragmented coordination, unclear responsibility, and incomplete information flow created unresolved variables inside the operational environment. By the time the threat became active, personnel were required to process multiple uncertainties under extreme time compression. Cognitive Load Theory predicts that when multiple interacting elements must be processed simultaneously, working memory becomes vulnerable to overload, especially when unnecessary uncertainty has not been structurally reduced before the event (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988).

That pattern translates directly to municipal policing. Patrol Officers routinely respond to events where important variables are unresolved: who is armed, who is injured, who is the aggressor, who has authority over the scene, what information dispatch has not transmitted, whether the subject is mentally ill, whether force is legally justified, whether de escalation is feasible, whether backup is close, whether civilians are in the background, whether a Supervisor is en

route, and whether the event is being recorded. A well designed Directive system cannot eliminate uncertainty, but it can reduce unnecessary uncertainty by defining operational roles, communication expectations, decision thresholds, and mandatory actions before the encounter begins.

The 2026 White House Correspondents' Dinner attack, as analyzed in the cross domain paper, illustrates the cognitive burden of compressed access environment failure. Once a threat breaches a controlled or credentialed environment, personnel must quickly distinguish legitimate presence from threat behavior, assess weapon status, manage civilian density, coordinate movement, and determine engagement authority. This kind of environment creates severe decision branching complexity because multiple possible interpretations and actions compete simultaneously. In municipal policing, similar branching appears in crowded disturbances, schools, public events, domestic violence calls, traffic stops with passengers, and active threat responses. Officers must sort identity, threat, authority, movement, communication, and legal thresholds at once. If the Directive system adds unclear discretionary language or vague role expectations to that environment, it increases extraneous cognitive load rather than reducing it.

The White House perimeter shooting analysis presents a related problem: late stage threat recognition inside a populated environment. Once the weapon or threat is recognized late, the decision window collapses. Personnel must decide whether to isolate, order compliance, move, pursue, disengage, use force, communicate, or protect civilians, often in seconds. The policy problem is not simply whether a use of force Directive exists. The question is whether the Directive has already created stable decision architecture before that moment. If the policy leaves Officers with broad abstractions and unclear triggers, the Officer must construct the decision pathway during the event. Under time compression, that is a predictable point of failure.

The same problem appears in municipal use of force Directives. Many such Directives contain lawful principles, factors, limitations, reporting duties, de escalation expectations, medical requirements, and supervisory review provisions. The question is whether those provisions are organized into usable decision architecture. A high stress encounter does not permit the Officer to process a long undifferentiated list of equal considerations. The Directive should identify what is prohibited, what is mandatory, what factors guide discretion, what conditions require disengagement or repositioning where feasible, what conditions require Supervisor notification, and what must be documented after the event. This structure does not eliminate discretion. It makes discretion more legally and cognitively stable.

Communication architecture is one of the most important parts of policy as cognitive operating architecture. Fragmented communication degrades shared situation awareness. In multi Officer events, different personnel may arrive with different facts, different assumptions, different roles, and different risk perceptions. If the Directive does not standardize what must be communicated, who establishes command, how threat updates are transmitted, when roles shift, and what information Supervisors must obtain, each Officer may construct an independent operational picture. That increases the risk of inconsistent action. Policy should therefore define communication duties as operational controls, not merely administrative preferences.

Role architecture is equally important. Role ambiguity increases cognitive burden because personnel must determine who owns the decision while also processing the event. In protective operations, uncertainty about responsibility for a security zone, threat observation point, or screening layer can delay action. In municipal policing, role ambiguity appears when multiple Officers respond to a scene but no one clearly owns communication, contact, cover, command,

less lethal options, arrest control, perimeter, medical aid, or evidence preservation. Directives should not assume role clarity. They should create it. A human centered Directive system should identify default roles and transition rules when Supervisors arrive, when specialized Units respond, or when the event escalates.

Decision trigger architecture connects language to action. A decision trigger is a recognizable condition that tells personnel when a duty, prohibition, permission, notification, report, review, or escalation requirement begins. The modal verbs paper showed that must, may, and should operate as obligation signals (Bremer, 2024b). Under stress, those signals should be tied to concrete triggers. A Directive that states that Officers should notify a Supervisor when appropriate leaves the trigger undefined. A Directive that states that an Officer must notify a Supervisor when force results in injury, complaint of injury, visible injury, use of a weapon, allegation of excessive force, or any circumstance requiring command review provides a decision point. The second form reduces interpretive burden.

This does not mean every operational situation can be reduced to a checklist. Policing involves discretion, judgment, uncertainty, and context. The point is not to mechanize all police decisions. The point is to identify where policy can reduce unnecessary cognitive uncertainty without eliminating necessary professional judgment. A Directive can preserve discretion while still defining the conditions of discretion. It can state what must never occur, what must occur when certain facts exist, what may occur when legally justified, what should occur absent countervailing circumstances, and what deviation requires documentation. That is not rigid policy. It is structured discretion.

Policy as cognitive operating architecture also clarifies why more policy is not always better policy. When agencies respond to failure by adding additional factors, qualifications, exceptions, cross references, approval steps, and reporting duties without reorganizing the decision pathway, they may increase the very burden that contributed to the original failure. Administrative burden scholarship recognizes that institutional requirements impose learning and compliance costs (Herd & Moynihan, 2019). Cognitive Load Theory explains that unnecessary complexity consumes working memory that could otherwise be used for the primary task (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988). In high stress policing, every added requirement should be evaluated not only for legal or administrative value, but for cognitive cost.

This section also supports the broader claim that policy failure should not be understood only after the incident. By the time hesitation, fragmented communication, inconsistent force, or poor documentation becomes visible, the policy architecture may already have failed. The failure may have occurred earlier when the Directive did not define roles, did not standardize communication, did not establish decision triggers, did not align training with policy, or did not convert legal standards into usable operational schemas. Systems theory supports this point because visible failures often arise from latent conditions embedded in organizational design before the event occurs (Perrow, 1984, Reason, 1990). Directive architecture can be one such latent condition.

The legal significance of this point is indirect but important. Municipal liability does not arise merely because a Directive could have been better written. The legal question requires municipal fault, causation, and the required constitutional threshold (Board of County Commissioners v. Brown, 1997, City of Canton v. Harris, 1989, Connick v. Thompson, 2011). But policy architecture becomes relevant when it helps show that the agency failed to prepare personnel for recurring constitutional decision points, failed to train clear thresholds, failed to supervise field application, or failed to respond after warning signs. A policy system that

increases cognitive overload in known high risk contexts may become part of the evidence that the agency did not build a functioning constitutional control system.

Policy as cognitive operating architecture therefore extends the synthesis beyond document quality. The issue is not whether a Directive is well written in a general sense. The issue is whether the Directive helps personnel manage operational cognition. Does it reduce uncertainty? Does it define roles? Does it prioritize action? Does it stabilize communication? Does it identify decision triggers? Does it clarify when discretion exists and when it ends? Does it support recognition under pressure? Does it give Supervisors clear review criteria? Does it connect the event back to training and correction? These questions evaluate policy as operating architecture rather than as static text.

A human centered legal decision system should be designed around the conditions under which policy will be used. In low stress administrative contexts, a detailed procedural explanation may be sufficient. In high stress operational contexts, the Directive must be built for retrieval, recognition, and review. It must translate legal authority into decision pathways. It must define communication and role structure. It must clarify hierarchy among competing duties. It must reduce avoidable branching. It must support training scenarios and supervisory evaluation. Most importantly, it must reduce cognitive burden where reduction is possible, because the field environment will impose enough burden on its own.

The lesson from this section is direct. Policy is not merely documentation of the agency's legal position. It is a cognitive operating system. If it is designed as a compliance artifact, it may be complete after the fact but unstable during the event. If it is designed as human centered legal decision architecture, it can help personnel perceive, understand, communicate, prioritize, and act under pressure. That distinction is central to the rest of the paper because it explains why passive dissemination is inadequate. A cognitive operating system cannot become operational knowledge merely because it was distributed. It must be trained, retrieved, tested, supervised, corrected, and revised.

VII. PASSIVE DISSEMINATION AND THE FAILURE OF COMPREHENSION VALIDATION

The fourth mechanism in a Compliance Centered Police Policy System is passive dissemination. Structural fragmentation makes the Directive system unstable. Linguistic inconsistency weakens the decision signals inside the Directive. Policy Cognitive Load makes the Directive harder to process under operational conditions. Passive dissemination then compounds those failures by treating policy exposure as policy implementation. The agency sends the Directive, posts the Directive, assigns the Directive, or requires an electronic acknowledgment, but does not determine whether Officers understood, retained, retrieved, and could apply the Directive under field conditions.

Prior work in this series defined passive policy dissemination as organizational implementation methods that emphasize distribution, exposure, or acknowledgment without validating operational comprehension (Bremer, 2025c). Common examples include email distribution, policy portal posting, electronic acknowledgment, learning management system completion, brief roll call notice, or mass document assignment through a digital policy platform. These methods are administratively useful because they create records. They can prove that the agency issued a Directive, that personnel received notice, that an assignment was completed, or that a document was acknowledged. The problem is that those records do not prove learning.

This distinction matters because police Directives are not merely informational notices. They govern constitutional thresholds, discretion, reporting duties, supervisory notification, intervention obligations, documentation requirements, and accountability consequences. A revised use of force Directive, pursuit Directive, search and seizure Directive, body worn camera Directive, prisoner handling Directive, or duty to intervene Directive does not become operationally effective when the agency can prove that Officers received it. It becomes effective when Officers understand the rule, retain the rule, recognize the triggering condition, apply the rule correctly, and can explain or document the decision afterward. Passive dissemination proves exposure. It does not prove operational readiness.

Learning science strongly supports this distinction. Cognitive Load Theory explains that complex information does not become durable knowledge merely because it was presented to the learner. Working memory has limited capacity, and learning depends on whether information is structured and reinforced in a way that supports schema formation (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988, Sweller et al., 1998). Police Directives frequently contain multiple interacting elements, including legal standards, exceptions, definitions, reporting requirements, supervisory duties, and cross references. When agencies distribute those Directives without guided instruction, retrieval, or application, they assume that Officers can independently process and internalize complex legal and operational material. Cognitive Load Theory gives little support for that assumption.

Retrieval practice research makes the problem even clearer. Roediger and Karpicke (2006) demonstrated that active retrieval strengthens long term retention more effectively than passive review. Dunlosky et al. (2013) identified practice testing and distributed practice as among the most effective learning techniques, while passive rereading and review produced weaker durable learning. Bjork and Bjork (2011) similarly explained that effortful retrieval strengthens memory and improves later access to knowledge. These findings matter directly for police policy. An Officer may recognize policy language immediately after reading it and still fail to retrieve the rule weeks later during a stressful encounter. Familiarity is not the same as operational recall.

Passive dissemination also creates a false sense of institutional certainty. A dashboard may show one hundred percent completion. An electronic record may show that all Officers acknowledged the Directive. A learning management system may show that a module was completed. Those records can create an administrative appearance that implementation occurred. But training evaluation literature distinguishes between delivery, learning, behavior, and results (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Delivery means the material was provided. Learning means the person acquired knowledge or skill. Behavior means the learning transferred into job performance. Results concern the organizational outcome. Acknowledgment sits near the delivery level. It does not establish learning, transfer, behavior, or result.

This is why police policy implementation must be understood as a transfer problem. A Directive begins as written policy. It must become usable knowledge. It must then transfer into field behavior. Baldwin and Ford (1988) explained that transfer of training depends on trainee characteristics, training design, and work environment. Blume et al. (2010) further showed that transfer is influenced by individual, instructional, and contextual factors. Applied to municipal policing, this means a Directive does not become operationally meaningful simply because it was issued. It must be taught, practiced, reinforced, supervised, and connected to the conditions under which Officers will use it. A policy that does not transfer into operational judgment remains incomplete as an implementation system.

The problem is most acute in high liability policy areas because those Directives require application under stress. Officers must often retrieve policy while managing uncertainty, citizen behavior, threat indicators, communication demands, time pressure, and safety risks. Kahneman (2011) explained that high pressure conditions increase reliance on fast heuristic processing rather than slow analytical reasoning. Klein (1998) similarly showed that experienced personnel in time constrained environments often rely on recognition based decision making. If the Directive was only passively reviewed, the Officer may not have a strong enough cognitive pathway to retrieve and apply the rule in the moment. Under stress, weakly encoded policy knowledge may give way to habit, local norms, prior experience, or incomplete memory.

Passive dissemination also fails to detect misunderstanding. An Officer may acknowledge a Directive while misunderstanding the duty. A Supervisor may believe a policy was implemented because the acknowledgment record is complete. The Training Function may not know that Officers interpret the same term differently. Command Staff may not know that a newly revised requirement conflicts with established field practice. Without comprehension validation, the agency has limited visibility into what personnel actually understand. Systems theory warns that latent organizational weaknesses often remain hidden until operational stress exposes them (Perrow, 1984, Reason, 1990). Passive dissemination creates precisely that risk because it generates proof of exposure while leaving comprehension invisible.

