

Fragmented Policy Systems: How Decentralized Drafting Creates Inconsistency and Conflict

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Abstract

Police departments rely on written directives to translate legal authority, accreditation requirements, supervisory expectations, documentation duties, and operational responsibilities into formal organizational guidance. Yet police policy analysis and accreditation practice often emphasize the adequacy of discrete policies or standards compliance, while giving less explicit attention to the coherence of the directive system as an integrated architecture. This paper argues that decentralized, multi author policy development structures function as a causal system that generates fragmentation through redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment. Drawing on organizational systems theory, bureaucratic fragmentation, institutional drift, path dependency, Normal Accident Theory, and high reliability organization literature, the paper demonstrates that fragmented directive systems are not merely the result of poor drafting or isolated administrative error. They are predictable outputs of production structures in which authorship, ownership, revision, and maintenance are distributed without a centralized authority responsible for system wide coherence.

The paper further argues that compliance and accreditation frameworks can verify conformity with required standards without necessarily detecting whether related directives operate as an internally coherent system. This creates a compliance coherence gap in which agencies may satisfy formal standards while retaining structurally inconsistent directive architectures. Through cross domain comparison with healthcare protocol systems, aviation procedural standardization, military doctrine, and public administration coordination failures, the paper shows that fragmentation is a generalizable systems failure pattern in complex organizations. The paper concludes by proposing a structural model: decentralized production produces fragmentation mechanisms, fragmentation remains undetected where coherence is not evaluated, undetected fragmentation persists and scales through institutional routines, and the resulting system produces inconsistent formal guidance. The central contribution is to shift police policy analysis from the adequacy of individual directives to the architecture and governance of the directive system as a whole.

I. INTRODUCTION

Police directives occupy a central position in the administrative architecture of modern policing. They translate legal authority, professional standards, supervisory expectations, documentation duties, and operational responsibilities into formal organizational guidance. Written policy is one of the principal mechanisms through which police agencies attempt to control discretion, define organizational expectations, and create accountability for official conduct (Goldstein, 1977, Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018). Yet the existence of written policy does not itself establish that the policy system functions coherently. A police agency does not operate through one directive at a time. It operates through a system of interdependent directives whose meaning, authority, and practical effect depend on how those directives relate to one another.

A fragmented policy system exists when individual directives appear complete, current, or compliant when examined separately, but collectively produce structural inconsistency across the policy architecture. Fragmentation is not merely poor writing, unclear formatting, or failure to update a single document. It is a system level condition in which the relationships among directives become unstable. Public administration literature distinguishes coordination, coherence, and integration as related but analytically distinct conditions, which is significant because a set of policies may be formally coordinated around required subjects while still failing to operate as an integrated and coherent system (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). Within a police directive system, fragmentation may appear as repeated rules expressed differently, incompatible instructions across related policies, uneven revision timelines, accumulated additions that are never integrated, or misaligned definitions, responsibilities, thresholds, documentation duties, and supervisory expectations.

This paper addresses the gap between compliance and coherence. Compliance asks whether a policy system satisfies a rule, standard, or documentation requirement. Coherence asks whether the components of the policy system operate together as an internally consistent structure of guidance. The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) describes accreditation as a process through which public safety agencies voluntarily meet an established set of professional standards (Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies [CALEA], n.d.-a). CALEA identifies five phases in the accreditation process: enrollment, self assessment, assessment, commission review and decision, and maintaining compliance and reaccreditation (CALEA, n.d.-b). NJSACOP similarly describes law enforcement accreditation as grounded in the adoption of standards containing professional objectives, with participating agencies conducting self analysis to determine how existing operations can be adapted to those standards and objectives (New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police [NJSACOP], n.d.). These descriptions support a careful and limited claim: accreditation is a standards based compliance structure. They do not, by themselves, establish that accreditation functions as a system wide coherence audit of every relationship among related directives. The analytical distinction between standards compliance and system coherence must therefore be drawn from policy integration and public administration theory, not from accreditation materials alone (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019).

The central causal variable examined here is decentralized policy production. Police directives are often created, revised, inherited, imported, amended, and maintained by multiple actors over time. Command staff, accreditation managers, legal advisors, supervisors, specialized units, policy vendors, committees, and prior administrations may each shape portions of the policy system. Commercial policy management platforms and professional policing organizations make model policies, policy resources, and policy management tools available to agencies, which supports the limited descriptive claim that external policy materials may enter

local directive systems (International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], n.d., PowerDMS, n.d.). The structural problem is not that these actors lack expertise. The problem is that each actor may produce locally rational policy language without controlling the architecture of the directive system as a whole. Organizational theory makes this risk predictable. As organizations differentiate tasks, roles, and specialized functions, they also increase the need for integration mechanisms capable of coordinating those differentiated outputs (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, Thompson, 1967). Galbraith's organizational information processing theory further supports the proposition that complex organizational work requires sufficient coordination capacity to process interdependence and uncertainty (Galbraith, 1973). A police policy system that distributes authorship, ownership, revision, and maintenance without centralized architectural control is therefore structurally predisposed to fragmentation.

This paper advances the following hypothesis: decentralized, multi author police policy development structures function as a causal system that generates fragmentation through redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment. Because compliance and accreditation frameworks can verify conformity with required standards without necessarily evaluating the relational coherence of the directive system as a whole, these fragmentation effects may remain undetected, persist over time, become institutionalized, and scale across directives, resulting in structurally inconsistent directive application. This hypothesis treats fragmentation not as an accidental outcome of careless drafting, but as a predictable product of the production structure itself. Perrow's analysis of complex systems supports the broader theoretical proposition that failures can emerge from system interaction rather than from a single isolated error or negligent actor (Perrow, 1999). Historical institutionalist work on path dependence, drift, and layering further explains why structural arrangements, once embedded, tend to persist and accumulate through ordinary institutional maintenance rather than disappear through routine correction (Mahoney, 2000, Pierson, 2000, Streeck & Thelen, 2005).

The scope of this paper is deliberately narrow. It analyzes structural system failure in police policy production. It does not develop cognitive load theory, failure to train doctrine, instructional systems theory, modal verb analysis, or linguistic ambiguity. Those issues may arise downstream from fragmentation, but they are not the analytical object of this paper. The central question is structural: how does decentralized policy creation produce systemic inconsistency, and why does that inconsistency persist despite formal compliance? This scope follows the governing research design for the paper, which requires analysis of policy production structure, fragmentation mechanisms, and the persistence of coherence failure within accreditation and compliance environments.

The argument proceeds in seven movements. First, the paper establishes a theoretical framework grounded in organizational systems theory, bureaucratic fragmentation, institutional drift, path dependency, Normal Accident Theory, and high reliability organization literature. Second, it defines the key variables: decentralized policy production, structural inconsistency, fragmentation mechanisms, non detection, and scaling. Third, it presents a causal analytical model linking decentralized production to fragmentation, fragmentation to non detection, non detection to persistence, and persistence to system level inconsistency. Fourth, it examines the structure of policy production in policing, emphasizing multi author drafting environments, decentralized ownership, incremental updates, legacy accumulation, and the absence of centralized design authority. Fifth, it analyzes redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment as system mechanisms. Sixth, it explains why accreditation and compliance systems can validate policy presence without necessarily detecting relational incoherence across directives. Finally, it uses cross domain evidence from healthcare, aviation, military

doctrine, and public administration to demonstrate that fragmentation is a generalizable failure pattern in complex systems lacking sufficient integration control.

The contribution of this paper is to shift police policy analysis from the adequacy of individual directives to the architecture of the directive system. A single directive can be legally current, professionally written, and accreditation compliant while still contributing to system incoherence when read against related directives. This distinction matters because police agencies govern conduct through interdependent policy systems, not isolated documents. If the system is fragmented, inconsistency is not incidental. It is built into the structure through which organizational guidance is produced, validated, revised, and maintained.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this paper rests on the premise that police directive systems must be analyzed as organizational systems rather than as collections of independent documents. Open systems theory treats organizations as interdependent arrangements of roles, processes, inputs, outputs, and feedback mechanisms rather than as static formal charts or isolated administrative products (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Scott and Davis similarly distinguish formal organizational structures from the larger systems of interaction through which organizations actually operate, which supports analyzing directives not only by their individual content but by their relationships across the broader policy architecture (Scott & Davis, 2007). Applied to policing, this means that the meaning of one directive is rarely self contained. A use of force directive, vehicle pursuit directive, body worn camera directive, evidence directive, supervisory review directive, and reporting directive may each govern different parts of an incident, but their operational effect depends on whether they function together as a coherent system.

Organizational differentiation creates the first structural condition for policy fragmentation. Lawrence and Lorsch argued that organizations differentiate internally as they respond to varied environmental demands, but that differentiation also creates a corresponding need for integration mechanisms capable of coordinating specialized units and functions (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Thompson likewise emphasized that organizations must manage interdependence among differentiated activities if they are to operate as coordinated systems rather than as disconnected parts (Thompson, 1967). This theoretical relationship is directly applicable to police policy production. Specialized units, accreditation personnel, legal advisors, command staff, and operational supervisors may each produce or revise policies from a legitimate subject matter perspective. Yet the more differentiated the production structure becomes, the more the agency requires an integration authority capable of preserving coherence across the directive system.

Organizational information processing theory reinforces this point. Galbraith argued that organizations must develop information processing capacity sufficient to manage task uncertainty and interdependence (Galbraith, 1973). When task complexity increases but coordination capacity does not, organizational performance deteriorates because the structure cannot process the volume and relational complexity of the information it must manage. Police policy systems create precisely this kind of information processing burden. Legal updates, accreditation standards, technology changes, incident reviews, litigation concerns, supervisory expectations, documentation requirements, and operational revisions all enter the policy system through different channels. If those channels produce discrete updates without a system wide mechanism for reconciling related directives, the agency's formal guidance architecture becomes increasingly vulnerable to redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment.