Comprehension validation is the corrective mechanism. Prior work in this series defined comprehension validation as organizational processes designed to determine whether personnel understand, retain, and can operationally apply policy requirements after dissemination or training (Bremer, 2025c). Validation may include low stakes quizzes, retrieval prompts, scenario exercises, Supervisor questioning, roll call application discussions, report writing review, body camera based policy review, remedial assignments, periodic refreshers, and audits of field application. The defining feature is not the format. The defining feature is that the agency assesses understanding rather than merely recording receipt.

Comprehension validation should not be designed as a punitive memory trap. It should be understood as a feedback mechanism. The point is not to punish Officers for imperfect recall of dense policy language. The point is to identify whether the Directive has become operational knowledge. If Officers misunderstand a rule, the agency learns that clarification, retraining, or policy revision may be needed. If many Officers miss the same question, the problem may not be individual failure. It may be policy design, training design, terminology, supervision, or implementation. Formative assessment improves learning by identifying gaps and guiding correction, and retrieval practice itself strengthens retention (Bjork & Bjork, 2011, Roediger & Karpicke, 2006).

Scenario application is especially important because many police Directives govern judgment rather than rote recall. An Officer may recite a rule but fail to recognize when it applies. A pursuit policy, for example, requires more than knowing that Supervisors must be notified. It requires understanding termination thresholds, danger balancing, communication duties, Supervisor authority, documentation, and post incident review. A use of force policy requires recognizing proportionality, necessity, de escalation opportunities, duty to intervene, medical aid, reporting, and review requirements. Scenario based testing helps determine whether personnel can move from text to judgment. It turns the Directive from information into applied decision architecture.

Distributed reinforcement is also necessary because policy knowledge decays. A single distribution event is weak implementation for complex or high liability material. Cepeda et al.

(2006) found that spaced learning improves retention compared with massed or single exposure learning. Police agencies should therefore treat high liability Directives as knowledge requiring periodic retrieval, not one time acknowledgment. Annual training may be insufficient if the policy governs rare but consequential events. Short recurring refreshers, Supervisor led discussions, brief retrieval checks, and post incident review can strengthen policy fidelity over time.

Passive dissemination also weakens supervision because Supervisors may inherit untested policy understanding. If Officers have only acknowledged a Directive, the Supervisor cannot assume that the rule has been operationally internalized. Supervisors become the field control layer, but they need evidence of what Officers were trained to understand. A comprehension validated system gives Supervisors a stronger basis for review because it identifies the policy concepts that personnel were taught, tested on, corrected on, and expected to apply. Without that system, supervisory review may be based on assumption. The Officer signed. The policy was posted. The assignment cleared. None of those facts proves that the Officer understood the rule being reviewed.

The legal significance of this distinction must be stated carefully. Existing failure to train doctrine does not require police agencies to test every policy update or prove perfect comprehension after every Directive revision. *City of Canton v. Harris* (1989) requires deliberate indifference, and *Connick v. Thompson* (2011) makes clear that failure to train liability is difficult to prove and ordinarily requires notice through a pattern of similar violations. *Board of County Commissioners v. Brown* (1997) further requires a close causal connection between the municipal action or omission and the constitutional injury. The argument here is not that passive dissemination automatically creates liability. The argument is that passive dissemination may weaken the agency's ability to prove meaningful training and preparation when a recurring constitutional decision point is at issue.

That distinction becomes more important after warning signs appear. If Officers repeatedly misapply a Directive, if Supervisors identify confusion, if complaints reveal recurring misunderstandings, if body camera audits show repeated noncompliance, or if litigation exposes a policy application problem, continued reliance on passive dissemination becomes harder to defend as reasonable implementation. Once the agency has notice that exposure is not producing comprehension, the corrective response should move beyond sending the Directive again. It should include clarification, retrieval based training, scenario application, supervisory reinforcement, remedial instruction, documentation, and policy review where needed.

Passive dissemination also interacts with digital compliance. Digital platforms can make dissemination faster, cleaner, and more visible. They can assign Directives, send reminders, track completion, preserve versions, and produce dashboards. Those features are useful, but they can deepen the illusion of implementation if the agency treats completion as learning. The PowerDMS mechanism paper argued that digital policy systems can either support implementation or amplify passivity depending on how the agency uses them (Bremer, n.d.). That insight applies directly here. A digital acknowledgment record is stronger than no record, but it remains incomplete unless connected to training, comprehension verification, supervisory follow up, and correction.

Implementation science reinforces the same point. Adoption is not implementation. Fixsen et al. (2005) argued that effective implementation requires competency drivers, organizational supports, leadership, feedback, and continuous improvement. Durlak and DuPre (2008) found that implementation quality affects outcomes and that organizational capacity, training, and monitoring influence whether programs are carried out effectively. Nilsen (2015) likewise

emphasized that implementation requires mechanisms that translate formal decisions into actual practice. Applied to police policy, adopting a Directive, uploading it, and acknowledging it are implementation inputs. They are not proof of implementation fidelity.

A comprehension validated policy system should therefore contain several basic elements. First, the agency should classify Directives by risk. Low risk administrative notices may require only acknowledgment. High liability Directives should require deeper implementation. Second, material revisions should trigger appropriate training. A minor formatting correction does not require the same response as a change to force, pursuit, search, custody, reporting, or supervisory review. Third, training should include retrieval and application. Fourth, Supervisors should reinforce the Directive in field review. Fifth, repeated errors should trigger remediation and policy review. Sixth, the agency should preserve records showing not only that the Directive was distributed, but that understanding was evaluated and corrected.

This approach improves policy fidelity. Policy fidelity refers to the degree to which field conduct aligns with the intended meaning of the Directive. Fidelity cannot be assumed from policy presence. It depends on comprehension, retention, transfer, supervision, reinforcement, and correction. Passive dissemination weakens fidelity because it leaves the central question unanswered: do personnel actually know how to apply the Directive? A comprehension validated system strengthens fidelity because it generates evidence of learning and identifies gaps before those gaps become operational failures.

The practical objection is that agencies have limited time and resources. That objection is real. Municipal agencies cannot conduct lengthy academy style training every time a Directive changes. The answer is not maximal training for every update. The answer is risk based implementation. High liability, high frequency, legally sensitive, or repeatedly misunderstood Directives require more than acknowledgment. Lower risk administrative updates may not. Comprehension validation should be scalable. It can include brief quizzes, short scenario prompts, Supervisor led discussion, roll call retrieval checks, periodic refreshers, or targeted remediation. The core requirement is proportionality between policy risk and implementation depth.

The synthesis point is direct. A Compliance Centered Police Policy System treats dissemination as an endpoint. A human centered legal decision system treats dissemination as the beginning of implementation. The Directive must be distributed, but then it must be taught, retrieved, applied, supervised, corrected, and revised. The agency must be able to show not merely that Officers were exposed to policy, but that the policy became operational knowledge capable of guiding lawful decision making under stress.

Passive dissemination therefore completes a critical part of the failure chain. Fragmentation creates incoherent Directive architecture. Linguistic instability weakens obligation signals. Policy Cognitive Load makes the Directive harder to process and retrieve. Passive dissemination then fails to verify whether personnel overcame those burdens. The result is a policy system that may look administratively complete while leaving the agency uncertain about whether Officers understand the rules they are expected to apply. That uncertainty is not a minor training gap. It is a system level implementation failure.

VIII. SUPERVISORY FAILURE AND THE MISSING CONTROL LAYER

The fifth mechanism in a Compliance Centered Police Policy System is supervisory failure. Structural fragmentation creates incoherent Directive architecture. Linguistic instability weakens

obligation signals. Policy Cognitive Load makes the Directive harder to process under operational stress. Passive dissemination then leaves comprehension unverified. Supervisory failure completes the implementation gap by allowing misunderstanding, drift, inconsistent practice, and weak policy fidelity to persist after the Directive enters the field. In a functioning policy system, supervision is not an administrative afterthought. It is the organizational control layer that converts written policy into observed, reviewed, corrected, and documented practice (Bremer, 2026b, Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018).

A police Directive that tells Officers what to do but does not tell Supervisors what to review, document, correct, escalate, or refer is incomplete as an organizational control system. Officer duties and Supervisor duties are different but interdependent. The Officer must act lawfully in the field. The Supervisor must evaluate whether the action complied with policy, whether the decision was properly documented, whether corrective action is needed, whether training gaps appeared, whether a pattern is developing, and whether the Directive itself requires revision. Prior work in this series argued that legacy Directives often fail by stating an Officer rule while remaining silent on the supervisory mechanisms required to make the rule function (Bremer, 2026b). That silence is not a minor drafting omission. It weakens implementation.

The reason is straightforward. Policy does not enforce itself. Written rules require a supervisory structure capable of detecting noncompliance, correcting misunderstanding, identifying repeated errors, documenting intervention, and feeding lessons back into training and revision. Police accountability scholarship recognizes that supervision is central to controlling discretion and maintaining organizational accountability because frontline police work occurs in dispersed environments where Officers exercise substantial judgment (Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018). Street level bureaucracy literature similarly shows that frontline actors interpret formal rules under practical constraints, which makes supervisory reinforcement necessary if organizational standards are to remain connected to field behavior (Lipsky, 1980, Maynard Moody & Musheno, 2003).

The first supervisory failure is failure to assign review duties. A high liability Directive should not merely state the Officer's obligation. It should identify what the Supervisor must do when that obligation is triggered. For example, a use of force Directive should specify when a Supervisor must respond, what the Supervisor must review, what statements or evidence must be obtained, what body camera footage must be examined, what medical care must be confirmed, what reporting must be completed, when command notification is required, and when internal affairs or training referral is necessary. Without these duties, the agency may have a rule for the Officer but no operational mechanism to verify whether the rule functioned. That distinction reflects the broader principle that formal policy presence does not establish operational policy function (Bremer, 2025a, Bremer, 2026b).

The second supervisory failure is failure to define review criteria. A Supervisor cannot consistently evaluate conduct if the Directive does not provide stable standards. This problem connects directly to linguistic instability. If the Officer duty is written with vague language, unstable modal verbs, undefined qualifiers, or unclear thresholds, the Supervisor must interpret the policy before evaluating the conduct. Different Supervisors may then apply different expectations to similar events. One Supervisor may treat a provision as mandatory. Another may treat it as discretionary. One may require documentation for deviation. Another may not. The result is supervisory variability caused by policy design. Organizational control depends on clear rules and stable evaluative criteria, and unclear rules weaken the ability to enforce expectations consistently (March & Simon, 1958, Simon, 1947, Weick, 1995).

The third supervisory failure is failure to document correction. Supervision must create a record when policy errors are identified. Informal counseling, verbal instruction, shift level correction, report return, remedial review, and referral to training may all be appropriate depending on severity. But if correction is not documented in a usable way, the agency loses the ability to see patterns. It also loses evidence that it responded to warning signs. Systems theory explains that latent organizational weaknesses often persist when feedback is weak, fragmented, or invisible (Perrow, 1984, Reason, 1990, Reason, 2000). In police policy systems, undocumented correction may solve one event locally while preventing the organization from learning globally.

The fourth supervisory failure is failure to connect review to training. Supervisors are often the first personnel to see that Officers are misunderstanding a Directive. They see incomplete reports, incorrect force classifications, late notifications, missing body camera explanations, weak legal articulation, pursuit decision errors, inconsistent search justifications, and confusion about documentation thresholds. In a human centered legal decision system, those observations should feed the Training Function. If several Officers miss the same requirement, the agency should not treat those events as isolated individual mistakes. It should ask whether the Directive is unclear, whether training was insufficient, whether comprehension was validated, and whether Supervisors are reinforcing the rule consistently. Prior work in this series argued that passive dissemination leaves agencies without reliable comprehension data, making supervisory feedback even more important (Bremer, 2025c). Training transfer literature supports the same point because learning must move from instruction into field behavior, and workplace reinforcement is a major determinant of transfer (Baldwin & Ford, 1988, Blume et al., 2010).

The fifth supervisory failure is failure to connect review to policy revision. Supervisors do not merely enforce policy. They are positioned to detect whether policy is working. Repeated confusion over the same provision may indicate that the Directive is ambiguous. Repeated reporting errors may indicate that documentation triggers are poorly written. Repeated inconsistent force reviews may indicate that the Directive does not provide clear review criteria. Repeated pursuit decision problems may indicate that termination thresholds are not operationally usable. In each situation, the supervisory record should trigger policy review. Organizational learning theory distinguishes surface correction from deeper learning that changes the system producing the error (Argyris & Schön, 1978, Senge, 1990). A policy system that disciplines or counsels individual Officers without examining whether the Directive contributed to the pattern remains incomplete.

The sixth supervisory failure is failure to escalate recurring risk. Not every policy error requires command intervention, but repeated policy errors in high liability areas should not remain at the shift level. Use of force, vehicle pursuits, searches, custodial care, prisoner handling, domestic violence response, duty to intervene, mental health encounters, and body worn camera compliance all involve recurring legal and operational risk. If Supervisors repeatedly observe problems in those areas, the agency should have escalation triggers. Those triggers may require command notification, training review, internal audit, policy revision, or internal affairs referral. Without escalation triggers, the agency may have notice at the supervisory level but no reliable path for institutional correction (Bremer, 2026b, Reason, 1990).

This is where supervisory failure becomes legally significant. Failure to supervise, failure to discipline, and failure to correct are not separate from policy implementation. They are part of the same institutional system. In Monell analysis, municipal liability does not attach merely because an Officer violated the Constitution. The plaintiff must connect the injury to municipal policy, custom, practice, or omission (Monell v. Department of Social Services, 1978). But

supervision, discipline, and correction may become relevant when they show how the agency responded to known or recurring risk. *City of Canton v. Harris* (1989) recognized that inadequate training may create municipal liability when it reflects deliberate indifference to constitutional rights. *Connick v. Thompson* (2011) emphasized that a pattern of similar violations is ordinarily necessary to prove deliberate indifference. Supervisory records are often where such patterns first become visible.

Complaint and discipline cases reinforce this point. *Beck v. City of Pittsburgh* (1996) is important because the Third Circuit treated prior excessive force complaints and the municipality's response as relevant to whether the agency tolerated or acquiesced in unconstitutional conduct. The case does not mean every complaint proves misconduct. It means complaint patterns and weak corrective response can become evidence of municipal custom or deliberate tolerance. *Estate of Roman v. City of Newark* (2019) similarly treated failure to train, failure to supervise, and failure to discipline as related Monell pathways. *Bielevicz v. Dubinon* (1990) further supports the principle that municipal custom may be shown through persistent practices and that causation may be established where the custom made the violation reasonably probable. These cases support the broader point that supervisory systems are not merely internal management tools. They may become evidence of whether the agency detected, corrected, or tolerated recurring constitutional risk.

Supervisory failure also weakens policy fidelity. Policy fidelity is the degree to which field conduct aligns with the intended meaning of the Directive. Fidelity depends on more than writing and distribution. It requires training, comprehension, supervision, reinforcement, correction, and feedback. A Directive may be understood during initial dissemination but drift in practice as Officers adapt to local norms, time pressure, peer expectations, or perceived enforcement patterns. Supervisors are the agency's primary mechanism for detecting that drift. If they do not identify and correct it, the policy as practiced may separate from the policy as written (Bremer, 2025c, Lipsky, 1980, Maynard Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Implementation science supports this point. Fixsen et al. (2005) argued that implementation requires competency drivers, organizational supports, leadership, feedback, and continuous improvement. Durlak and DuPre (2008) found that implementation quality affects outcomes and that monitoring, training, leadership, and organizational capacity influence whether programs are delivered as intended. Nilsen (2015) emphasized that implementation depends on mechanisms that translate formal decisions into actual practice. Applied to police Directives, supervision is one of the central mechanisms through which formal policy becomes actual practice. Without supervision, policy implementation depends too heavily on individual memory and voluntary compliance.

A Compliance Centered Police Policy System often treats supervision as assumed. The agency may believe that because Supervisors exist, supervision occurs. That assumption is weak. Supervisory authority is not the same as supervisory control. A Sergeant title does not prove review. A review box does not prove meaningful evaluation. A signed report does not prove policy analysis. A command notification does not prove correction. A high liability Directive should specify the supervisory action required, the standard of review, the documentation required, the escalation trigger, and the corrective pathway. Otherwise, the agency may have supervision in structure but not in function (Bremer, 2026b, Walker & Archbold, 2018).

This distinction matters for digital policy systems as well. A digital platform may show that Officers acknowledged a Directive, but it may not show that Supervisors later reinforced the Directive in practice. A dashboard may show completion, but it may not show that Supervisors

reviewed body camera footage for compliance, corrected recurring misunderstandings, or referred repeated failures for retraining. The PowerDMS mechanism paper argued that digital systems can document disciplined implementation or passive completion depending on how the agency uses them (Bremer, n.d.). Supervisory integration is one of the key differences. A digital policy system becomes stronger when it connects policy assignment to Supervisor review, training follow up, remedial action, and revision after warning signs.

Supervisory failure also interacts with cognitive load. If a Directive is cognitively difficult, Supervisors must help stabilize its meaning in practice. They must reinforce the decision threshold, correct misinterpretation, identify ambiguous provisions, and communicate recurring confusion back to the policy and training functions. If Supervisors themselves interpret the Directive inconsistently, cognitive burden increases across the organization. Officers learn not only from the written policy, but from what Supervisors actually enforce. When enforcement varies, policy meaning becomes localized. That localization undermines agency wide consistency (Bremer, 2025b, Weick, 1995).

The most dangerous form of supervisory failure occurs when warning signs appear but no correction follows. Warning signs may include repeated complaints, body camera audit findings, force review deficiencies, pursuit crashes, report writing errors, search suppression issues, missed notifications, incomplete supervisory reviews, internal affairs patterns, or training failures. A functioning policy system treats these warning signs as governance information. A compliance centered system may treat them as isolated files. The difference matters. If the warning sign does not trigger review, retraining, correction, discipline, or revision, the system has lost its feedback loop (Argyris & Schön, 1978, Bremer, 2026b, Reason, 1990, Senge, 1990).

A human centered legal decision system should therefore build supervision into the Directive itself. Every high liability Directive should identify the Officer duties, the Supervisor duties, the review standard, the documentation requirements, the escalation criteria, the remediation pathway, and the feedback mechanism. The Directive should tell Supervisors what they must look for, what they must decide, what they must document, and what they must do when they find noncompliance or confusion. This structure turns supervision from an assumed role into an assigned control function.

The design of supervisory duties should be proportional to risk. Low risk administrative Directives may need limited supervisory involvement. High liability Directives require deeper review. A use of force Directive should have more structured supervisory duties than a uniform appearance Directive. A pursuit Directive should have clearer command and review triggers than a routine equipment Directive. A search and seizure Directive should connect report review, legal articulation, and corrective feedback because errors may affect constitutional rights and criminal prosecutions. Risk based supervision prevents the agency from overburdening Supervisors while ensuring that critical decisions receive meaningful control (Bremer, 2026b, *City of Canton v. Harris*, 1989).

The purpose of supervisory control is not only discipline. Discipline is necessary when misconduct occurs, but the broader purpose is organizational learning. A Supervisor who identifies a policy misunderstanding should be able to correct the Officer, alert the Training Function, identify whether other Officers share the misunderstanding, and recommend policy clarification. A Supervisor who reviews a force report should determine not only whether the Officer violated the Directive, but whether the Directive was understood and whether the event reveals a training or policy issue. A Supervisor who sees repeated body camera failures should

not merely return reports. The pattern should trigger review of training, equipment, policy clarity, and enforcement practice (Argyris & Schön, 1978, Senge, 1990).

This approach strengthens legal defensibility because it creates evidence of a functioning system. The agency can show not merely that the Directive existed, but that Supervisors were required to review conduct, that they documented findings, that they corrected errors, that repeated issues were escalated, that retraining occurred when needed, and that policy revision followed when warning signs showed the Directive was not working. This does not guarantee immunity from liability. It does show that the agency treated policy as an operational control system rather than a static manual (Board of County Commissioners v. Brown, 1997, Bremer, 2026b, City of Canton v. Harris, 1989).

The central point is that supervision is the missing control layer in many legacy policy systems. A policy that is fragmented, linguistically unstable, cognitively burdensome, and passively disseminated will not become reliable simply because it is assigned to Officers. The agency needs Supervisors to observe how the Directive functions in practice. It needs Supervisors to identify drift. It needs Supervisors to correct misunderstanding. It needs Supervisors to document warning signs. It needs Supervisors to connect field performance back to training and policy revision. Without that control layer, the Directive system remains incomplete.

Supervisory failure therefore continues the integrated causal chain. Structural fragmentation makes the Directive system incoherent. Linguistic instability weakens decision signals. Policy Cognitive Load degrades comprehension and recall. Passive dissemination fails to validate understanding. Supervisory failure then allows misunderstanding and drift to survive in the field. The result is policy presence without policy control. In a human centered legal decision system, supervision is not assumed. It is designed, assigned, documented, reviewed, and connected to correction.

IX. DIGITAL COMPLIANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION AMPLIFICATION

The sixth mechanism in a Compliance Centered Police Policy System is digital compliance amplification. Structural fragmentation, linguistic instability, Policy Cognitive Load, passive dissemination, and weak supervision can all exist in paper based policy systems. Digital platforms do not create those conditions by themselves. They do, however, change the way those conditions are stored, accelerated, measured, displayed, and later discovered. A digital policy system can help an agency build a disciplined implementation record. It can also help an agency create a polished record of administrative completion without proving meaningful policy function.

Prior work in this series argued that PowerDMS should be understood as legally neutral but operationally consequential infrastructure (Bremer, n.d.). That framing is important because the issue is not whether PowerDMS is defective software or whether digital policy management is inherently harmful. Digital platforms can improve policy governance by supporting access, version control, distribution, review cycles, assignment tracking, training linkage, standards mapping, electronic signatures, reports, and audit records. The risk appears when agencies use those capabilities primarily to document assignment, acknowledgment, proof mapping, and dashboard completion while failing to document training, comprehension, supervisory reinforcement, corrective action, and revision after warning signs (Bremer, n.d.).

The central distinction is digital completion versus digital implementation. Digital completion means that the administrative system moved. A Directive was uploaded. A task was assigned. A

user opened the document. An acknowledgment was recorded. A reminder was sent. A dashboard changed status. A proof was attached to an accreditation standard. These facts are not meaningless. They may prove access, notice, timing, version history, and administrative follow through. Digital implementation requires more. It asks whether the current Directive was trained, whether comprehension was validated, whether Supervisors reinforced the rule, whether field performance was reviewed, whether errors were corrected, whether warning signs triggered revision, and whether the platform record shows a living policy system rather than mere completion activity.

This distinction tracks the broader implementation science distinction between adoption and implementation fidelity. Adoption occurs when an organization formally accepts a program, policy, technology, or system. Implementation fidelity concerns whether the adopted system is actually delivered, reinforced, monitored, corrected, and sustained as intended (Durlak & DuPre, 2008, Fixsen et al., 2005, Nilsen, 2015). A police agency may adopt PowerDMS, migrate Directives into the platform, assign acknowledgment tasks, map standards, and generate reports. Those actions prove adoption of digital infrastructure. They do not automatically prove implementation fidelity. The stronger questions are whether the agency used the platform to support learning, supervision, correction, and continuous improvement.

This is why digital systems should be analyzed as implementation amplifiers. They amplify the agency's underlying policy culture. A disciplined agency can use PowerDMS to maintain current Directives, compare versions, identify material revisions, assign targeted training, attach tests, document comprehension, alert Supervisors, monitor overdue assignments, track remedial action, connect accreditation proofs to actual practices, and revise policy after operational feedback. A passive agency can use the same platform to upload a Directive, assign it, collect signatures, clear reminders, attach proofs, and appear administratively ready. The software may function as designed in both settings. The difference is the agency's implementation doctrine (Bremer, n.d.).

PowerDMS is analytically useful because its public safety functions place it at the intersection of policy management, accreditation, training, standards mapping, reporting, electronic acknowledgment, and administrative proof (Bremer, n.d.). That breadth matters because a platform with these functions is not merely an electronic filing cabinet. It can become part of the agency's policy memory. It may preserve active and archived policy versions, assignment histories, acknowledgment records, administrator actions, training publication information, event logs, reminders, reports, and standards proofs. Those records can protect an agency when they show meaningful implementation. They can expose an agency when they show that implementation stopped at distribution and signature collection.

The signature problem is central. Electronic acknowledgment has value because it can prove that personnel were assigned a Directive, had access to it, and certified review. That evidence may matter in discipline, accreditation, internal review, or litigation. But acknowledgment is not comprehension. Prior work in this series argued that acknowledgment based policy systems verify exposure without proving retention, retrieval, or operational application (Bremer, 2025c). Learning science supports the distinction because passive exposure and familiarity are weaker indicators of durable learning than retrieval practice, application, distributed review, and feedback (Dunlosky et al., 2013, Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). A digital signature may show that an Officer encountered the rule. It does not show that the Officer can apply the rule under stress.

The problem becomes more serious when acknowledgment records are used as training evidence. A digital policy platform may show that an Officer read and acknowledged a use of force update. That record may prove notice. It does not prove that the agency taught the constitutional threshold, trained the decision point, tested comprehension, required scenario application, briefed Supervisors, or corrected misunderstanding. Training evaluation literature distinguishes between training delivery, learning, behavior, and results (Arthur et al., 2003, Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Acknowledgment is closer to delivery than demonstrated learning. Treating it as proof of competence creates an evidentiary overstatement.