Bounded rationality provides an additional explanation for why fragmentation can emerge even when individual actors act competently. Simon argued that administrative actors make decisions under cognitive and informational limits, relying on satisfactory rather than perfect solutions within the organizational constraints they face (Simon, 1947). March and Simon further emphasized that organizations operate through routines, limited search, and localized decision processes rather than through total system optimization (March & Simon, 1958). In the context of policy production, an accreditation manager may satisfy a specific standard, a legal advisor may correct a discrete legal issue, and a commander may revise a procedure for a particular operational problem. Each decision may be reasonable within its local frame. The structural defect arises when those local decisions are not integrated into the directive system as a whole.

Normal Accident Theory supplies the paper's complex systems lens. Perrow argued that in complex and tightly coupled systems, failures can arise from unexpected interactions among system components rather than from one isolated mistake or one negligent actor (Perrow, 1999). The relevance to police policy systems is not that directives are identical to high risk technological systems. The relevant point is analytical: when system components interact in ways that are difficult to fully observe, predict, or control, failure may be produced by the structure of interaction itself. A contradiction between two directives, an obsolete provision left unreconciled after a legal update, or a reporting requirement repeated differently across several policies may not be traceable to one clear act of misconduct. It may instead be the ordinary output of a complex policy architecture lacking sufficient integration control.

Public administration theory places this problem within the broader literature on bureaucratic fragmentation. Peters described horizontal coordination as a recurring problem in government because public organizations divide authority across programs, offices, and institutional responsibilities that do not automatically align (Peters, 1998). Bouckaert, Peters, and Verhoest argued that coordination in the public sector is a structural governance problem because differentiated administrative units often require deliberate mechanisms to align their activities (Bouckaert et al., 2010). Christensen and Lægreid's work on whole of government reform similarly treats fragmentation as a recurring feature of public administration and identifies integration as a necessary response to segmented authority (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007). Police policy fragmentation fits within this broader pattern. A directive system is a public administrative system, and the division of drafting authority across functions creates the same coordination risks identified in the public administration literature.

The distinction among coordination, coherence, and integration is especially important. Cejudo and Michel argue that fragmented government action requires careful differentiation among these concepts because aligning activities, avoiding policy contradiction, and integrating policy instruments are related but not identical administrative problems (Cejudo & Michel, 2017). Trein, Meyer, and Maggetti likewise show that policy integration and coordination are distinct analytical concerns within public policy research, particularly where complex policy problems require multiple instruments, actors, and governance levels to work together (Trein et al., 2019). This distinction is essential for the paper's compliance coherence argument. A police agency may coordinate its policies around accreditation standards, and it may maintain documentation showing compliance with those standards, but that does not necessarily prove that the directives operate as an integrated and coherent system.

Institutional theory explains why fragmented policy structures persist once established. Pierson's work on path dependence shows that institutional arrangements can become self-reinforcing over time, particularly where increasing returns make existing arrangements easier to maintain than to replace (Pierson, 2000). Mahoney similarly defines path dependence as a

sequence in which early institutional choices constrain later possibilities through self-reinforcing processes (Mahoney, 2000). Applied to directive systems, initial drafting structures, inherited templates, legacy provisions, prior approval practices, and earlier accreditation responses can shape later policy maintenance. Once those structures become embedded, agencies may revise around them rather than reconstruct the system, allowing fragmentation to persist through ordinary administrative continuity.

The concepts of drift and layering further explain the gradual accumulation of incoherence. Streeck and Thelen identify institutional change as often occurring through gradual processes rather than abrupt replacement, including layering, in which new rules are added onto existing institutional arrangements, and drift, in which institutions remain formally intact while their environment or functional meaning changes (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Hacker's analysis of institutional drift similarly demonstrates how formal structures may remain in place while changing conditions alter their practical effects (Hacker, 2004). In a police policy system, drift occurs when related directives evolve on different timelines. Layering occurs when new provisions are added to satisfy emerging legal, operational, or accreditation demands without redesigning the surrounding directive architecture. These are not incidental drafting problems. They are institutional change mechanisms that explain why policy incoherence accumulates gradually.

Institutional isomorphism explains how fragmentation can scale beyond a single agency. DiMaggio and Powell argue that organizations within a field tend to become more similar through coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures, especially when legitimacy depends on conformity to accepted models (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Meyer and Rowan similarly argue that formal organizational structures often serve legitimacy functions by demonstrating conformity to institutionalized expectations, even when those formal structures may be loosely coupled from actual operational practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In police policy systems, agencies may borrow from model policies, vendor libraries, accreditation examples, neighboring agencies, and inherited templates. Such borrowing can support professionalization, but it can also reproduce incoherence if imported provisions are inserted without system-wide integration.

High Reliability Organization theory provides the contrast condition. HRO research emphasizes that reliable performance in complex environments depends on active processes of failure detection, operational sensitivity, disciplined communication, and continuous attention to weak signals (Roberts, 1990, Weick et al., 1999). LaPorte and Consolini showed that high reliability is not produced by formal structure alone, but through sustained organizational practices that allow complex systems to operate with unusually low failure rates (LaPorte & Consolini, 1991). Schulman likewise emphasized that organizational reliability depends on negotiated, active processes of maintaining coordination under conditions of complexity (Schulman, 1993). These sources support the paper's critique of passive compliance. A system that merely verifies the existence of required policy content is not equivalent to a system that actively searches for cross-directive incoherence.

Reason's work on organizational accidents also supports the distinction between visible errors and latent structural conditions. Reason argued that major organizational failures often arise from latent conditions embedded in systems, defenses, and managerial structures, not simply from the actions of front-line personnel (Reason, 1997). In the policy context, a contradiction between directives, a misaligned supervisory duty, or an obsolete reporting requirement may function as a latent condition within the agency's formal guidance system. It may remain dormant until a critical incident, disciplinary review, lawsuit, internal investigation, or

accreditation cycle exposes the inconsistency. This framework supports the paper's structural claim while avoiding a shift into individual cognition or training failure.

Taken together, these theoretical traditions establish the paper's analytical foundation. Organizational systems theory shows that directives must be analyzed relationally. Differentiation and information processing theory explain why decentralized authorship creates integration demands. Normal Accident Theory explains how failures can emerge from complex interaction. Public administration literature explains why fragmented authority produces coordination and coherence problems. Institutional theory explains why incoherent structures persist, accumulate, and spread. HRO and organizational accident theory show that complex systems require active reliability management rather than passive confirmation of formal requirements. The resulting theoretical claim is precise: fragmented police policy systems are predictable where decentralized production structures generate interdependent policy outputs without a corresponding mechanism for system wide coherence control.

III. CONCEPTUAL AND VARIABLE DEFINITIONS

This paper defines **structural inconsistency** as the dependent outcome. Structural inconsistency exists when a directive system cannot provide internally coordinated guidance across related operational, supervisory, documentation, and accountability domains. The concept does not refer simply to a poorly drafted sentence or an outdated provision within a single directive. It refers to a system level condition in which the relationships among directives produce uneven, duplicative, incompatible, or poorly coordinated organizational guidance. Public policy literature distinguishes coherence from mere coordination because policy components may be arranged around common subjects or administrative requirements while still failing to operate as a logically integrated policy structure (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). In this paper, structural inconsistency is therefore the condition that results when a police agency's directive architecture lacks sufficient internal coherence.

The independent variable is **decentralized policy production**. Decentralized policy production exists when authorship, revision, ownership, interpretation, and maintenance of directives are distributed across multiple actors without a centralized architectural authority responsible for the integrity of the policy system as a whole. This structure may include command staff, accreditation personnel, legal advisors, specialized units, supervisors, committees, vendors, inherited templates, and legacy policy materials. Organizational theory supports treating this structure as analytically significant because differentiated organizational functions require integration mechanisms when their outputs are interdependent (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, Thompson, 1967). Galbraith's information processing theory further explains that organizations must develop coordination capacity proportionate to task uncertainty and interdependence (Galbraith, 1973). A decentralized directive production system is therefore not simply a staffing arrangement. It is a causal structure that determines whether policy outputs are integrated or fragmented.

The first mediating mechanism is **redundancy**. Redundancy occurs when the same rule, duty, approval requirement, reporting obligation, definition, or supervisory responsibility appears in multiple directives. Redundancy is not inherently defective. In some organizational contexts, deliberate redundancy can create resilience or reinforce critical expectations. The problem arises when redundancy is uncontrolled, meaning that repeated provisions are drafted, revised, or maintained separately and therefore begin to differ in wording, scope, threshold, procedure, or timing. Organizational coordination theory explains why this occurs: when multiple organizational units address overlapping areas of responsibility without a shared integration

mechanism, each unit may produce locally reasonable outputs that generate system level duplication (Bouckaert et al., 2010, Thompson, 1967). In a directive system, uncontrolled redundancy creates multiple versions of organizational authority.

The second mediating mechanism is **contradiction**. Contradiction occurs when two or more directives impose incompatible instructions, conditions, permissions, prohibitions, reporting duties, or supervisory expectations for related circumstances. Contradiction is more severe than redundancy because it creates a formal conflict within the policy architecture. A contradiction may arise when one directive is updated to reflect a new legal requirement, operational lesson, accreditation standard, or administrative priority while a related directive retains older or inconsistent language. Complex systems theory supports treating contradiction as an interaction effect rather than merely as a drafting oversight. Perrow's work explains that system failures may arise from interactions among components that are not fully visible when each component is examined separately (Perrow, 1999). In a police policy system, contradictory directives may remain hidden precisely because each document can appear reasonable in isolation.