PowerDMS's own public facing policy training materials, as analyzed in the subordinate paper, recognize the same distinction between reading, signing, and applying policy in critical moments (Bremer, n.d.). That matters for fairness. The critique is not that PowerDMS denies the difference between acknowledgment and comprehension. The critique is that agencies may still use the platform in ways that privilege the administratively convenient parts of the system. If an agency has access to tools that can support training, testing, reporting, and follow up, but uses the system mainly to assign documents and collect acknowledgments, the weakness is not the mere presence of the platform. The weakness is agency implementation choice.

Digital systems can also intensify accreditation centered completion. PowerStandards and similar accreditation workflows can help agencies organize standards, proofs, tasks, assessment materials, dashboards, and reports. These are valuable functions. Accreditation requires evidence, and agencies need an organized method to manage it. The risk is that proof management can be mistaken for operational implementation. A standard may be mapped. A proof may be attached. A task may be marked ready. But the deeper question remains whether the policy was understood, supervised, enforced, corrected, and revised when necessary. Standards mapping can organize proof. It does not by itself prove policy function (Bremer, n.d.).

This is another form of the compliance coherence gap. A digital accreditation environment may make the measurable parts of compliance highly visible: mapped standards, attached proofs, status indicators, task completion, assessment readiness, and dashboard progress. Those measures are useful but incomplete. They can show that the agency assembled a compliance file. They may not show that related Directives operate coherently, that Officers understand the policy, or that Supervisors use the policy consistently in field review. Public administration scholarship warns that policy coherence and integration require more than the presence of policy instruments or formal alignment to objectives (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). The digital environment can organize the instruments without testing whether the system functions as integrated decision architecture.

Digital systems also create dependency and institutional memory concerns. Once Directives, standards maps, training records, acknowledgments, archived versions, proofs, and administrative histories reside inside one platform, the platform becomes part of the agency's governance structure. That can improve continuity. It can also make the platform the practical location where the agency's compliance history lives. The concern is not an antitrust claim or a claim that digital integration is improper. The concern is that agencies may become dependent on digital workflows before building the internal capacity needed to use those workflows as implementation systems. Implementation science emphasizes that organizational capacity, leadership, competence, and feedback structures shape whether tools produce outcomes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008, Fixsen et al., 2005).

Administrator succession is another overlooked digital risk. A platform may be configured by an experienced administrator who understands the agency's policy logic, group assignments,

workflows, training triggers, revision rules, and reporting practices. Over time, that administrator may retire, transfer, promote, or lose the assignment. A replacement administrator may know how to assign a document and collect acknowledgments, but not why the system was built in a particular way. The mechanics may survive while the implementation doctrine weakens. This creates a second generation passive use problem. The platform begins as an implementation system and slowly becomes a signature system because the agency failed to preserve administrative competence and command oversight (Bremer, n.d.).

The capacity to do more can become important after warning signs. If an agency receives complaints, audit findings, use of force review deficiencies, pursuit problems, body camera failures, training failures, or litigation notice showing that Officers are misapplying a Directive, continued reliance on electronic acknowledgment becomes harder to defend as meaningful implementation. If the platform could support retraining assignments, tests, supervisory alerts, reports, review cycles, or remedial documentation, the agency's choice not to use those functions may become relevant to organizational analysis. The point is not that every available tool must be used for every Directive. The point is that high liability Directives require implementation depth proportional to risk.

This digital record can become legally consequential. The failure to train and failure to supervise paper argued that digital policy management systems may protect an agency when they show current policy, version control, timely review, training linkage, comprehension checks, Supervisor follow up, corrective action, and revision after warning signs (Bremer, 2026b). The same systems may harm the agency when they show only distribution, acknowledgment, dashboard completion, and no meaningful follow up. In litigation, the question is not merely whether the agency used PowerDMS. The question is what PowerDMS shows the agency actually did.

Reported cases involving PowerDMS support this evidentiary framing. The subordinate liability paper analyzed cases in which courts discussed PowerDMS records involving policy review, version history, acknowledgments, event logs, training publication, access, and administrative compliance (Bremer, 2026b). *Wynne v. East Hartford* (2022) illustrates how PowerDMS records may become discovery evidence concerning which policy version Officers reviewed and when they reviewed it. *White v. Hamilton County, Tennessee* (2025) illustrates the defense value of structured policy review records, including review requirements, access, reminders, and noncompletion consequences. *Young v. Gloucester County Sheriff's Department* (2023) illustrates that digital evidence may include event logs, login information, administrator actions, and training publication records. These cases do not make PowerDMS liable. They show that PowerDMS records can become evidence of policy implementation or the lack of it.

Version control is one of the strongest protective uses of digital policy management. A defensible agency should be able to show which Directive version was active at the time of an event, when it was revised, whether the revision was administrative or substantive, who reviewed it, whether retraining was required, and whether Supervisors were briefed on the change. Version control becomes especially important when legal standards change or when policy revisions affect high liability decisions. If the platform shows that Officers reviewed an older version, missed a material revision, or were not trained on a substantive change, the digital record may expose the implementation gap. If the platform shows timely revision, assignment, training, comprehension assessment, and supervisory follow up, it may support the agency's defense.

Digital systems also affect causation analysis indirectly. Municipal liability still requires a connection between the alleged municipal deficiency and the constitutional injury (*Board of County Commissioners v. Brown*, 1997, *Monell v. Department of Social Services*, 1978). A digital policy defect does not prove causation by itself. But a digital record may help build or rebut the causal chain. If the record shows repeated policy assignments without comprehension validation after prior warning signs, the plaintiff may argue that the agency tracked exposure while ignoring implementation. If the record shows retraining, testing, Supervisor alerts, remedial action, and policy revision, the agency can argue that it responded reasonably to known risk. The platform does not decide the legal issue. It supplies evidence.

Digital completion can also distort internal management incentives. Dashboards make certain activities visible: overdue assignments, completion percentages, proof status, signature rates, and assessment readiness. Visibility can improve administration. It can also cause agencies to manage what the platform measures most easily. Completion is easier to measure than comprehension. Acknowledgment is easier to measure than application. Proof attachment is easier to measure than policy fidelity. If command attention focuses on clearing dashboards rather than testing operational understanding, the platform may shift the organization toward administrative closure rather than implementation quality. This is not a software defect. It is a governance risk.

A human centered legal decision system should therefore use digital platforms as implementation infrastructure, not as substitutes for implementation. For high liability Directives, the platform should help answer a structured set of questions. Was the correct Directive version active? Was the change material? Who was affected? Was training required? Was comprehension checked? Were Supervisors assigned review duties? Were overdue assignments escalated? Did incidents reveal misunderstanding? Was remedial training assigned? Did repeated problems trigger revision? Was the corrective action documented? These questions separate digital implementation from digital completion.

The agency should also classify Directives by implementation depth. Low risk administrative notices may require distribution and acknowledgment. Moderate risk procedural changes may require brief review, Supervisor discussion, and limited knowledge checks. High liability Directives should require training, retrieval based assessment, scenario application, Supervisor reinforcement, and revision triggers after warning signs. This risk based approach prevents overuse of training resources while avoiding the weak assumption that every Directive can be implemented through the same signature workflow. It aligns digital process with operational risk.

Digital platforms can also strengthen supervisory integration. A strong system should not stop after Officer acknowledgment. It should notify Supervisors of high liability updates, assign supervisory review tasks, require Supervisors to document reinforcement, flag noncompletion, preserve remedial training records, and connect field review findings to policy administration. Supervisory failure, discussed in the prior section, is not solved by digitization unless the digital workflow makes supervision visible and accountable. A platform record should show not only that the Officer received the Directive, but that the Supervisor had defined responsibilities for implementation and correction.

Digital records should also support organizational learning. A use of force pattern, pursuit review trend, body camera audit result, complaint cluster, or training failure should be able to trigger a policy review workflow. If the agency identifies recurring confusion, the system should preserve the path from warning sign to analysis, revision, training, supervisory reinforcement, and follow up. Argyris and Schön (1978) distinguished between surface correction and deeper

organizational learning. A digital platform can support deeper learning if it connects operational feedback to policy revision. It can also preserve surface correction if the agency uses it mainly to close tasks.

This section therefore does not reject digital policy management. It argues for disciplined use. Digital systems are necessary in modern policing because agencies must manage large policy systems, frequent revisions, distributed personnel, accreditation proofs, training records, and administrative accountability. The problem is not digitization. The problem is digitized passivity. A weak manual does not become a strong policy system because it is uploaded. A fragmented Directive does not become coherent because it is searchable. A legally dense update does not become understood because it is acknowledged. A policy platform can support reform, but only if the agency has an implementation doctrine that requires training, comprehension, supervision, correction, and revision.

Digital compliance amplification therefore continues the causal chain. Structural fragmentation creates incoherent policy architecture. Linguistic instability weakens decision signals. Policy Cognitive Load makes the Directives harder to process. Passive dissemination fails to validate comprehension. Supervisory weakness allows drift to persist. Digital systems may then preserve all of this in a professional, timestamped, searchable, and discoverable record. In a strong agency, that record may prove disciplined governance. In a weak agency, it may prove that the agency tracked completion while failing to build a human centered legal decision system.

The rule is simple. Digital platforms do not cure Compliance Centered Police Policy Systems by digitizing them. They cure the problem only when they are used to support current law, coherent architecture, controlled language, meaningful training, validated comprehension, supervisory reinforcement, corrective action, and revision after warning signs. If the digital record shows only assignment, acknowledgment, proof mapping, and dashboard completion, then the platform has not solved the legacy policy problem. It has preserved it with greater precision.

X. LEGACY POLICY SYSTEMS AS LEGAL AND EVIDENTIARY RISK

The seventh mechanism in a Compliance Centered Police Policy System is legal and evidentiary risk. The preceding sections analyzed the internal operation of policy failure. Structural fragmentation creates incoherent Directive architecture. Linguistic instability weakens obligation signals. Policy Cognitive Load degrades comprehension and recall. Passive dissemination fails to validate operational understanding. Supervisory failure allows implementation drift to persist. Digital systems may then preserve these conditions in a searchable and timestamped record. This section explains why those failures matter legally. A legacy policy system may become evidence of what the agency knew, what it required, what it trained, what it supervised, what it corrected, and what it ignored (Bremer, 2026b).

The legal issue is not whether every imperfect Directive creates municipal liability. It does not. Federal law does not impose liability on a municipality merely because an Officer violated the Constitution. *Monell v. Department of Social Services* (1978) rejected respondeat superior liability under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and requires a plaintiff to connect the constitutional injury to a municipal policy, custom, practice, decision, or omission. *Board of County Commissioners v. Brown* (1997) further requires rigorous proof of municipal culpability and causation. *Connick v. Thompson* (2011) emphasizes that failure to train claims ordinarily require a pattern of similar constitutional violations to establish deliberate indifference. These limits are important because they prevent policy critique from becoming automatic liability.

The more precise claim is that a legacy policy system becomes legally significant when it helps prove municipal conduct. A Directive manual is not only a management document. In litigation, it may become evidence of the agency's constitutional operating system. It may show whether a policy was current, whether related Directives were coherent, whether Officers were trained, whether comprehension was verified, whether Supervisors were assigned review duties, whether noncompliance was corrected, whether complaints triggered discipline or retraining, and whether warning signs produced revision. The question is not merely whether the agency had a written rule. The question is whether the agency operationalized that rule through training, supervision, correction, and learning (Bremer, 2026b).

Failure to train doctrine is central to this analysis. *City of Canton v. Harris* (1989) recognized that inadequate police training may support municipal liability when the failure reflects deliberate indifference to the rights of persons with whom police come into contact. The doctrine does not require perfect training, nor does it impose liability because a better training program can be imagined. But it does recognize that some recurring constitutional decision points require institutional preparation. Officers will foreseeably make decisions involving force, search and seizure, arrest, pursuit, custody, prisoner care, mental health response, domestic violence response, and duty to intervene. A policy system that merely distributes Directives without preparing Officers to apply them may leave the agency with proof of exposure but weak proof of constitutional preparedness (Bremer, 2025c, Bremer, 2026b).

This distinction matters because policy distribution is not training. A Directive may correctly state a constitutional standard while still failing to prepare Officers to recognize the decision point, apply the threshold, document the facts, notify a Supervisor, and respond to exceptions. *Popov v. City of Margate* (1979) illustrates the relevance of realistic training conditions by addressing whether Officers had been prepared for foreseeable field circumstances. *Zuchel v. City and County of Denver* (1993), *Allen v. Muskogee* (1997), and *Brown v. Gray* (2000) similarly show that training and policy evidence may become significant in high risk force contexts. These cases do not establish liability from policy imperfection alone. They show that training adequacy becomes legally meaningful when connected to foreseeable high liability decisions.

Failure to supervise creates a related pathway. A Directive may tell Officers what to do but fail to establish the supervisory system needed to make the rule function. Supervisors are the agency's field control mechanism. They review reports, examine body camera footage, respond to force incidents, approve or terminate pursuits, evaluate legal articulation, identify documentation gaps, correct misunderstandings, and escalate recurring problems. If Supervisors are not required to review, document, correct, retrain, or refer problems, the agency may have a written rule without an operational control structure (Bremer, 2026b, Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018).

Failure to discipline and failure to correct may also become municipal evidence when warning signs repeat. *Beck v. City of Pittsburgh* (1996) is important because the Third Circuit considered prior excessive force complaints and the municipality's response to those complaints as relevant to whether the city tolerated or acquiesced in unconstitutional conduct. *Bielevicz v. Dubinon* (1990) supports the principle that municipal custom may be shown through persistent practices and that causation may exist where the custom made the violation reasonably probable. *Estate of Roman v. City of Newark* (2019) treats failure to train, failure to supervise, and failure to discipline as related Monell theories. Together, these cases show why complaint patterns, weak review, and inadequate correction can matter. They may show not only that incidents occurred, but that the agency failed to learn from them.

Notice is the legal turning point. A weak Directive standing alone may show poor administration. A weak Directive after repeated warning signs may show something more. Warning signs may include complaints, lawsuits, internal affairs patterns, use of force reviews, pursuit crashes, body camera audits, suppression rulings, legal changes, accreditation findings, Supervisor identified confusion, failed training checks, or repeated documentation errors. Once warning signs appear, the agency's response becomes central. Did it revise the Directive? Did it retrain Officers? Did it validate comprehension? Did it assign supervisory duties? Did it correct or discipline noncompliance? Did it audit future performance? Did it close the loop? These questions determine whether the policy system functions as organizational learning or merely stores evidence of unresolved risk (Bremer, 2026b, Reason, 1990, Senge, 1990).

Deliberate indifference requires more than negligence, but legacy policy systems may help prove it when they show accumulated notice and inadequate response. City of Canton (1989) focuses on known or obvious training needs. Connick (2011) emphasizes pattern evidence. Brown (1997) requires a direct causal connection between municipal action and injury. A legacy policy system may contribute to that showing when it reveals that the agency knew a policy area was failing, continued to rely on passive dissemination, failed to correct Supervisors, ignored repeated complaints, left outdated language in place, or used electronic acknowledgment as a substitute for training. The stronger legal theory is not that the policy was imperfect. The stronger theory is that the agency saw risk and failed to operationalize correction.

Causation is the discipline that prevents overclaiming. A fragmented body worn camera Directive does not automatically cause an excessive force violation. A weak pursuit policy does not cause an unrelated unlawful search. A confusing internal affairs procedure does not matter unless it connects to a failure to discipline, supervise, or correct in a way that relates to the alleged constitutional injury. The plaintiff must identify how the policy defect mattered. The strongest causal chain links a known risk, a specific institutional omission, and a later similar injury. For example, if repeated pursuit crashes show misunderstanding of termination criteria, and the agency fails to revise the pursuit Directive, retrain Officers, assign supervisory termination duties, or audit compliance, a later similar pursuit injury may give the policy system legal significance (Board of County Commissioners v. Brown, 1997, Bremer, 2026b).

This is why legacy policy evidence must be analyzed as a system rather than a document. A single outdated paragraph may not prove much. A pattern of outdated legal standards, fragmented Directives, passive acknowledgments, weak training records, inconsistent supervisory reviews, repeated complaints, and no policy revision may prove more. The system may show that the agency had multiple opportunities to detect and correct a recurring risk but did not. Systems theory supports this way of thinking because organizational failure often emerges from latent conditions that align over time rather than from one isolated error (Perrow, 1984, Reason, 1990). In litigation, the policy system may reveal those latent conditions.

Digital policy records intensify the evidentiary problem. A digital platform can protect the agency when it shows disciplined implementation. It may prove that the correct Directive version was active, that material revisions were assigned, that training was linked, that comprehension checks occurred, that Supervisors were alerted, that remedial action followed, and that policy revision occurred after warning signs. But a digital system can also expose weakness. If the record shows only assignment, acknowledgment, dashboard completion, and no meaningful training or follow up, the agency may have created precise evidence of passive implementation (Bremer, n.d., Bremer, 2026b).

The PowerDMS cases analyzed in the subordinate liability paper illustrate this evidentiary function. *Wynne v. East Hartford* (2022) demonstrates how PowerDMS records may become discovery evidence about policy review and which version of a policy Officers reviewed. *White v. Hamilton County, Tennessee* (2025) shows how digital policy review records can support a defense when they demonstrate access, required review, reminders, Supervisor alerts, and consequences for noncompletion. *Young v. Gloucester County Sheriff's Department* (2023) shows that digital records may include event logs, login information, administrator activity, and training publication details. These cases do not treat PowerDMS as a constitutional actor. They show that digital policy records may help prove or test implementation (Bremer, 2026b).

Discovery is the point where legacy policy systems become litigation exhibits. Plaintiffs may seek current and historical Directives, revision logs, drafts, approval records, training files, roll call materials, acknowledgment histories, quizzes, test results, Supervisor reviews, internal affairs records, complaint histories, use of force reviews, body camera audits, pursuit reviews, communications, accreditation proofs, and digital platform logs. Those records may allow plaintiffs to compare the agency's claim of implementation against its actual evidence. Did the lesson plan match the Directive? Did the training occur after the revision? Did Supervisors review the conduct under the correct standard? Did complaints trigger retraining? Did digital acknowledgments stand alone? Did the agency revise the Directive after legal change? Discovery converts policy architecture into proof.

The most dangerous litigation pattern is false completeness. The manual exists. The digital platform shows assignments. The accreditation file contains proofs. The Directive has a revision date. Officers signed acknowledgments. Yet the record may still fail to prove that Officers understood the Directive, that Supervisors reinforced it, that violations were corrected, or that warning signs triggered revision. Prior work in this series described this as policy presence without policy function (Bremer, 2026b). False completeness is dangerous because it gives the agency confidence before litigation and gives plaintiffs a roadmap during litigation.

Dangerous admissions often follow the same pattern. Statements such as the policy was in the manual, Officers signed for it, we sent it through PowerDMS, Supervisors were responsible for enforcing it, or Officers are expected to know policy may sound administratively reasonable. In litigation, those statements may prove only exposure, assumption, or delegation without implementation. The issue is not whether such statements automatically establish liability. They do not. The issue is whether they reveal that the agency relied on policy presence and individual self study rather than training, comprehension validation, supervisory reinforcement, and correction (Bremer, 2025c, Bremer, 2026b).

The legal risk also includes internal inconsistency between policy, training, and supervision records. A Directive may state one rule. The lesson plan may teach another emphasis. The report form may require a different trigger. The Supervisor checklist may omit the key standard. Internal affairs may investigate under a different framework. Accreditation proof may show policy existence but not field implementation. This type of inconsistency supports the broader synthesis argument because it shows how fragmentation, cognitive burden, passive dissemination, and supervisory failure become evidentiary. The agency may not be able to prove one coherent legal decision system because its records reveal separate administrative silos (Bremer, 2024a, Bremer, 2026b).

DOJ pattern and practice findings reinforce the importance of examining policy function rather than policy presence. Federal investigations have repeatedly examined not only whether agencies had policies, but whether policies were clear, trained, supervised, enforced, and

connected to accountability mechanisms. The Department of Justice investigations of Ferguson, Baltimore, Chicago, Minneapolis, Louisville, and other agencies have frequently identified deficiencies involving policy implementation, training, supervision, accountability, and corrective systems rather than merely missing written rules (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2023, 2024). These findings support the synthesis point that written policy is only one component of a functioning constitutional control system.

The agency's strongest defense is not the mere existence of a Directive. It is evidence of a functioning implementation loop. A strong record shows current law, coherent architecture, controlled language, meaningful training, comprehension validation, Supervisor review, corrective action, discipline where appropriate, audit, and revision after warning signs. Such a record does not guarantee that no violation will occur. It does show that the agency treated the Directive as operational governance rather than documentation. That matters because Monell doctrine focuses on municipal action or omission, and failure to train doctrine focuses on whether the agency adequately prepared personnel for recurring constitutional tasks (City of Canton v. Harris, 1989, Monell v. Department of Social Services, 1978).

The agency's weakest record is one that proves administrative completion without implementation. That record may show that the policy existed, was assigned, was acknowledged, and was stored. But if it does not show training, understanding, supervision, correction, or revision, it leaves the central question unanswered. Did the agency build a system reasonably capable of producing lawful field conduct? If not, the policy system may stop functioning as evidence of compliance and begin functioning as evidence of institutional omission.

This section must end where the legal doctrine requires discipline. Legacy policy systems do not create liability by themselves. They create risk when they interact with notice, deliberate indifference, causation, and constitutional injury. A policy defect that has no connection to the injury may be irrelevant. A policy defect connected to a known pattern, uncorrected training weakness, repeated supervisory failure, or ignored legal change may be highly relevant. The legal significance of legacy policy is therefore contextual and evidentiary. It depends on what the system shows.

The integrated point is direct. A Compliance Centered Police Policy System may create strong evidence that rules existed and weak evidence that rules functioned. That imbalance becomes dangerous when litigation asks not whether the agency had a policy, but whether the agency trained it, supervised it, corrected it, and revised it after warning signs. The same policy system that agencies rely upon to prove compliance may become the record that shows the limits of compliance. A human centered legal decision system reduces that risk by ensuring that Directives are not only written and acknowledged, but operationalized through comprehension, supervision, correction, and learning.

XI. INTEGRATED CAUSAL MODEL OF COMPLIANCE CENTERED POLICY FAILURE

The preceding sections establish that municipal police policy failure is not adequately explained by one defect. It is not merely a drafting problem, a training problem, a supervision problem, a software problem, or a legal problem. Those defects matter, but they become most powerful when they interact. A Compliance Centered Police Policy System fails because its components reinforce one another. Structural fragmentation weakens the Directive architecture. Linguistic instability weakens the decision signals inside that architecture. Policy Cognitive Load makes the resulting guidance harder to process, retrieve, and apply. Passive dissemination fails to

verify comprehension. Supervisory weakness fails to correct drift. Digital systems may document completion without implementation. Legal and evidentiary risk then appears when warning signs accumulate and the agency cannot prove that the Directive system functioned as a constitutional control system. This section integrates those mechanisms into one causal model.

The model begins with compliance centered production. Compliance centered production occurs when the primary design logic of the Directive system is proof of policy existence, standards conformity, administrative completion, and institutional defensibility rather than operational decision support. This does not make compliance improper. Police agencies must satisfy constitutional law, statutory requirements, accreditation standards, Attorney General Directives, liability concerns, municipal oversight, and professional expectations. The problem is that compliance logic often measures what can be documented most easily: whether a policy exists, whether a standard is mapped, whether an acknowledgment was completed, whether a proof was uploaded, and whether a dashboard cleared. A human centered legal decision system must ask a different question: whether the Directive can guide lawful action under operational conditions (Bremer, 2025a).

The first causal movement runs from compliance centered production to structural fragmentation. When agencies build policy systems through decentralized authorship, inherited templates, vendor models, accreditation responses, legal updates, and incremental amendment, the resulting architecture becomes vulnerable to redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment (Bremer, 2024a). Organizational theory explains why this result is predictable. Differentiated organizational functions require integration mechanisms when their outputs are interdependent (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, Thompson, 1967). Public administration scholarship similarly recognizes that coordination, coherence, and integration are related but distinct conditions (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). A police agency may therefore satisfy separate policy requirements while failing to maintain a coherent Directive system.

The second causal movement runs from structural fragmentation to the compliance coherence gap. Fragmentation matters because police operations do not unfold through isolated Directives. A single event may require the Officer and Supervisor to integrate use of force, arrest, search and seizure, reporting, medical aid, body worn camera activation, evidence, internal affairs, and supervisory review requirements. If those Directives use different definitions, thresholds, reporting triggers, or review duties, the system transfers the burden of integration from the architecture to the user. That burden may be hidden during accreditation review or administrative inspection because each Directive may appear complete when examined alone. The gap appears when the Directives are used together.

The third causal movement runs from fragmented architecture to linguistic instability. Fragmented systems often contain language written by different authors at different times for different purposes. As a result, modal verbs, definitions, qualifiers, thresholds, and responsibility assignments may vary across and within Directives. Prior work in this series argued that modal verbs function as decision triggers because they communicate obligation, discretion, and expected practice (Bremer, 2024b). Legal interpretation and drafting authorities support the importance of clear obligation language, especially the distinction between mandatory and permissive terms (Office of the Federal Register, 2017, Scalia & Garner, 2012, Tiersma, 1999). When *must*, *may*, *should*, *shall*, *when feasible*, and *as appropriate* are used inconsistently, the Directive no longer communicates one stable level of obligation.