The third mediating mechanism is **drift**. Drift occurs when related directives gradually diverge because they evolve on different timelines. Unlike contradiction, drift does not require an immediately visible incompatibility at the moment of drafting. It develops as some policies are revised in response to legal change, accreditation revision, litigation, technology, administrative review, or critical incidents while related policies remain static. Historical institutionalist literature supports this concept. Pierson explains that institutional arrangements often persist through path dependent processes that make existing structures easier to maintain than replace (Pierson, 2000). Hacker defines drift as a condition in which formal arrangements remain in place while changing circumstances alter their effects (Hacker, 2004). Streeck and Thelen likewise identify gradual institutional change as a key mechanism through which institutional systems evolve without full redesign (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). In directive systems, drift produces temporal inconsistency: older and newer policy assumptions coexist without systematic reconciliation.

The fourth mediating mechanism is **layering**. Layering occurs when new rules, exceptions, definitions, procedures, documentation requirements, review duties, or approval thresholds are added onto existing directives without integrating those additions into the broader policy architecture. Streeck and Thelen identify layering as a mode of institutional change in which new elements are attached to existing arrangements rather than replacing them (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). This mechanism is especially important in compliance driven environments because agencies may face pressure to add language quickly in response to a new standard, legal issue, operational problem, or administrative concern. Meyer and Rowan's analysis of formal structure as a legitimacy mechanism also helps explain why organizations may add formal provisions to demonstrate conformity with institutional expectations even when those provisions are only loosely integrated into operational practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In a directive system, layering can make a policy appear more complete while making the system less coherent.

The fifth mediating mechanism is **misalignment**. Misalignment occurs when related directives fail to coordinate definitions, duties, thresholds, reporting sequences, supervisory responsibilities, review processes, documentation requirements, or operational decision points. Misalignment differs from contradiction because the policies may not directly conflict. Instead, they fail to fit together. Public administration literature on policy integration is directly relevant because it distinguishes the existence of multiple policy instruments from the more demanding condition of coherent policy interaction (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). Misalignment

is therefore the structural condition in which directives address related subjects without shared architecture. The result is not necessarily an explicit conflict, but a policy system that cannot reliably coordinate its own components.

The persistence mechanism is **lack of coherence detection**. Lack of coherence detection exists when a review system is capable of identifying whether required policy content exists, but is not designed to evaluate whether all related directives operate together as an internally coherent system. Official accreditation materials support the limited descriptive claim that law enforcement accreditation is structured around established professional standards and agency demonstration of compliance with those standards. CALEA describes accreditation as a voluntary process through which public safety agencies meet an established set of professional standards (CALEA, n.d.-a). CALEA identifies five phases in the accreditation process: enrollment, self assessment, assessment, commission review and decision, and maintaining compliance and reaccreditation (CALEA, n.d.-b). NJSACOP similarly describes law enforcement accreditation as a standards based process involving agency self analysis and adaptation of operations to professional objectives (NJSACOP, n.d.). These sources describe standards based compliance review. They do not establish that accreditation is designed as a comprehensive relational audit of every cross directive dependency. The theoretical distinction between compliance and coherence must therefore be supplied by public policy integration literature (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019).

The scaling mechanism is **institutional reproduction**. Fragmentation scales when redundant, contradictory, drifting, layered, or misaligned provisions are approved, trained, referenced, reused, revised, copied, or imported into additional directives or additional agencies. Pierson's account of path dependence explains how institutional arrangements become self reinforcing once actors adapt to them and the cost of change increases (Pierson, 2000). DiMaggio and Powell's theory of institutional isomorphism explains how organizations within a field may adopt similar structures through coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In police policy systems, this means fragmentation may spread through model policies, vendor libraries, accreditation examples, inherited templates, and agency to agency borrowing. The mechanism is not necessarily intentional. It is institutional. Once fragmented structures are treated as legitimate policy material, they can reproduce through ordinary administrative practice.

These definitions establish the analytical structure for the paper. Decentralized policy production is the causal condition. Redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment are the mediating mechanisms. Lack of coherence detection is the persistence mechanism. Institutional reproduction is the scaling mechanism. Structural inconsistency is the dependent outcome. This framework permits the paper to evaluate fragmentation as a causal system rather than as a collection of isolated drafting errors.

IV. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical framework of this paper is organized around a five part causal model: **decentralized production produces fragmentation mechanisms, fragmentation mechanisms remain undetected where compliance systems do not evaluate coherence, undetected fragmentation persists, persistence enables scaling, and scaling produces system level inconsistency**. This model treats directive fragmentation as a structural output of the policy production system rather than as a series of isolated drafting mistakes. Organizational systems theory supports this approach because organizational outcomes emerge from patterned relationships among interdependent components, not merely from the characteristics

of individual units or actors (Katz & Kahn, 1978, Scott & Davis, 2007). Applied to police policy, the relevant unit of analysis is therefore not the individual directive, but the directive system as an interconnected architecture of formal guidance.

The first causal link runs from **decentralized production to fragmentation**. Decentralized production creates fragmentation because multiple authors and owners generate policy language from different institutional locations, different functional priorities, and different revision histories. Thompson's theory of interdependence explains that differentiated organizational activities require coordination when the output of one unit affects the work of another (Thompson, 1967). Lawrence and Lorsch similarly argue that organizational differentiation creates integration demands because specialized units develop different orientations in response to their environments (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). In a police policy system, the accreditation function may prioritize standard compliance, a legal advisor may prioritize risk language, a specialized unit may prioritize operational detail, and command staff may prioritize administrative control. Each output may be locally rational, but without system level integration, the combined architecture becomes vulnerable to redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment.

The second causal link runs from **fragmentation to detection failure**. Fragmentation can remain invisible when review processes examine directives individually rather than relationally. A policy may satisfy a required standard, contain legally appropriate language, or appear administratively complete while still conflicting with or duplicating another directive. Cejudo and Michel's distinction among coordination, coherence, and integration is critical here because it shows that fragmented governmental action is not resolved merely by the existence of multiple policy instruments addressing required areas (Cejudo & Michel, 2017). Trein, Meyer, and Maggetti similarly demonstrate that public policy integration requires attention to how policy components interact, not simply whether they exist within the same administrative field (Trein et al., 2019). Therefore, a review process that validates the presence of required content can miss the relational defect that makes the policy system incoherent.

The third causal link runs from **detection failure to persistence**. When fragmentation is not detected as a system defect, it remains embedded in the directive architecture and becomes part of the agency's formal policy environment. Meyer and Rowan's theory of institutionalized formal structure helps explain this process. Formal structures can confer legitimacy by demonstrating conformity to institutional expectations, even where formal arrangements are loosely coupled from actual operational coordination (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In the accreditation context, once a directive has been approved, maintained, and used to demonstrate compliance, it may acquire institutional legitimacy by virtue of its existence and acceptance. If cross directive coherence has not been evaluated, that legitimacy can stabilize fragmented language rather than correct it.

The fourth causal link runs from **persistence to scaling**. Fragmentation scales because persistent policy structures become templates for later action. Path dependence literature explains that institutional arrangements become self reinforcing when actors adapt to existing structures and when the cost of replacing those structures increases over time (Mahoney, 2000, Pierson, 2000). Streeck and Thelen's account of gradual institutional change further explains how layering and drift allow institutions to change incrementally while preserving older structures (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). In police policy systems, the same process occurs when agencies revise around existing directives, add new compliance language to old frameworks, reuse inherited provisions, or borrow from familiar policy models. Fragmentation therefore grows through ordinary maintenance rather than through catastrophic failure.

The fifth causal link runs from **scaling to system level inconsistency**. As redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment accumulate, the directive system loses its capacity to provide unified formal guidance. This outcome is structural because it exists in the relationships among documents, duties, thresholds, definitions, review expectations, and supervisory responsibilities. Perrow's complex systems theory supports the claim that system failures may emerge from interactions among components rather than from a single defective component (Perrow, 1999). In the directive context, one policy may not appear deficient when examined alone. The inconsistency becomes visible only when related directives are examined together and their combined obligations are evaluated as a system.

The model also explains why compliance and accreditation can coexist with structural inconsistency. CALEA describes accreditation as a voluntary process through which public safety agencies meet an established set of professional standards (CALEA, n.d.-a). CALEA identifies five phases in the accreditation process: enrollment, self assessment, assessment, commission review and decision, and maintaining compliance and reaccreditation (CALEA, n.d.-b). NJSACOP similarly describes law enforcement accreditation as a process grounded in professional standards and agency self analysis. These descriptions support the conclusion that accreditation is a standards based compliance structure (NJSACOP, n.d.). They do not establish that accreditation is designed to perform a comprehensive coherence audit across every interdependent directive. The analytical implication is that compliance systems may verify whether required policy elements exist while leaving unresolved whether those elements interact coherently across the policy architecture.

This framework does not treat accreditation as irrelevant or valueless. Standards based accreditation can improve professionalization, require documentation, impose administrative discipline, and create external accountability expectations. The claim is narrower and more structural: a standards compliance framework is not necessarily equivalent to a system integration framework. High Reliability Organization literature reinforces this distinction. Reliable performance in complex systems depends on active attention to weak signals, sensitivity to operations, and disciplined processes for detecting failure before it produces harm (Roberts, 1990, Weick et al., 1999). If a policy review structure does not actively search for cross directive inconsistency, then fragmentation can remain outside the review system's field of detection.

The model therefore produces the paper's central explanatory sequence. Decentralized production creates locally rational but systemically vulnerable policy outputs. Those outputs generate fragmentation through redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment. Fragmentation remains undetected when compliance systems evaluate policy presence rather than directive system coherence. Undetected fragmentation persists because approved policies acquire institutional legitimacy and become part of ordinary administrative practice. Persistence becomes scaling as policies are reused, revised, copied, and layered over time. The endpoint is structural inconsistency: a directive system that may appear compliant when reviewed in parts, but incoherent when evaluated as an integrated system.