The fourth causal movement runs from linguistic instability to decision signal failure. Decision signal failure occurs when personnel cannot reliably determine whether a provision is mandatory, prohibited, discretionary, or expected. This matters operationally because Officers do not interpret policy under calm legal research conditions. They apply policy while processing threat, uncertainty, radio traffic, citizen behavior, movement, Supervisor direction, and time compression. If the Directive does not communicate a stable obligation signal before the event, the Officer may be forced to resolve the agency's drafting ambiguity during the event. Sensemaking theory explains that personnel construct meaning from organizational cues in ambiguous circumstances (Weick, 1995). If the policy cue is unstable, field interpretation becomes unstable.

The fifth causal movement runs from structural and linguistic instability to Policy Cognitive Load. Policy Cognitive Load is the cognitive burden imposed by Directive structure, fragmentation, ambiguity, branching complexity, cross reference dependency, information density, redundancy, and training misalignment during interpretation, recall, and operational decision making (Bremer, 2025b). Cognitive Load Theory explains that working memory is limited when processing novel, complex, or interacting information, and that unnecessary extraneous load impairs comprehension and performance (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988, Sweller et al., 1998). In municipal policing, the operational encounter already imposes substantial intrinsic load. A poorly designed Directive system adds avoidable load.

The sixth causal movement runs from Policy Cognitive Load to cognitive degradation. When total load exceeds working memory capacity, comprehension becomes incomplete, recall becomes unreliable, and schema activation becomes unstable (Baddeley, 1992, Cowan, 2001, Sweller et al., 1998). Officers may understand the general idea of a Directive while missing an exception, threshold, reporting trigger, or supervisory notification duty. They may remember training summaries while forgetting the specific policy language. They may rely on prior practice because the formal policy did not become an accessible mental model. This is not always a failure of effort. It may be the predictable result of a Directive system that imposes more processing demand than the operational environment permits (Bremer, 2025b).

The seventh causal movement runs from cognitive degradation to decision system disruption. Recognition Primed Decision Making theory shows that experienced personnel in time constrained environments often act by matching current conditions to familiar patterns and workable responses rather than comparing all options through slow analysis (Klein, 1998, Klein, 2008). This process depends on stable cues and usable schemas. If the Directive system is too fragmented, ambiguous, or dense to support schema formation, recognition based decision making may fail. The Officer may hesitate, substitute a simplified heuristic, rely on peer norms, default to habit, or interpret the Directive differently from another similarly situated Officer. Operational inconsistency then becomes predictable.

The eighth causal movement runs from disrupted decision making to degraded policy fidelity. Policy fidelity is the degree to which operational conduct aligns with the intended meaning of the Directive. Fidelity requires more than policy existence. It requires accurate understanding, retention, retrieval, application, supervision, correction, and reinforcement. When Officers apply partial recall, local interpretation, informal heuristics, or Supervisor specific expectations, the policy as practiced begins to separate from the policy as written. Street level bureaucracy scholarship explains that frontline personnel adapt formal rules under practical conditions (Lipsky, 1980, Maynard Moody & Musheno, 2003). The synthesis advanced here adds that poor Directive architecture can induce some of that adaptation by making formal guidance difficult to use.

The ninth causal movement runs from degraded policy fidelity to passive dissemination failure. If the Directive system is fragmented, linguistically unstable, and cognitively burdensome, the agency's implementation method becomes especially important. Passive dissemination is weak because it records exposure without validating comprehension (Bremer, 2025c). Retrieval practice research demonstrates that active recall and practice testing produce stronger retention than passive review, and distributed practice supports long term retention better than single exposure (Cepeda et al., 2006, Dunlosky et al., 2013, Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). Training evaluation literature distinguishes between delivery, learning, behavior, and results (Arthur et al., 2003, Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Acknowledgment may prove delivery. It does not prove learning or transfer.

The tenth causal movement runs from passive dissemination to implementation opacity. Implementation opacity exists when the agency can prove that the Directive was distributed but cannot prove whether it became operational knowledge. The agency may not know whether Officers understood the legal standard, retained the duty, recognized the trigger, or could apply the rule under stress. This opacity can remain hidden for long periods because completion records create administrative confidence. Systems theory explains that latent organizational conditions often remain invisible until operational pressure exposes them (Perrow, 1984, Reason, 1990). In a policy system, the latent condition is the gap between what the agency can document and what personnel can actually do.

The eleventh causal movement runs from implementation opacity to supervisory drift. Supervisors are the field control layer that should detect misunderstanding, inconsistent application, weak documentation, repeated errors, and emerging patterns. When Supervisors lack clear review duties, stable policy criteria, comprehension data, and escalation triggers, they may reinforce the Directive inconsistently or fail to correct drift at all (Bremer, 2026b). Police accountability literature recognizes supervision as central to controlling discretion and sustaining accountability in dispersed field environments (Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018). Implementation science likewise emphasizes monitoring, feedback, leadership, and organizational supports as necessary to sustain implementation fidelity (Durlak & DuPre, 2008, Fixsen et al., 2005, Nilsen, 2015).

The twelfth causal movement runs from supervisory drift to corrective feedback failure. A functioning policy system should learn from complaints, use of force reviews, pursuit reviews, body camera audits, report deficiencies, internal affairs findings, legal updates, training failures, and repeated Supervisor identified confusion. Organizational learning theory distinguishes between surface correction and deeper learning that changes the underlying system (Argyris & Schön, 1978, Senge, 1990). A compliance centered system may treat each warning sign as an isolated file. A human centered legal decision system treats warning signs as information about policy architecture, training, supervision, and implementation. If the system does not convert warning signs into revision, retraining, correction, or discipline where appropriate, the feedback loop has failed.

The thirteenth causal movement runs from corrective feedback failure to digital completion amplification. Digital systems can strengthen implementation when they document version control, training, comprehension checks, Supervisor follow up, remedial action, and revision after warning signs. They can also amplify passivity when they document assignment, acknowledgment, dashboard completion, and proof mapping without meaningful implementation (Bremer, n.d.). The platform does not create the agency's policy culture. It records and accelerates it. In a disciplined agency, the digital record may show a living implementation

system. In a passive agency, the digital record may show that the agency tracked completion while failing to verify competence.

The fourteenth causal movement runs from digital amplification to legal and evidentiary risk. When litigation, audit, external review, or public investigation occurs, the policy system becomes evidence. It may show that the agency maintained current law, coherent Directives, meaningful training, comprehension validation, Supervisor review, correction, discipline, and revision. It may also show policy presence without policy function. Municipal liability doctrine requires careful proof. *Monell* rejects respondeat superior liability, *City of Canton* requires deliberate indifference for failure to train, *Connick* ordinarily requires pattern based notice, and *Brown* requires causation and municipal culpability (*Board of County Commissioners v. Brown*, 1997, *City of Canton v. Harris*, 1989, *Connick v. Thompson*, 2011, *Monell v. Department of Social Services*, 1978). The policy system becomes legally significant when its defects help connect notice, institutional omission, and injury (*Bremer*, 2026b).

The full integrated model can therefore be stated as follows: compliance centered production creates structurally fragmented Directive architecture. Fragmented architecture produces the compliance coherence gap. Fragmentation and decentralized drafting destabilize obligation language. Unstable language produces decision signal failure. Structural and linguistic instability increase Policy Cognitive Load. Elevated Policy Cognitive Load degrades comprehension, recall, and schema activation. Cognitive degradation disrupts recognition based decision making. Disrupted decision making weakens policy fidelity. Passive dissemination fails to validate comprehension. Weak supervision fails to correct implementation drift. Digital systems may document completion without implementation. When warning signs appear and the agency fails to revise, retrain, supervise, discipline, or correct, the policy system may become evidence of municipal failure.

This model is cumulative. Each stage increases the significance of the next stage. Fragmentation is more dangerous when language is unstable. Unstable language is more dangerous when the Directive is high liability. Cognitive load is more dangerous when the agency relies on passive dissemination. Passive dissemination is more dangerous when Supervisors do not validate field application. Supervisory weakness is more dangerous when digital records create false confidence. Digital completion is more dangerous when warning signs appear and no correction follows. The system does not fail because one sentence is unclear or one Officer misreads a rule. The system fails when multiple weaknesses align.

The model is also directional. It begins with policy architecture and moves toward operational and evidentiary consequences. This does not mean policy architecture is the only cause of police failure. Culture, leadership, staffing, resources, training quality, individual conduct, local politics, and community conditions all matter. The claim is narrower. Policy architecture is an independent and underexamined system variable that shapes cognition, discretion, training transfer, supervision, feedback, and legal defensibility (*Bremer*, 2025a). A strong culture may compensate for weak policy architecture for a time. Strong Supervisors may correct confusion locally. Experienced Officers may develop workable informal schemas. But compensation is not design. A system that depends on informal compensation remains structurally weak.

The model also explains why adding more policy language may fail. If the underlying architecture is fragmented, additional provisions may increase density and cross reference dependency. If obligation language is unstable, new language may create more decision signal conflict. If training remains passive, more content may increase exposure without increasing comprehension. If supervision remains unstructured, more rules may create more review

ambiguity. If digital platforms measure completion, more assignments may clear dashboards without producing implementation. Reform that adds language to a compliance centered architecture may therefore expand the appearance of control while deepening the underlying cognitive and organizational burden.

The model clarifies why the solution is architectural rather than additive. A human centered legal decision system must be designed around the path from law to action. It must begin with current legal authority, organize related Directives coherently, control obligation language, reduce unnecessary cognitive load, train for retrieval and application, validate comprehension, assign supervisory review duties, document correction, connect warning signs to revision, and use digital tools to support implementation rather than merely completion. This is not simply better writing. It is system design.

The model also provides a diagnostic framework. An agency can examine each stage of the causal chain. Are Directives drafted through centralized architectural control? Do related Directives use common definitions and thresholds? Are modal verbs controlled? Are high liability rules written as decision pathways? Does training require retrieval and scenario application? Does the agency validate comprehension? Are Supervisors assigned review and correction duties? Do warning signs trigger retraining or revision? Does the digital record prove implementation or only completion? These questions convert the synthesis from theory into audit logic.

Finally, the model explains why the later development of a formal diagnostic theory is necessary. The present paper integrates the mechanisms. It demonstrates that municipal police policy failure often emerges from interacting structural, linguistic, cognitive, instructional, supervisory, digital, and legal conditions. The next theoretical step is to formalize those mechanisms into a diagnostic model capable of identifying the type, location, severity, and operational consequence of policy system failure. The synthesis established here supplies the foundation. A police agency does not merely need a policy manual. It needs a human centered legal decision system capable of guiding, training, supervising, correcting, and learning under the conditions in which policing actually occurs.

XII. IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN CENTERED LEGAL DECISION SYSTEMS

The integrated causal model developed in the prior section leads to one central implication: municipal police policy reform cannot be limited to adding more rules, updating more language, purchasing better software, collecting more acknowledgments, or mapping more standards. Those actions may be necessary, but they are not sufficient. If the problem is architectural, cognitive, instructional, supervisory, digital, and evidentiary, then the corrective response must also be architectural, cognitive, instructional, supervisory, digital, and evidentiary. The agency does not need merely a better manual. It needs a human centered legal decision system.

A human centered legal decision system is a Directive architecture designed to translate legal authority, organizational expectations, supervisory control, training requirements, and corrective feedback into usable decision guidance for Officers and Supervisors operating under real conditions. It begins with law, but it does not end with law. It must account for how people read, learn, remember, retrieve, interpret, apply, supervise, and correct policy under stress. Cognitive Load Theory supports this requirement because instructional systems must be designed around the limits of working memory and the need for schema formation (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988, Sweller et al., 1998). Recognition based decision making research supports it because personnel under time pressure depend on accessible cues and usable mental models (Klein,

1998, Klein, 2008). Police accountability and street level bureaucracy scholarship support it because frontline discretion must be structured, reinforced, and reviewed in practice, not merely described in text (Lipsky, 1980, Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018).

The first implication is that policy architecture must become a formal design object. Agencies should stop treating policy as a set of individual documents and begin treating the Directive system as an integrated architecture. Prior work in this series showed that decentralized drafting and legacy accumulation produce redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment when no one controls system wide coherence (Bremer, 2024a). Public administration scholarship supports the distinction between separate policy instruments and integrated policy coherence (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). Therefore, agencies should evaluate not only whether each Directive is current, but whether related Directives operate together. A use of force Directive should align with body worn camera, reporting, supervisory review, medical aid, duty to intervene, internal affairs, training, and discipline Directives. Policy architecture must be governed as a system.