V. STRUCTURE OF POLICY PRODUCTION IN POLICING

Police directive systems function as administrative infrastructure. They connect law, accreditation standards, supervision, documentation, discipline, training, operational practice, and public accountability into a formal system of organizational guidance. Written policy is one of the principal tools through which police agencies attempt to structure discretion, define authorized conduct, and create standards for review (Goldstein, 1977, Mastrofski, 2004, Walker

& Archbold, 2018). For that reason, the structure through which directives are produced matters. If policy production is fragmented, then the agency's formal guidance system may also become fragmented. The issue is not merely whether a single directive is legally current or professionally written, but whether the total directive system functions as a coherent administrative architecture.

Police policy production commonly occurs in multi author environments. Directives may be drafted, revised, amended, reviewed, or imported by command staff, accreditation managers, legal advisors, specialized units, supervisors, committees, policy vendors, and prior administrations. This is not inherently defective. Complex organizations require specialized knowledge, and policy systems often need input from personnel who understand legal mandates, accreditation requirements, operational practice, and administrative priorities. The structural risk arises when specialized contributions enter the policy system without a corresponding integration mechanism. Lawrence and Lorsch's theory of differentiation and integration explains why this risk is predictable: differentiated organizational units develop specialized orientations, and the organization must then create integration mechanisms to coordinate those differentiated outputs (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). In policy production, specialization without integration produces local competence and system vulnerability at the same time.

Decentralized ownership compounds this risk. In many policy systems, ownership follows subject matter responsibility rather than system architecture. A specialized unit may control a technical directive, accreditation staff may control standards related provisions, command staff may approve revisions, and legal advisors may recommend language to address risk or statutory change. Each ownership claim may be administratively reasonable. Yet public administration literature repeatedly shows that fragmented authority creates coordination problems when no institution is responsible for the coherence of the whole system (Bouckaert et al., 2010, Peters, 1998). The same structure appears within directive systems. When each policy has an owner, but the system as a whole does not, the organization may lack an actor responsible for identifying cross directive inconsistency.

Incremental updating is another structural source of fragmentation. Police agencies revise directives in response to new statutes, court decisions, accreditation revisions, technology changes, litigation concerns, critical incidents, administrative reviews, and operational lessons. These revisions often occur under time pressure and are commonly directed at the policy most visibly connected to the triggering issue. Historical institutionalist theory explains why such revision practices can create drift and layering. Streeck and Thelen describe layering as the addition of new rules onto existing institutional arrangements and drift as the changing effect of institutions that remain formally in place while conditions around them change (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). In directive systems, a legal update may be inserted into one policy while related policies remain unchanged. A new accreditation requirement may be added to an existing directive without reconciling definitions, reporting duties, or supervisory expectations elsewhere. The system changes, but unevenly.

Legacy accumulation further intensifies the problem. A current directive system may contain language produced by former Chiefs, prior command staffs, previous accreditation cycles, earlier legal advisors, policy vendors, model policy sources, and inherited local practices. Path dependence explains why these inherited structures persist. Pierson argues that institutional arrangements can become self reinforcing because actors adapt to them and because the costs of replacement increase over time (Pierson, 2000). Mahoney similarly explains that early institutional choices can structure later possibilities through self reinforcing sequences

(Mahoney, 2000). In a police directive system, inherited language often becomes the default foundation for future revision. Rather than reconstructing the architecture, agencies tend to revise around what already exists. That practice preserves continuity, but it also preserves latent inconsistency.

Policy reuse and external borrowing add another layer to the production structure. Agencies may rely on model policies, vendor templates, neighboring agency examples, accreditation samples, and legacy policy libraries. Such materials can support professionalization by giving agencies access to recognized policy language and common administrative structures. But institutional isomorphism theory also shows how organizations within a field tend to adopt similar forms in response to legitimacy pressures, uncertainty, professional norms, and imitation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Meyer and Rowan similarly argue that formal structures often demonstrate conformity to institutional expectations, even when those structures may be loosely coupled from actual operational needs (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). When imported policy language is inserted without system wide integration, reuse can transmit not only professional standards, but also structural incompatibilities.

The central production defect is the absence of centralized design authority. Approval authority is not the same as architectural authority. A Chief, governing body, command staff, or accreditation process may approve individual directives, but approval of parts does not necessarily equal governance of the whole. Galbraith's organizational design theory emphasizes that organizations must create information processing capacity sufficient to manage interdependence and uncertainty (Galbraith, 1973). Thompson likewise shows that interdependent work requires coordination mechanisms appropriate to the form and intensity of interdependence (Thompson, 1967). A directive system with many authors, many update triggers, many external compliance demands, and many operational dependencies requires a mechanism responsible for cross directive coherence. Without that mechanism, the production structure itself becomes the source of fragmentation.

This production structure produces a critical distinction between local rationality and system rationality. A legal advisor may reasonably update the search and seizure directive after a court decision. An accreditation manager may reasonably add required language to satisfy a standard. A specialized unit may reasonably revise a procedure based on operational experience. A vendor may reasonably supply model language grounded in common practice. Yet the directive system can still become incoherent if those changes are not reconciled across related policies. March and Simon's account of organizations as systems of bounded rationality and localized decision making supports this point because organizational actors often solve problems within limited frames rather than by optimizing the entire system (March & Simon, 1958, Simon, 1947). Fragmentation is therefore not proof that individual actors acted irrationally. It is evidence that locally rational policy production lacked system level integration.

The structure of police policy production therefore creates the conditions necessary for fragmentation. Multi author drafting distributes authorship. Decentralized ownership distributes responsibility. Incremental updating produces uneven revision. Legacy accumulation preserves older structures. Policy reuse imports external language. Lack of centralized design authority prevents relational reconciliation. These conditions do not guarantee that every directive system will be equally fragmented, but they establish why fragmentation is a predictable structural risk in compliance driven policy environments. The next section analyzes the mechanisms through which that risk becomes a system property: redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment.

VI. FRAGMENTATION AS A SYSTEM PROPERTY

Fragmentation is best understood as a predictable system property of decentralized policy production rather than as an accidental drafting defect. A fragmented directive system emerges when interdependent policy components are created, revised, and maintained through distributed authority without sufficient integration control. Organizational systems theory supports this position because system outcomes are produced by relationships among components, not merely by the characteristics of each component viewed separately (Katz & Kahn, 1978, Scott & Davis, 2007). Public administration scholarship likewise treats fragmented governmental action as a structural problem that arises when differentiated programs, instruments, or administrative units are not sufficiently coordinated or integrated (Bouckaert et al., 2010, Cejudo & Michel, 2017). In police policy systems, fragmentation therefore should not be treated as an exception to normal policy production. It is the expected result when multiple authors produce interdependent directives without system wide coherence control.

The first mechanism is **redundancy**. Redundancy occurs when the same rule, responsibility, definition, approval requirement, reporting duty, documentation obligation, or supervisory expectation appears in more than one directive. Redundancy is not inherently harmful. In organizational design and safety literature, deliberate redundancy may support resilience when it creates backup capacity or reinforces essential controls (Reason, 1997). The problem in directive systems is uncontrolled redundancy. When repeated provisions are maintained separately, they can evolve differently, appear in different locations, use different thresholds, or impose different procedural details. At that point, redundancy no longer reinforces the system. It creates multiple versions of the same organizational obligation.

Uncontrolled redundancy emerges structurally from overlapping policy jurisdiction. Police operations do not divide cleanly into isolated policy subjects. A single incident may implicate use of force, arrest procedures, body worn camera activation, reporting, evidence handling, supervisory notification, pursuit review, complaint intake, and internal investigation. When different authors or units draft directives around their own functional responsibilities, they often restate overlapping duties from their own local perspective. Thompson's theory of interdependence explains why this occurs: where organizational activities depend on one another, separate units must coordinate their outputs or risk producing inconsistent results (Thompson, 1967). Galbraith's information processing theory similarly indicates that greater interdependence requires greater coordination capacity (Galbraith, 1973). In the absence of a controlled rule inventory or system wide reconciliation process, overlapping policy jurisdiction predictably produces repeated obligations.

The structural consequence of redundancy is that the directive system may contain several versions of the same requirement. One directive may require immediate supervisory notification, another may require notification before the end of the shift, another may condition notification on a threshold event, and another may use different documentation language for the same underlying occurrence. The problem is not simply that personnel must read repeated language. The deeper problem is that the agency has created multiple formal sources for the same duty. That weakens system coherence because formal authority is no longer expressed through one controlled policy relationship. Public policy literature distinguishes coherence from the mere presence of multiple policy instruments, and this distinction is directly applicable to repeated policy rules that exist without integration (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019).

The second mechanism is **contradiction**. Contradiction occurs when two or more directives provide incompatible instructions for related circumstances. Contradiction may involve an action

that one directive requires and another limits, a threshold that one directive defines one way and another defines differently, or a reporting sequence that cannot be followed consistently because related directives impose incompatible timing, approval, or review requirements. Unlike redundancy, contradiction does not merely multiply policy language. It creates formal conflict inside the policy architecture. A contradictory directive system cannot speak with one organizational voice because it authorizes or requires inconsistent conduct across related policy domains.

Contradiction emerges when directives are revised locally without cross directive reconciliation. A policy may be updated after a court decision, accreditation revision, technology change, critical incident, or administrative review, while related directives remain unchanged. Complex systems theory helps explain why this defect can remain hidden. Perrow argued that failures in complex systems often arise from interactions among system components that are not visible when those components are examined separately (Perrow, 1999). A revised directive may appear accurate in isolation, and an unrevised directive may appear familiar or historically legitimate. The contradiction becomes visible only when the two are examined relationally. This is why contradiction is a system property. It arises not only from the content of individual directives, but from the failure to manage the relationships among them.

The structural consequence of contradiction is formal organizational instability. If one directive instructs personnel to take one course of action and another directive points toward a different course, then the policy system itself has transferred conflict resolution to supervisors, units, legal advisors, or individual personnel. That does not require an analysis of cognition or training to identify the defect. The defect exists in the formal structure. Police accountability literature recognizes written policy as a mechanism for controlling discretion and establishing reviewable expectations (Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018). Contradictory directives weaken that mechanism because they prevent the organization from identifying a single, consistent standard of authorized conduct.

The third mechanism is **drift**. Drift occurs when related directives gradually diverge over time because they are revised on different schedules or in response to different pressures. Drift is not necessarily obvious at the moment it begins. A directive may remain unchanged because no one has identified it as defective, while another directive is updated because it is more visible, more directly tied to accreditation, or more clearly affected by a recent event. Historical institutionalism is especially useful here. Pierson explains that institutions often persist through path dependent processes because actors adapt to existing arrangements and because change becomes more difficult as structures become embedded (Pierson, 2000). Hacker's work on drift further shows that formal arrangements may remain in place while changing circumstances alter their functional meaning (Hacker, 2004).

Drift emerges through asynchronous revision. Police policy systems are exposed to multiple update triggers, including statutory change, judicial decisions, accreditation revisions, technology, litigation, internal audits, leadership priorities, and incident reviews. These triggers rarely affect the entire directive system at once. More often, they affect one visible policy area while related policies remain untouched. Streeck and Thelen's theory of gradual institutional change explains this pattern because institutional systems often change through partial adjustment rather than complete redesign (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). In a directive system, partial adjustment allows old and new policy assumptions to coexist. A body worn camera directive may be updated for new technology, while evidence, complaint, use of force, or supervisory review directives continue to reflect earlier operational assumptions.

The structural consequence of drift is temporal inconsistency. The directive system contains different generations of organizational authority at the same time. Some provisions reflect current law, technology, accreditation expectations, or agency practice. Others reflect earlier assumptions that remain formally valid because they have never been removed or reconciled. This produces a policy architecture in which age and currency are unevenly distributed across related directives. The system may appear stable because the documents remain formally approved, but the relationships among those documents have changed. Drift therefore allows incoherence to develop without any single dramatic policy failure.

The fourth mechanism is **layering**. Layering occurs when new provisions are added onto existing directives without redesigning the surrounding policy architecture. Layering may include new definitions, exceptions, approval requirements, reporting steps, supervisory duties, documentation obligations, review procedures, or compliance statements. Streeck and Thelen identify layering as a form of institutional change in which new rules are attached to existing arrangements rather than replacing them (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). In directive systems, layering is common because adding language is often faster, cheaper, and administratively easier than reconstructing the broader policy system.

Layering emerges from compliance pressure and administrative expediency. When an agency faces a new accreditation requirement, legal development, technology issue, or operational concern, the immediate administrative response is often to insert corrective language into the most relevant directive. Meyer and Rowan's theory of formal structure as institutional legitimacy explains why organizations may adopt formal provisions to demonstrate conformity to external expectations, even where those provisions are not fully integrated into operational systems (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In the directive context, added language may satisfy the immediate appearance of compliance. But if the addition is not reconciled with related directives, it becomes another layer in an already accumulated policy structure.

The structural consequence of layering is density without coherence. A layered directive may appear more complete because it contains more requirements, more exceptions, more procedures, or more documentation language. Yet each added layer can increase the number of relationships that must be reconciled across the system. Perrow's analysis of complex systems supports this concern because additional interacting components can increase the difficulty of anticipating how system parts will relate under operational conditions (Perrow, 1999). Layering therefore can solve a narrow policy problem while increasing the system level risk of redundancy, contradiction, drift, or misalignment. The directive becomes thicker, but not necessarily more coherent.

The fifth mechanism is **misalignment**. Misalignment occurs when related directives do not coordinate their definitions, thresholds, duties, reporting requirements, supervisory responsibilities, documentation standards, review sequences, or operational assumptions. Misalignment differs from contradiction because the directives may not directly conflict. They may simply fail to fit together. Policy integration literature is essential to this concept because it distinguishes the existence of multiple policies from the more demanding condition of coherent policy interaction (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). Misalignment is therefore a relational defect. It exists in the gaps among policies, not necessarily in any single policy read alone.

Misalignment emerges when directives are organized around separate standards, units, incidents, or functions rather than shared architecture. For example, one directive may define a reportable incident by event type, another by force level, another by injury, another by

complaint, and another by supervisory review requirement. Each definition may be understandable in its own policy context. The system defect appears when those definitions are not reconciled across the agency's formal guidance structure. Public administration coordination literature explains why this is predictable in fragmented systems. Horizontal coordination is difficult because administrative components often pursue their own programmatic or functional logic unless deliberate integration mechanisms align them (Bouckaert et al., 2010, Peters, 1998). In police policy systems, separate functional logic becomes separate directive logic.

The structural consequence of misalignment is breakdown of system wide coordination. Personnel may encounter different definitions, thresholds, approval points, documentation duties, or review obligations depending on which directive is consulted first. Supervisors may also apply different expectations because the formal architecture does not align duties across related contexts. Again, the paper need not claim that personnel are confused or poorly trained. The structural defect is prior to those issues. The directive system itself fails to coordinate its internal components. If policy is intended to support organizational control and accountability, then misalignment weakens that function by making the formal standard uneven across the system (Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018).

These five mechanisms do not operate independently. They interact and compound. Redundancy creates multiple locations where later contradiction can develop. Drift allows older and newer provisions to separate over time. Layering adds new material that may not align with existing directives. Misalignment hides contradictions because related policies appear to address different subjects even when they govern connected conduct. Complex systems theory is useful precisely because it explains how system failures can emerge from interaction effects rather than from single component defects (Perrow, 1999). Reason's organizational accident framework similarly emphasizes that latent conditions embedded in organizational systems can align over time to produce failure (Reason, 1997). In directive systems, fragmentation mechanisms operate as latent structural conditions within the formal guidance architecture.

The result is a policy system that may retain the appearance of order while losing internal coherence. Each directive may have a title, approval date, revision history, accreditation connection, and professional format. Each may appear defensible when reviewed alone. But fragmentation is not located only inside individual documents. It exists in the relationships among them. A system can therefore look complete while operating inconsistently. That is the central structural claim of this section: decentralized policy production generates fragmentation not because policy actors necessarily act carelessly, but because the production system creates interdependent outputs without sufficient coherence control.

VII. ACCREDITATION AND COMPLIANCE AS NON DETECTING SYSTEMS

Compliance and coherence are different evaluative conditions. Compliance asks whether an agency can demonstrate conformity with an applicable standard, rule, requirement, or proof expectation. Coherence asks whether the agency's directives operate together as an internally aligned system of formal guidance. This distinction is central to the paper because a fragmented directive system may still satisfy many forms of compliance review. Public policy scholarship distinguishes coordination, coherence, and integration as analytically separate problems, and that distinction supports the claim that the existence of standards, policies, or administrative processes does not automatically establish system wide policy coherence (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). In a police directive system, the relevant defect may not be that a required policy is missing. The defect may be that required policies exist but do not fit together.

Law enforcement accreditation is properly understood as a standards based validation structure. CALEA describes accreditation as an opportunity for public safety agencies to voluntarily meet an established set of professional standards (CALEA, n.d.-a). CALEA describes its law enforcement accreditation standards as best practices addressing life, health, and safety procedures for the agency (CALEA, n.d.-c). CALEA describes self assessment as an internal, systematic analysis of agency operations, management, and practices to determine compliance with applicable standards (CALEA, n.d.-d). CALEA describes assessment as including remote file review and site based assessment to confirm standards compliance (CALEA, n.d.-e). NJSACOP similarly describes accreditation as grounded in the adoption of standards containing professional objectives, with participating agencies conducting self analysis to determine how existing operations can be adapted to meet those standards and objectives (NJSACOP, n.d.). These descriptions establish the proper baseline: accreditation evaluates agencies against professional standards and requires agencies to demonstrate compliance.

That baseline matters because the critique advanced here is not that accreditation lacks value. Accreditation can create administrative discipline, standardize professional expectations, require written directives, promote review of agency practices, and reinforce accountability. The analytical point is narrower. A standards based validation process is not necessarily the same as a system wide coherence audit. Public administration scholarship shows that policy integration requires more than the presence of multiple instruments or the separate alignment of those instruments to formal objectives (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). Therefore, even when accreditation effectively confirms that an agency has adopted required policies or practices, that confirmation does not logically prove that every related directive has been tested against every other directive for redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment.

This limitation can be described more precisely as standards conformity validation without full relational coherence testing. Standards conformity validation occurs when a review system confirms that required policy content, documentation, proofs, or practices satisfy an applicable standard, without necessarily testing whether all related directives operate together as a coherent policy architecture. Standards conformity validation is necessary in any compliance environment because agencies must be able to show that required rules, procedures, proofs, practices, and administrative controls satisfy applicable standards. CALEA's self assessment description expressly frames the process around determining whether agency operations, management, and practices comply with applicable standards (CALEA, n.d.-d). But a directive may exist and still be misaligned with another directive. A required provision may be present and still be repeated differently elsewhere. A standard may be satisfied and still leave unresolved whether related directives use consistent thresholds, definitions, reporting sequences, supervisory duties, or review mechanisms.