The second implication is that Directives should be written around operational decision points. Legacy policy often reads as accumulated legal and administrative language. A human centered legal decision system should begin with the decisions personnel must make. What is prohibited? What is mandatory? What is permitted? What is expected? What facts trigger Supervisor notification? What documentation is required? What review follows? What correction occurs when the rule is misunderstood or violated? Prior work in this series argued that policy should be treated as cognitive operating architecture because it structures perception, role assignment, threat recognition, communication, prioritization, and action under stress (Bremer, 2026a). Directives should therefore be organized around the path from condition to decision to action to review.

The third implication is that obligation language must be controlled across the entire Directive system. Modal verbs are not stylistic choices. They are obligation signals. Must should identify mandatory action. Must not should identify prohibited action. May should identify authorized discretion. Should should identify expected practice that allows justified deviation. Qualifiers such as when feasible, as appropriate, and if possible should be used carefully and defined where they affect high liability decisions. Prior work in this series described modal verbs as decision triggers that influence how Officers perceive obligation, discretion, and expected practice (Bremer, 2024b). Legal interpretation and plain language authorities also support the need for precision in mandatory and permissive language (Office of the Federal Register, 2017, Scalia & Garner, 2012, Tiersma, 1999). A human centered system cannot tolerate uncontrolled obligation language because unstable language produces unstable decisions.

The fourth implication is that Directives must reduce unnecessary Policy Cognitive Load. Police work is already cognitively demanding. Directives should not add avoidable burden through fragmentation, unclear terminology, excessive cross references, dense paragraphs, unprioritized factors, or poorly sequenced decision rules. Prior work in this series defined Policy Cognitive Load as the burden imposed by Directive structure, ambiguity, branching complexity, cross reference dependency, and training misalignment (Bremer, 2025b). The corrective implication is not to make policy simplistic. The corrective implication is to make policy cognitively coherent. Complex legal and operational subjects should be structured through clear definitions, visible thresholds, stable sequencing, controlled language, and decision pathways that can be trained and retrieved under pressure.

The fifth implication is that policy and training must be integrated at the design stage. A Directive is not fully implemented when it is published. It becomes operational when personnel can retrieve and apply it. Prior work in this series argued that passive dissemination verifies exposure without proving comprehension, retention, or operational application (Bremer, 2025c). Retrieval practice and training transfer research support that conclusion because active recall, practice testing, distributed reinforcement, and application improve durable learning and transfer better than passive review (Baldwin & Ford, 1988, Blume et al., 2010, Dunlosky et al., 2013, Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). Therefore, high liability Directives should be written with training in mind. The policy should identify decision points that can be taught, tested, practiced, and reviewed.

The sixth implication is that comprehension validation must become part of policy implementation. Acknowledgment has value, but it is not enough for high liability Directives. Agencies should classify Directives by risk and match implementation depth to risk. Low risk administrative updates may require acknowledgment only. Material revisions to force, pursuit, search, custody, intervention, domestic violence, mental health response, prisoner handling, body worn camera use, or supervisory review should require more. Comprehension validation may include short knowledge checks, scenario prompts, Supervisor discussion, report review, body camera based application, remedial assignments, and periodic refreshers. This approach treats testing not as punishment, but as feedback and reinforcement (Bjork & Bjork, 2011, Bremer, 2025c, Roediger & Karpicke, 2006).

The seventh implication is that supervision must be built into the Directive rather than assumed. A high liability Directive should identify Officer duties and Supervisor duties as separate but connected parts of the same control system. Supervisors should know what they must review, what standard they must apply, what they must document, what they must correct, when they must escalate, and when they must refer for retraining, discipline, audit, or policy revision. Prior work in this series argued that legacy policy systems often fail by stating rules for Officers while leaving supervisory review, correction, and feedback duties underdeveloped (Bremer, 2026b). This omission matters because supervision is the field control layer that detects whether policy is functioning in practice. Without designed supervision, implementation depends too heavily on individual memory and informal correction.

The eighth implication is that the Directive system must include a corrective feedback loop. Complaints, use of force reviews, pursuit reviews, body camera audits, report deficiencies, internal affairs findings, legal changes, training failures, suppression rulings, lawsuits, and Supervisor identified confusion should feed back into policy review, retraining, supervision, and correction. Organizational learning theory supports this because durable improvement requires changing the system that produced the error, not merely correcting the visible event (Argyris & Schön, 1978, Senge, 1990). Systems theory similarly warns that latent conditions persist when feedback is weak or fragmented (Perrow, 1984, Reason, 1990). A human centered legal decision system should therefore treat warning signs as information about the policy system, not merely as isolated incidents.

The ninth implication is that digital platforms should be used as implementation infrastructure rather than completion infrastructure. Digital policy systems can support version control, assignment, training linkage, testing, Supervisor alerts, remedial assignments, policy review, reports, and accreditation proofs. They can also reduce implementation to acknowledgment, dashboard status, and proof mapping. Prior work in this series argued that PowerDMS and similar platforms amplify the agency's existing policy culture rather than create that culture by themselves (Bremer, n.d.). Implementation science supports this distinction because adoption of

a tool does not establish implementation fidelity (Durlak & DuPre, 2008, Fixsen et al., 2005, Nilsen, 2015). A human centered system should ask whether the digital record proves operational implementation or only administrative completion.

The tenth implication is that legal defensibility should be grounded in function, not paper presence. A policy manual protects the agency only if the agency can show that the Directive system actually functioned. Municipal liability doctrine requires fault and causation, and no policy system can prevent every constitutional violation (*Board of County Commissioners v. Brown*, 1997, *Connick v. Thompson*, 2011, *Monell v. Department of Social Services*, 1978). But when the issue is failure to train, failure to supervise, or failure to correct, the agency's best evidence is not merely the existence of a rule. It is the implementation record. Did the agency train the rule? Did it validate comprehension? Did Supervisors review field application? Did complaints or audits trigger correction? Did legal changes trigger revision? Prior work in this series argued that legacy policy systems may become evidence against the agency when they prove presence without function (Bremer, 2026b).

The eleventh implication is that agencies need a centralized policy architecture function. Decentralized contribution is unavoidable because legal advisors, Command Staff, specialized Units, accreditation managers, training personnel, and Supervisors all possess relevant expertise. But decentralized contribution should not mean decentralized architecture. Someone must own the coherence of the Directive system as a whole. Organizational theory supports this because differentiated functions require integration when outputs are interdependent (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, Thompson, 1967). A centralized architecture function would maintain definitions, modal language rules, policy hierarchy, cross Directive alignment, revision triggers, training integration, supervisory duties, and feedback loops. Without that role, fragmentation will continue to reproduce through ordinary maintenance.

The twelfth implication is that policy review cycles must move beyond date based revision. Many agencies review Directives on a fixed cycle. Periodic review is useful, but it is not enough. A Directive should also be reviewed when operational evidence shows confusion, drift, legal change, repeated noncompliance, supervisory inconsistency, litigation risk, audit findings, or training failure. Date based review asks whether time has passed. Function based review asks whether the Directive is working. A human centered legal decision system needs both. This implication follows from the liability paper's emphasis on notice, warning signs, correction, and revision after known risk appears (Bremer, 2026b).

The thirteenth implication is that policy reform must resist additive repair when the defect is architectural. If a Directive is missing a definition, adding one may solve the problem. If a legal standard is outdated, updating the standard may solve the problem. But when the system suffers from accumulated fragmentation, unstable terminology, cross reference dependency, training misalignment, weak supervision, and poor feedback, adding more language may intensify the same failure. Prior work in this series described this as compliance accretion and Policy Architecture Drift (Bremer, 2025a). Organizational learning theory similarly distinguishes surface correction from deeper system change (Argyris & Schön, 1978). A structurally maladaptive Directive system may require architectural replacement, not incremental patching.

The fourteenth implication is that agencies should evaluate Directives through usability criteria. Traditional policy review often asks whether the Directive is legally accurate, accredited, complete, and approved. Human centered review should also ask whether the Directive is understandable, internally coherent, consistent with related Directives, aligned with training, structured around decisions, clear in obligation language, manageable in cognitive load,

reviewable by Supervisors, and connected to correction. Human factors scholarship supports the need to design systems around user cognition and task performance rather than institutional convenience alone (Norman, 2013, Wickens et al., 2015). In policing, usability is not cosmetic. It is operational.

The fifteenth implication is that this framework changes how policy failure should be diagnosed. When an Officer misapplies a Directive, the agency should not ask only whether the Officer violated the rule. It should also ask whether the Directive was coherent, whether the language was clear, whether the rule was trained, whether comprehension was validated, whether Supervisors reinforced it, whether prior warning signs existed, and whether the digital record proves implementation. This does not excuse misconduct. It expands the diagnostic lens. Reason's human error framework supports this broader inquiry because visible errors often reflect deeper system conditions (Reason, 1990, Reason, 2000).

These implications do not require agencies to abandon compliance, accreditation, digital platforms, legal review, or policy management systems. They require agencies to subordinate those tools to the higher function of lawful operational decision making. Compliance should support policy function. Accreditation should support system coherence. Digital platforms should support implementation. Legal review should support operational clarity. Training should support retrieval and application. Supervision should support correction and learning. Each component must serve the Directive's purpose as a human centered legal decision system.

This section therefore identifies the direction of reform, not the full replacement model. The later formal diagnostic theory can specify categories, tests, metrics, and remediation pathways. The present synthesis establishes why such a model is necessary. A Compliance Centered Police Policy System may produce documents, proofs, acknowledgments, and dashboards. A human centered legal decision system produces usable legal guidance, trained understanding, supervised application, correction after warning signs, and evidence that the agency learned from its own operations.

The implication is direct. Municipal police policy reform cannot remain a manual management project. It must become a decision system design project. The agency must build Directives around the people who must use them, the stress under which they must act, the law they must obey, the Supervisors who must review them, the training that must reinforce them, the digital tools that must document implementation, and the feedback that must improve the system over time. Anything less preserves the central weakness of the compliance centered model: it proves that the agency had rules while leaving unresolved whether those rules functioned when they mattered most.

XIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that municipal police policy failure is not adequately explained by the absence of written rules. Modern police agencies often possess extensive Directive manuals, accreditation proofs, digital policy platforms, electronic acknowledgment records, and formal review cycles. Yet those records do not necessarily prove that Directives function as operational guidance. The central problem identified in this synthesis is the persistence of Compliance Centered Police Policy Systems, meaning Directive architectures designed and evaluated primarily to prove rule existence, standards conformity, administrative completion, and legal defensibility, while insufficiently ensuring that Directives operate as coherent, cognitively usable, training integrated, supervision connected, and feedback driven legal decision systems.

The subordinate mechanism papers establish the components of that failure. Instructional Systems Failure in Municipal Police Policy framed the larger problem by showing that Directives are often designed as compliance artifacts while being used operationally as human centered instructional decision systems (Bremer, 2025a). Fragmented Policy Systems showed that decentralized drafting and legacy accumulation generate redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment across related Directives (Bremer, 2024a). From Language to Action showed that modal verbs and obligation language function as operational decision triggers, not stylistic choices (Bremer, 2024b). Cognitive Load in Police Policy showed that fragmented, ambiguous, dense, and structurally inconsistent Directives increase cognitive burden and contribute to misapplication under operational stress (Bremer, 2025b). Policy Without Comprehension showed that passive dissemination and acknowledgment based systems verify exposure without proving comprehension, retention, retrieval, or field application (Bremer, 2025c). Digitized Compliance showed that digital platforms may support disciplined implementation or amplify passive completion depending on agency use (Bremer, n.d.). Legacy Police Policy Systems as Evidence of Failure to Train and Failure to Supervise Liability showed how weak policy systems may become evidence of municipal omission when they prove presence without function after warning signs appear (Bremer, 2026b). Policy as a Cognitive System showed that the same cognitive architecture problem appears in high consequence operational domains beyond ordinary municipal policing (Bremer, 2026a).

The unified pattern is clear. Compliance centered production creates Directive systems that are administratively visible but operationally uncertain. The agency can often prove that a policy exists, that a standard was mapped, that a revision occurred, that a task was assigned, or that an Officer acknowledged receipt. Those facts matter, but they do not answer the deeper operational question. Did the Directive produce lawful decision making under stress? Did the Officer understand the duty? Was the obligation signal clear? Was the Directive coherent with related policies? Was the rule trained and reinforced? Did Supervisors know what to review and correct? Did warning signs trigger revision, retraining, discipline, or organizational learning? Those questions determine whether the Directive system functions.

The central causal model developed in this paper explains why policy presence may fail to become policy function. Compliance centered production and decentralized drafting generate structural fragmentation. Fragmentation produces a compliance coherence gap because related Directives may satisfy separate requirements while failing to operate as one internally consistent system. Fragmented architecture destabilizes obligation language, producing decision signal failure. Structural and linguistic instability increase Policy Cognitive Load by forcing Officers and Supervisors to process unnecessary complexity, ambiguity, and cross reference dependency. Elevated cognitive load degrades comprehension, recall, schema activation, and recognition based decision making. Passive dissemination then fails to determine whether personnel actually understood or retained the Directive. Weak supervision fails to detect and correct implementation drift. Digital systems may document completion while leaving implementation unproven. When warning signs appear and the agency does not revise, retrain, supervise, discipline, or correct, the policy system may become evidence of institutional failure rather than evidence of institutional control.