Standards based review logic helps explain why this limitation persists. Checklist based tools are valuable when the central risk is omission, and standards based review systems are valuable when the central question is whether an agency can demonstrate conformity with required standards. Aviation and healthcare safety research demonstrates that well designed checklists and procedural standardization can reduce omitted steps and improve reliability when embedded within a coherent operating system (Degani & Wiener, 1993, Haynes et al., 2009, Pronovost et al., 2006). But omission control, standards conformity, and relational coherence are not identical. A checklist can confirm that required items are present, but it does not necessarily reveal whether those items interact consistently across the broader system. In a directive system, the relevant question is often not simply, "Does a policy address this issue?" The deeper question is, "Do all directives that address this issue impose compatible definitions,

duties, thresholds, approvals, reporting obligations, and review expectations?" A checklist structure can assist with the first question while missing the second.

The missing control is **integration testing**. In this context, integration testing means a deliberate review of how related directives interact across the entire policy system. Such a review would compare definitions, approval thresholds, reporting duties, supervisory responsibilities, documentation requirements, review sequences, and operational assumptions across all affected directives. HRO theory demonstrates why this type of active detection matters in complex systems. High reliability is associated with sustained attention to failure, sensitivity to operations, reluctance to simplify, and organizational processes that identify weak signals before they become system failures (Roberts, 1990, Weick et al., 1999). A directive system that lacks integration testing may still maintain a formal review process, but it lacks the specific review function needed to detect cross directive incoherence.

Diffusion of responsibility further explains why coherence failures are not corrected. When authorship, revision, and ownership are distributed across multiple actors, no single actor may be positioned to see the whole system. Organizational coordination theory shows that differentiated activities require mechanisms capable of managing interdependence across units and functions (Galbraith, 1973, Thompson, 1967). Public administration literature similarly identifies fragmented authority as a persistent obstacle to coordinated governmental action (Bouckaert et al., 2010, Peters, 1998). In police policy production, a unit may own its operational directive, accreditation personnel may manage standards compliance, legal counsel may advise on discrete legal changes, and command staff may approve revisions. Yet none of those roles necessarily owns the cross directive architecture. When the system lacks an architectural owner, the system lacks a natural point of responsibility for coherence failure.

Organizational incentives reinforce local repair rather than system redesign. Accreditation deadlines, legal updates, emerging technologies, litigation concerns, leadership changes, staffing limits, and critical incident responses often require agencies to act quickly. Under those conditions, adding language to an existing directive is administratively easier than reconstructing a policy architecture. Institutional theory explains why organizations often preserve formal structures that have already acquired legitimacy, even when those structures are only loosely coupled to operational needs (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Path dependence further explains why existing arrangements become difficult to replace once actors adapt to them and the cost of change increases (Pierson, 2000). In a directive system, these incentives make incremental amendment more likely than comprehensive integration.

The result is the central paradox of this paper: a police agency can be formally compliant and structurally incoherent at the same time. The paradox disappears once compliance and coherence are separated analytically. Accreditation materials show that law enforcement accreditation is organized around professional standards and agency demonstration of compliance with those standards (CALEA, n.d.-a, n.d.-d, n.d.-e, NJSACOP, n.d.). Public administration literature shows that policy coherence and integration require attention to the relationships among instruments, not merely the existence of instruments or their separate alignment to objectives (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). Therefore, unless a review system expressly evaluates the directive architecture as an interdependent whole, it may validate the presence of policies while leaving structural fragmentation intact.

This does not make accreditation the cause of fragmentation. The cause remains decentralized production without sufficient system architecture control. Accreditation becomes relevant because it can function as a non detecting validation environment. If a fragmented directive

system repeatedly passes through standards based review without a relational coherence audit, the system gains legitimacy while its internal inconsistencies remain uncorrected. That is why compliance can become a persistence mechanism. It does not necessarily create the fragmentation, but it may fail to detect it, and by failing to detect it, it allows fragmentation to survive, normalize, and scale.

VIII. SCALING EFFECTS AND SYSTEM ENTRENCHMENT

Fragmentation expands because directive systems are cumulative. Each legal update, accreditation cycle, incident review, technology change, leadership transition, or operational revision creates another opportunity for uneven integration. When a policy system lacks a system wide coherence control, each update is absorbed into the existing architecture through partial adjustment rather than full reconstruction. Historical institutionalism explains why this pattern is common. Institutional arrangements often persist because actors adapt to them, routines form around them, and the cost of replacement increases over time (Mahoney, 2000, Pierson, 2000). In police policy systems, this means that fragmentation does not need to be recreated from the beginning with each revision. Once embedded, it can expand through ordinary maintenance.

Formal approval is one mechanism of entrenchment. Once a directive is adopted, signed, published, referenced, trained, or used in an accreditation file, it gains institutional legitimacy. Meyer and Rowan argue that formal organizational structures often operate as legitimacy signals because they demonstrate conformity to institutional expectations, even where formal structures may be loosely coupled from actual operational practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This concept is directly applicable to directive systems. A policy that has passed review may be treated as authoritative because it has been formally approved. Yet formal approval of an individual directive does not necessarily prove that the directive is coherent with all related directives. Approval can therefore stabilize the very provisions that later produce redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, or misalignment.

Practice is a second mechanism of entrenchment. Organizations often adapt to imperfect formal systems by developing informal routines, local interpretations, and workarounds. Cyert and March explain that organizations rely on routines and adaptive behavior rather than constant comprehensive optimization (Cyert & March, 1963). Lipsky's work on street level bureaucracy likewise shows that front line public service systems frequently rely on practical interpretation and routinized discretion when formal rules do not fully resolve operating conditions (Lipsky, 1980). In a fragmented directive system, supervisors and personnel may learn which provisions are actually enforced, which policies are treated as controlling, and which inconsistencies are resolved through custom rather than formal architecture. These adaptations allow the organization to keep functioning, but they also reduce pressure to correct the underlying system defect.

Precedent is a third mechanism of entrenchment. Prior policy language often becomes the starting point for later drafting. A provision that appeared in an older directive may be copied into a revised directive because it is familiar, previously approved, or assumed to be safe. Path dependence theory explains why this pattern is durable. Pierson argues that institutional paths become increasingly difficult to reverse as actors invest in them and as alternative paths become more costly (Pierson, 2000). Mahoney similarly explains that once a self reinforcing sequence begins, later institutional development is constrained by earlier choices (Mahoney, 2000). In the directive context, precedent can turn prior drafting choices into future drafting

defaults. Even flawed language can become durable when it is embedded in templates, revision habits, or inherited policy structures.

Incremental revision is a fourth mechanism of entrenchment. Streeck and Thelen explain that institutional change often occurs through gradual processes such as layering and drift rather than through wholesale replacement (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). This is especially significant in policy systems because incremental revision allows old and new structures to coexist. A police agency may add new body worn camera language after a technology change, new reporting language after an accreditation update, or new review language after an incident. Each addition may respond to a real problem. Yet when these additions are not reconciled across the directive system, they compound the existing structure rather than correct it. The result is not sudden collapse. It is cumulative incoherence.

Fragmentation also scales through policy borrowing and shared models. Police agencies commonly operate within a field of professional expectations, accreditation standards, model policies, vendor products, and peer agency examples. DiMaggio and Powell's theory of institutional isomorphism explains how organizations within the same field become more similar through coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In policing, agencies may imitate policies perceived as legitimate, adopt vendor language to reduce drafting burden, or borrow from accredited agencies to align with professional norms. This process can diffuse useful standards, but it can also transmit structural problems. If borrowed provisions are inserted without full integration, policy reuse becomes a scaling mechanism for fragmentation.

Diffusion does not require intentional replication of defects. Greenhalgh and colleagues' review of innovation diffusion in service organizations shows that adoption processes are shaped by compatibility, complexity, communication channels, organizational context, and implementation conditions (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). Applied to directive systems, this means that imported language may be adopted because it appears reputable, efficient, or professionally accepted, not because it has been tested against the receiving agency's total policy architecture. The imported policy element may have been coherent in its original context, partially coherent in a model form, or already fragmented. Once transferred, its effect depends on whether it is integrated into the receiving system. Without integration, borrowing can spread misalignment across agencies.

Accreditation cycles can also reinforce entrenchment. Standards based review may prompt agencies to update, reorganize, or add directives to demonstrate compliance with professional standards. This has institutional value, but it also creates an incentive to repair policies in relation to specific standards rather than redesign the policy system as a whole. Meyer and Rowan's theory of formal structures as legitimacy bearing arrangements helps explain why organizations may prioritize visible conformity to institutional expectations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). When a directive is amended to satisfy a standard, the amendment may strengthen the agency's compliance posture while leaving cross directive coherence unresolved. Over repeated cycles, this pattern can create a policy system that becomes more formally developed while also becoming more structurally layered.

Leadership turnover further stabilizes fragmentation. New leaders often inherit directive systems already shaped by prior administrations, legal updates, accreditation reviews, and vendor materials. Because policy systems are large and administratively embedded, new leadership may focus on visible priorities rather than comprehensive reconstruction. Historical institutionalism explains this persistence because inherited institutional arrangements shape the range of feasible action available to later decision makers (Thelen, 1999). In policing, leadership

changes may produce selective updates, new priorities, or policy additions, but they do not automatically produce architectural review. As a result, the directive system accumulates leadership eras rather than maintaining a single coherent design logic.

Entrenchment is strengthened when informal practice masks formal incoherence. Vaughan's analysis of the Challenger launch decision demonstrates how organizational deviance can become normalized through routine practices, institutional pressures, and accepted ways of interpreting risk (Vaughan, 1996). The analogy is not that police policy fragmentation is equivalent to NASA's technical failure. The relevant theoretical point is that organizations can normalize structurally risky conditions when those conditions become familiar and are repeatedly absorbed into ordinary practice. In directive systems, personnel may become accustomed to looking around inconsistent provisions, supervisors may resolve conflicts informally, and policy managers may prioritize immediate updates over system redesign. Familiarity then reduces the perceived urgency of correction.

Over time, fragmentation becomes administrative sediment. Each layer reflects a prior legal update, accreditation response, operational problem, leadership priority, vendor import, or legacy drafting choice. Streeck and Thelen's concept of layering explains how new institutional elements accumulate on top of old arrangements rather than replacing them (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Perrow's complex systems theory explains why increasing interaction among components can make system behavior more difficult to observe and control (Perrow, 1999). In a directive system, administrative sediment is not merely historical clutter. It is accumulated formal authority. Because each layer has some institutional origin and some apparent justification, the system becomes harder to challenge as a system.

The consequence is that fragmentation scales along four dimensions. It scales across **time** as old and new directives evolve unevenly. It scales across **subjects** as overlapping policy domains generate repeated or incompatible obligations. It scales across **organizational units** as specialized policy owners maintain local directives without system wide reconciliation. It scales across **agencies** as policy models, vendor language, and accreditation examples are borrowed and adapted. Institutional theory explains why these pathways are durable: once structures are legitimized, routinized, and reproduced, they become difficult to dislodge (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, Meyer & Rowan, 1977, Pierson, 2000).

Scaling effects therefore transform fragmentation from a correctable local defect into a systemic condition. A single redundant provision can be edited. A single contradiction can be resolved. A single outdated policy can be revised. But once redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment are distributed across a large directive system, the problem is no longer a drafting error. It is an institutional architecture problem. The system has accumulated inconsistency through the same processes by which it ordinarily maintains legitimacy, compliance, and continuity. That is why fragmentation persists and scales: it is reproduced through approval, practice, precedent, incremental revision, borrowing, accreditation cycles, leadership turnover, and normalization.

IX. OPERATIONAL CONSEQUENCES, STRUCTURAL ONLY

The first operational consequence of fragmentation is inconsistent formal guidance across related directives. This consequence is structural because it exists in the agency's written policy architecture before any question of individual comprehension, training quality, or discretionary judgment arises. Written policy is one of the formal mechanisms through which police agencies attempt to structure discretion and define reviewable expectations for official conduct

(Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018). When related directives impose different definitions, duties, thresholds, reporting requirements, supervisory responsibilities, or review sequences, the agency's formal guidance system no longer expresses a unified organizational position. The defect is therefore located in the structure of the directive system itself.

Inconsistent formal guidance is especially consequential because police operations routinely involve overlapping policy domains. A single event may require reference to directives governing arrest, search and seizure, use of force, body worn cameras, evidence, reporting, supervision, internal review, complaints, vehicle operations, or medical aid. Organizational systems theory supports analyzing these policies relationally because organizational outputs emerge from interaction among system components rather than from isolated units alone (Katz & Kahn, 1978, Scott & Davis, 2007). If those directives do not align, the agency has not merely produced several imperfect documents. It has produced a formal system in which related components do not coordinate.

The second structural consequence is conflicting supervisory expectations. Supervisors rely on directives to evaluate conduct, require reports, assign responsibility, initiate review, and impose corrective action. Police accountability literature recognizes formal policy as an important tool for controlling discretion and creating standards by which conduct can be reviewed (Goldstein, 1977, Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018). If different directives impose different supervisory duties or review expectations, supervisors may reasonably rely on different provisions when evaluating related conduct. The result is not merely inconsistent interpretation at the individual level. The organization has created multiple formal bases for supervisory action.

Conflicting supervisory expectations weaken the administrative control function of policy. Thompson's theory of organizational interdependence explains that coordinated action requires structures capable of aligning related activities (Thompson, 1967). In a police agency, supervision is one of the mechanisms through which organizational expectations are translated into review, correction, discipline, and accountability. When the directive system assigns inconsistent review duties across related policies, supervision becomes structurally uneven. One supervisor may treat an incident as requiring immediate review because one directive says so, while another may treat the same incident as subject to a different reporting or review pathway because another directive structures the responsibility differently. The inconsistency is produced by the formal architecture, not merely by individual preference.

The third consequence is increased reliance on informal interpretation. When the written policy system does not resolve its own relationships, personnel and supervisors must supply the missing integration through custom, memory, unit practice, informal advice, or ad hoc judgment. Lipsky's theory of street level bureaucracy explains that public service workers often operate within environments where rules, resource constraints, and practical demands require interpretive adaptation (Lipsky, 1980). Pressman and Wildavsky's implementation analysis similarly shows that implementation becomes more difficult as decisions pass through multiple actors, conditions, and points of dependency (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). In a fragmented directive system, informal interpretation becomes the substitute for formal coherence.

This substitution is structurally significant. The purpose of a directive system is to establish institutional guidance that is stable enough to govern conduct, supervision, documentation, and review. When formal inconsistency forces reliance on informal interpretation, authority shifts from the written architecture to local practice. That does not mean informal judgment is always wrong or operationally unreasonable. The problem is that informal interpretation is not a system

wide control mechanism. It may vary by squad, supervisor, shift, assignment, unit, or incident type. Public administration literature identifies fragmented authority and weak coordination as recurring sources of uneven implementation (Bouckaert et al., 2010, Peters, 1998). Fragmented directives reproduce that same problem inside the agency's internal rule system.

The fourth consequence is breakdown of system wide alignment. Alignment requires that related directives coordinate the same organizational logic across definitions, duties, thresholds, approvals, reporting requirements, supervisory responsibilities, and review processes. Policy integration literature distinguishes the mere existence of policy instruments from the more demanding condition that those instruments operate coherently together (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). A fragmented directive system may continue to contain all expected policy categories, but the categories do not necessarily function together. The agency may have a use of force directive, a reporting directive, a supervisory review directive, and a complaint directive, yet still lack a coherent relationship among them.

Breakdown of alignment also affects accountability. Accountability depends on the ability to identify the applicable rule, the assigned duty, the responsible actor, the required documentation, and the review standard. Walker and Archbold argue that accountability systems depend on formal structures capable of defining and reviewing police conduct (Walker & Archbold, 2018). Where directives are fragmented, the accountability structure becomes harder to apply consistently because the formal system may not specify one coordinated pathway. A failure to report, supervise, document, or review may be evaluated differently depending on which directive is treated as controlling. That is a structural accountability problem.

The consequence is not merely internal administrative inefficiency. It is a weakening of organizational control. Simon's work on administrative behavior emphasizes that organizations structure decision making through rules, roles, and procedures that channel action under conditions of bounded rationality (Simon, 1947). March and Simon likewise show that organizational behavior is shaped by routines and decision structures rather than by fully comprehensive individual analysis in each case (March & Simon, 1958). If the directive system provides inconsistent structures, then the organization has weakened the formal channels through which it attempts to guide action. The failure remains structural because it concerns the design of the decision environment.

Fragmentation also complicates documentation. Documentation requirements are often distributed across multiple directives, including incident reporting, use of force reporting, evidence handling, vehicle operations, supervisory review, internal affairs, complaint intake, and specialized operational policies. When those directives impose different timelines, forms, approval steps, or review requirements, the documentation system becomes misaligned. Reason's organizational accident framework treats latent conditions as weaknesses embedded within systems before visible failure occurs (Reason, 1997). In the directive context, misaligned documentation duties function as latent administrative conditions. They may remain unnoticed until a critical incident, lawsuit, disciplinary review, accreditation file review, or public controversy exposes the inconsistency.

Fragmentation further weakens policy maintenance. A coherent directive system allows policy managers to identify where a change must be made across related documents. A fragmented system obscures those relationships. When a new statute, court decision, technology, accreditation requirement, or operational lesson requires revision, policy managers must know which related directives are affected. Galbraith's information processing theory explains that

organizations must possess enough information processing capacity to manage uncertainty and interdependence (Galbraith, 1973). Fragmented systems increase interdependence while reducing visibility. As a result, each new update becomes another opportunity to deepen drift, layering, and misalignment.

The cumulative consequence is loss of system reliability. HRO theory demonstrates that reliable performance in complex environments depends on active detection, sensitivity to operations, and continuous attention to possible failure points (Roberts, 1990, Weick et al., 1999). Fragmented directive systems move in the opposite direction. They allow latent inconsistencies to accumulate in the formal guidance architecture while preserving the appearance of policy completeness. The system may look stable because every policy exists, but its internal relationships are unstable. Reliability is therefore undermined not by the absence of policy, but by the incoherence of the policy system.

These operational consequences remain structural. The paper does not need to prove that officers misunderstand directives, that training is deficient, or that legal doctrine is violated in any particular case. Those are separate questions. The narrower claim is that fragmentation changes the formal conditions under which organizational guidance is issued, supervised, documented, reviewed, and maintained. If the directive system gives inconsistent formal guidance, creates conflicting supervisory expectations, relies on informal interpretation, weakens accountability pathways, misaligns documentation, and complicates maintenance, then system level inconsistency exists before any downstream human performance issue is analyzed.

The operational endpoint is a directive system that continues to function administratively while no longer functioning coherently. It may contain professionally formatted policies, current approval dates, accreditation references, and required subject matter coverage. Yet the system may fail to provide unified authority, responsibility, documentation, supervision, and review across related operational domains. That is the structural consequence of fragmentation. It transforms the directive system from an integrated governance architecture into an accumulation of partially connected policy artifacts.