This synthesis also clarifies why traditional reform responses may be incomplete. Agencies often respond to failure by adding more policy language, more documentation requirements, more review steps, more electronic assignments, or more accreditation proofs. Those responses may be necessary in particular contexts, but they are not sufficient when the underlying problem is architectural. Adding more language to an incoherent Directive system can deepen fragmentation. Adding more qualifiers to an ambiguous rule can increase

interpretive instability. Adding more acknowledgment assignments can expand proof of exposure without improving comprehension. Adding more digital records can create stronger evidence of completion without proving implementation. Reform becomes ineffective when it adds compliance material to a system that was never rebuilt for human decision making.

The outside literature supports this conclusion. Cognitive Load Theory demonstrates that working memory is limited and that poorly structured instructional information increases extraneous load (Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988, Sweller et al., 1998). Recognition Primed Decision Making theory shows that personnel under time pressure rely on pattern recognition and accessible schemas rather than slow analytical reconstruction (Klein, 1998, Klein, 2008). Street level bureaucracy scholarship shows that frontline personnel interpret and operationalize policy under constraint rather than mechanically execute written rules (Lipsky, 1980, Maynard Moody & Musheno, 2003). Organizational systems theory shows that visible failures often emerge from latent structural conditions embedded within the system before the incident occurs (Perrow, 1984, Reason, 1990). Implementation science shows that adoption is not implementation and that fidelity requires organizational capacity, feedback, training, leadership, and sustained practice (Durlak & DuPre, 2008, Fixsen et al., 2005, Nilsen, 2015). Municipal liability doctrine confirms that policy, custom, training, supervision, discipline, and omission may become legally relevant when connected to constitutional injury, while also requiring careful proof of municipal fault and causation (Board of County Commissioners v. Brown, 1997, City of Canton v. Harris, 1989, Connick v. Thompson, 2011, Monell v. Department of Social Services, 1978).

The legal point should remain restrained. This paper does not argue that every old policy, unclear sentence, weak training record, or missed acknowledgment creates liability. It does not argue that PowerDMS or any other digital platform causes municipal liability. It does not argue that accreditation is defective or that compliance has no value. The argument is narrower and stronger. A policy system becomes legally and operationally dangerous when it repeatedly proves presence without proving function, especially after warning signs reveal that Directives are not being understood, supervised, corrected, or revised. The constitutional issue is not the mere existence of policy imperfection. The issue is whether the agency maintained a system reasonably capable of preparing, guiding, supervising, correcting, and learning from recurring constitutional decision points.

This paper's contribution is therefore conceptual and integrative. It brings together structural policy analysis, linguistic analysis, cognitive science, training theory, implementation science, supervision theory, digital policy management, and municipal liability doctrine into one system level explanation. The result is not merely a critique of legacy manuals. It is a reframing of police policy itself. A Directive is not only a document. It is legal decision architecture. It must translate law into action, action into supervision, supervision into correction, correction into learning, and learning back into revision. A Directive system that cannot perform that cycle is incomplete, even when it appears administratively complete.

The practical implication is direct. Municipal police agencies should move from compliance centered policy management toward human centered legal decision systems. Such systems must be legally grounded, structurally coherent, cognitively usable, linguistically controlled, training integrated, comprehension validated, supervision connected, digitally supported, feedback driven, and revision capable. The agency must be able to show not only that a Directive existed, but that the Directive was written to be understood, trained to be retrieved, supervised to be applied, corrected when misunderstood, and revised when evidence showed that it was not functioning.

This does not make policy simple. Policing is legally and operationally complex. Some Directives must preserve discretion. Some decisions require judgment. Some encounters cannot be reduced to mechanical rules. But a human centered legal decision system does not eliminate discretion. It structures discretion. It tells Officers where discretion exists and where it does not. It tells Supervisors what must be reviewed. It tells trainers what must be reinforced. It tells command staff what warning signs require revision. It tells the agency what evidence is needed to prove that policy became operational governance rather than administrative recordkeeping.

The future of municipal police policy reform cannot depend on better storage of legacy systems. It cannot depend only on better dashboards, more frequent review cycles, more signatures, or longer Directives. Those tools may support reform, but they cannot substitute for architecture. The essential task is to rebuild police Directives around the actual conditions of use: human cognition, legal thresholds, operational stress, recognition based decision making, supervisory control, comprehension validation, digital implementation, and organizational learning.

The final conclusion is therefore straightforward. Legacy police policy systems fail when they are built to prove compliance after the fact rather than guide lawful decision making before harm occurs. A police agency does not need only a manual. It needs a functioning legal decision system. The measure of a Directive is not whether it exists, whether it was acknowledged, or whether it satisfies a standard when read alone. The measure is whether it helps Officers and Supervisors make, review, correct, and learn from lawful decisions under the conditions in which policing actually occurs.

XIII. RECOMMENDED CHANGES FOR AGENCIES WITH LEGACY POLICY SYSTEMS

Therefore, agencies with legacy policy systems should not modernize by merely uploading existing Directives into a digital platform, adding additional compliance language, or collecting electronic acknowledgments. Modernization should rebuild the policy system as a human centered legal decision system designed to support lawful action, supervisory control, training transfer, correction, and organizational learning under operational conditions. The following changes are recommended.

- Conduct a system wide Directive architecture audit. The agency should review the entire policy system as an integrated architecture, not as isolated documents. The audit should identify redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, misalignment, inconsistent definitions, conflicting reporting triggers, uneven supervisory duties, and outdated legal references across related Directives (Bremer, 2024a, Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019).
- Establish centralized policy architecture control. The agency should assign responsibility for system wide Directive coherence to a designated policy architecture function. Command Staff, legal advisors, accreditation personnel, Training Function personnel, Supervisors, and specialized Units may contribute subject matter expertise, but one authority should control definitions, structure, terminology, hierarchy, cross Directive alignment, and revision logic (Bremer, 2024a, Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, Thompson, 1967).
- Rebuild high liability Directives around operational decision points. Directives governing use of force, pursuits, search and seizure, prisoner handling, duty to intervene, mental health response, domestic violence response, body worn camera use, internal affairs,

and supervisory review should be organized around the decisions Officers and Supervisors must actually make. Each Directive should clearly identify prohibited conduct, mandatory duties, permitted discretion, expected practices, decision thresholds, documentation requirements, supervisory review duties, and corrective triggers (Bremer, 2025a, Bremer, 2026a, Klein, 1998).

- Adopt a controlled modal language protocol. The agency should standardize obligation language across all Directives. Must should mean mandatory. Must not should mean prohibited. May should mean permitted discretion. Should should mean expected practice unless circumstances justify deviation. Qualifiers such as when feasible, if possible, and as appropriate should be defined when they affect high liability decisions (Bremer, 2024b, Office of the Federal Register, 2017, Scalia & Garner, 2012, Tiersma, 1999).
- Reduce unnecessary Policy Cognitive Load. Directives should be rewritten to reduce avoidable complexity, dense paragraphing, excessive cross references, unstable terminology, unprioritized factors, and unnecessary branching. The goal is not to make policy simplistic. The goal is to make complex legal and operational guidance cognitively usable under stress (Bremer, 2025b, Paas et al., 2003, Sweller, 1988, Sweller et al., 1998).
- Separate rules, discretion, exceptions, and documentation duties. Each high liability Directive should distinguish the core rule, mandatory duties, discretionary authority, exceptions, and after action documentation. Officers should not have to infer whether a provision is a rule, factor, preference, exception, or reporting requirement during a high stress event (Bremer, 2024b, Bremer, 2025b).
- Align every high liability Directive with training. Policy and training should be developed together. When a Directive is issued or materially revised, the Training Function should convert the Directive into learning objectives, decision thresholds, scenarios, retrieval prompts, knowledge checks, and supervisory reinforcement points (Bremer, 2025c, Baldwin & Ford, 1988, Blume et al., 2010, Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).
- Replace passive dissemination with risk based comprehension validation. Low risk administrative updates may require acknowledgment only. High liability Directives should require comprehension checks, scenario based application, Supervisor led discussion, remedial review where needed, and periodic reinforcement. Acknowledgment should prove receipt, not understanding (Bremer, 2025c, Dunlosky et al., 2013, Roediger & Karpicke, 2006).
- Build supervisory duties directly into the Directive. Each high liability Directive should identify what Supervisors must review, what standard they must apply, what they must document, when they must correct, when they must escalate, and when they must refer an issue for training, discipline, audit, or policy revision. Supervision should be designed into the policy system, not assumed by title (Bremer, 2026b, Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018).
- Create corrective feedback loops. Complaints, internal affairs findings, use of force reviews, pursuit reviews, body camera audits, report deficiencies, suppression rulings, lawsuits, legal updates, failed quizzes, and Supervisor identified confusion should trigger

review of the relevant Directive, training, supervision, and corrective process. The agency should treat warning signs as system information, not merely isolated incidents (Bremer, 2026b, Argyris & Schön, 1978, Reason, 1990, Senge, 1990).

- Use digital platforms as implementation infrastructure, not completion infrastructure. Systems such as PowerDMS should be configured to document more than assignment and acknowledgment. The digital record should show version control, material revision review, training linkage, comprehension validation, Supervisor notification, remedial assignments, corrective action, and policy revision after warning signs (Bremer, n.d., Bremer, 2026b, Durlak & DuPre, 2008, Fixsen et al., 2005).
- Classify Directives by risk level. The agency should create implementation categories for low risk, moderate risk, and high risk Directives. Higher risk Directives should receive deeper training, more frequent reinforcement, stronger supervisory review, and more robust digital documentation. This prevents every Directive from being treated the same while ensuring that constitutional and operational risk receives appropriate implementation depth (Bremer, 2025c, Bremer, 2026b).
- Require material revision triggers. The agency should distinguish administrative edits from material revisions. A material revision should include changes affecting legal standards, Officer duties, Supervisor duties, documentation requirements, reporting thresholds, disciplinary consequences, or operational decision points. Material revisions should trigger targeted training and comprehension validation (Bremer, n.d., Bremer, 2026b).
- Integrate accreditation with coherence review. Accreditation standards mapping should not be treated as proof that the Directive system is coherent. The agency should use accreditation review as one input, then separately test whether related Directives align across definitions, thresholds, duties, reporting, supervision, training, and correction (Bremer, 2024a, Bremer, n.d., Cejudo & Michel, 2017).
- Establish a policy usability review before approval. Before adoption, each high liability Directive should be reviewed for legal accuracy, operational clarity, cognitive usability, modal language control, training alignment, supervisory duties, documentation requirements, and feedback triggers. Legal sufficiency should be necessary but not sufficient (Bremer, 2025a, Bremer, 2025b, Norman, 2013, Wickens et al., 2015).
- Connect internal affairs and policy revision. Internal affairs findings should not remain isolated disciplinary files. Sustained findings, repeated allegations, recurring report deficiencies, and repeated misunderstandings should be reviewed for policy, training, supervision, and system implications. Discipline should correct the individual where appropriate, but the agency should also determine whether the Directive system contributed to the failure (Bremer, 2026b, Beck v. City of Pittsburgh, 1996, Estate of Roman v. City of Newark, 2019).
- Preserve evidence of implementation, not merely exposure. The agency should maintain records showing that Directives were current, coherent, trained, understood, supervised, corrected, and revised when necessary. The strongest policy record is not only proof that an Officer acknowledged a Directive. It is proof that the agency operated a living

implementation system (Bremer, n.d., Bremer, 2026b, City of Canton v. Harris, 1989, Monell v. Department of Social Services, 1978).

- Move from manual management to decision system governance. The agency should stop treating the policy manual as the final product. The final product is lawful, consistent, supervised, and correctable decision making in the field. The Directive system should therefore be governed as operational infrastructure, not as an administrative archive (Bremer, 2025a, Bremer, 2026a).
- Use legacy policy modernization as an architectural replacement process. Agencies should avoid simply editing old Directives one paragraph at a time when the deeper failure is structural. Where the system suffers from accumulated fragmentation, inconsistent language, weak training integration, passive dissemination, supervisory silence, and poor feedback loops, modernization should rebuild the architecture rather than add more language to the same legacy structure (Bremer, 2025a, Bremer, 2024a, Argyris & Schön, 1978).
- Measure success by policy function. The agency should evaluate modernization by whether Directives are coherent, understandable, trainable, retrievable, supervisable, enforceable, correctable, and revision capable. The question is not only whether the agency has a policy. The question is whether the policy helps Officers and Supervisors make, review, correct, and learn from lawful decisions under operational stress.

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