X. CROSS DOMAIN EVIDENCE

Cross domain evidence is necessary because the paper's central claim is not limited to policing. The argument is that fragmentation is a general systems failure pattern that appears when complex organizations rely on discrete procedural or compliance structures without sufficient integration control. Perrow's work on complex systems supports the proposition that failures may emerge from interactions among components rather than from isolated component defects (Perrow, 1999). Reason similarly argues that organizational accidents often arise from latent conditions embedded in systems, defenses, procedures, and managerial structures rather than from a single visible front line error (Reason, 1997). These theories justify comparison across domains. The purpose is not to argue that police policy systems are identical to healthcare systems, aviation systems, or military doctrine systems. The purpose is to show that fragmented formal guidance produces predictable risk across complex organizational environments.

Healthcare provides a strong analogy because modern healthcare safety literature repeatedly treats error as a system problem. The Institute of Medicine's **To Err Is Human** argued that many healthcare errors arise from faulty systems, processes, and conditions that lead people to make mistakes or fail to prevent them, rather than from individual negligence alone (Institute of Medicine, 2000). **Crossing the Quality Chasm** further described the American healthcare

system as requiring redesign because quality problems were linked to system fragmentation, poor coordination, and failure to organize care around reliable processes (Institute of Medicine, 2001). These findings support the paper's structural premise. In both healthcare and police policy systems, the central issue is not merely whether individual professionals are competent. The issue is whether the formal system organizes their work through coherent, coordinated guidance.

Healthcare protocol research also shows the importance of standardization when multiple actors must coordinate under risk. Pronovost and colleagues demonstrated that a structured intervention involving evidence based procedures and checklist supported implementation substantially reduced catheter related bloodstream infections in intensive care units (Pronovost et al., 2006). Haynes and colleagues found that implementation of a surgical safety checklist was associated with reduced complications and mortality across diverse hospital settings (Haynes et al., 2009). These studies are not being used to claim that checklist compliance alone proves system coherence. They show something more precise: in complex service environments, reliability improves when critical procedures are standardized, visible, and embedded into coordinated practice. The implication for directive systems is that formal guidance must be organized as an integrated operating structure, not merely as a set of separate documents.

Healthcare also illustrates the limits of diffusion without integration. Greenhalgh and colleagues' systematic review of diffusion in service organizations found that adoption of innovations depends on multiple interacting factors, including the attributes of the innovation, communication channels, organizational context, implementation process, and system readiness (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). This matters for police directives because policy models, vendor language, accreditation examples, and peer agency materials can function like imported organizational innovations. Their value depends on how they are adopted into the receiving system. A protocol or policy element that appears sound in one environment may produce misalignment in another if it is inserted without local integration. Cross domain evidence therefore supports the claim that borrowing professionalized material does not eliminate the need for system coherence review.

Aviation offers a second analogy because aviation has developed a mature procedural culture around standardization, checklist design, and cockpit coordination. Degani and Wiener's work on cockpit checklists emphasized that checklists are not merely lists of tasks, but procedural tools whose design, timing, content, and integration with cockpit workflow matter for safe operation (Degani & Wiener, 1993). Their later work on procedures in complex systems similarly analyzed airline cockpit procedures as components of a broader system involving technology, crew coordination, task demands, and operational context (Degani & Wiener, 1997). Aviation therefore shows that procedural reliability depends on architecture. A checklist or procedure has value when it fits into a coherent system. A collection of procedures that do not align can create risk even when each procedure appears reasonable when read alone.

The aviation analogy also clarifies the difference between procedural existence and procedural integration. A cockpit checklist can reduce omission only if it is designed for the task environment, coordinated with other procedures, and usable in the operational sequence in which it is applied (Degani & Wiener, 1993, 1997). The same principle applies to police directives. A policy requiring documentation, supervisory review, equipment use, or notification may be formally present, but its operational value depends on whether related directives impose compatible definitions, thresholds, timing, and responsibilities. The cross domain lesson is not

that police agencies should simply adopt aviation checklists. It is that procedural systems must be relationally coherent to produce reliable organizational guidance.

Military doctrine supplies a third analogy because doctrine is a formal guidance system for distributed actors operating under conditions of uncertainty, hierarchy, and interdependence. Posen's analysis of military doctrine treats doctrine as an institutional mechanism through which military organizations define how they expect to fight, coordinate, and apply force (Posen, 1984). Cohen and Gooch's analysis of military misfortune identifies failure as often arising from organizational breakdowns in learning, anticipation, and adaptation rather than from isolated battlefield mistakes (Cohen & Gooch, 1990). The relevance to police directives is structural. Distributed actors cannot coordinate reliably when formal guidance systems are fragmented. Doctrine, like policy, must align authority, responsibility, definitions, and action expectations across the organization.

Military organizational learning literature further supports the persistence argument. Rosen argues that military innovation requires institutional change, not merely new language or isolated tactical adjustment (Rosen, 1991). Nagl's comparative study of counterinsurgency learning similarly emphasizes that military organizations differ in their capacity to learn, adapt doctrine, and institutionalize change (Nagl, 2002). These sources matter because police directive systems also must absorb new information, legal change, technology, operational lessons, and external standards. If policy systems adapt only by adding language to existing directives, rather than by reexamining the architecture of guidance, they risk producing the same kind of partial adaptation that institutional learning literature warns against.

Public administration provides the fourth and most direct cross domain comparison. Pressman and Wildavsky's classic implementation study demonstrated that policy implementation becomes increasingly difficult as action depends on multiple actors, decisions, clearances, and points of dependency (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). Peters identifies horizontal coordination as a recurring problem in government because administrative authority is divided across units and programs that do not automatically align (Peters, 1998). Christensen and Lægheid's work on whole of government reform likewise treats fragmentation as a recurring challenge in public administration and integration as a necessary response to segmented governmental structures (Christensen & Lægheid, 2007). Police directive systems are internal public administration systems. They face the same structural problem at the level of agency rules: multiple components must be coordinated to produce coherent action.

The public administration literature also supports the paper's distinction between fragmentation and mere complexity. Complexity means a system has many parts, actors, or demands. Fragmentation means those parts are insufficiently coordinated or integrated. Cejudo and Michel argue that fragmented government action requires attention to coordination, coherence, and integration as distinct but related governance problems (Cejudo & Michel, 2017). Trein, Meyer, and Maggetti similarly show that policy integration and coordination are separate analytical concerns in complex policy environments (Trein et al., 2019). This distinction is essential to police policy analysis. A police directive system will inevitably be complex because policing itself involves many legal, operational, supervisory, and administrative domains. The preventable problem is not complexity alone. The preventable problem is unmanaged fragmentation.

Across these domains, the same structural pattern appears. Healthcare shows that professional competence does not compensate for fragmented processes. Aviation shows that procedural reliability depends on integrated design rather than the mere existence of procedures. Military

doctrine shows that distributed actors require coherent formal guidance to coordinate action. Public administration shows that divided authority and multiple decision points create implementation and coherence problems unless integration is deliberately managed. These domains differ in mission, risk profile, professional culture, and institutional context, but they converge on one systems principle: formal components must be integrated if the system is expected to produce reliable action.

This cross domain evidence strengthens the central hypothesis. Fragmented police directive systems are not anomalous. They reflect a broader organizational pattern in which decentralized production, weak integration control, and standards based validation can coexist with system level incoherence. Perrow's and Reason's systems theories explain why this pattern is structurally plausible (Perrow, 1999, Reason, 1997). HRO literature explains why active coherence detection is necessary in complex operating environments (Roberts, 1990, Weick et al., 1999). Public administration literature explains why fragmented authority tends to persist without deliberate coordination mechanisms (Bouckaert et al., 2010, Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Peters, 1998). The conclusion is therefore not that police policy systems should imitate any single external domain. The conclusion is that policing cannot escape a systems problem that appears across complex organizations: discrete procedural compliance does not equal integrated system coherence.

XI. SYNTHESIS MODEL

The preceding analysis supports a structural model of police policy fragmentation. The model explains how decentralized policy production becomes system level inconsistency through a sequence of interacting mechanisms: **decentralized production** → **fragmentation mechanisms** → **lack of coherence detection** → **persistence and scaling** → **system level inconsistency**. This model synthesizes organizational systems theory, public administration coordination literature, institutional theory, and complex systems analysis. Its central premise is that fragmentation is not primarily a matter of defective individual drafting. It is a predictable output of a production structure that distributes authorship, ownership, revision, and maintenance without a corresponding mechanism for system wide coherence control.

The first component of the model is **decentralized production**. Decentralized production describes a policy development structure in which multiple actors produce or revise directives from different institutional positions, including command staff, accreditation personnel, legal advisors, specialized units, supervisors, vendors, committees, and inherited policy sources. Organizational theory explains why this matters. Differentiation allows organizations to develop specialized expertise, but it also creates integration demands because specialized units tend to develop different orientations and local priorities (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Thompson similarly explains that interdependent organizational activities require coordination mechanisms if the organization is to operate as a coherent system rather than as disconnected parts (Thompson, 1967). In police policy systems, decentralized production creates local rationality: each policy actor may address a legitimate concern. The defect arises when no authority is responsible for reconciling those outputs across the directive architecture.

The second component is **fragmentation mechanisms**. Fragmentation mechanisms are the intermediate processes through which decentralized production becomes structural inconsistency. This paper identifies five mechanisms: redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment. Redundancy multiplies obligations across policies. Contradiction creates incompatible formal instructions. Drift allows related directives to diverge over time. Layering adds new provisions without redesigning the surrounding architecture. Misalignment prevents

related directives from coordinating definitions, thresholds, duties, documentation requirements, and supervisory expectations. These mechanisms are consistent with systems theory because they arise from relationships among components rather than from isolated component defects (Katz & Kahn, 1978, Scott & Davis, 2007). They are also consistent with public administration scholarship, which treats fragmentation as a problem of insufficient coordination, coherence, and integration among related governmental actions (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019).

The third component is **lack of coherence detection**. Lack of coherence detection exists when review systems identify whether required policy content is present, but do not systematically test whether related directives operate together as an integrated policy architecture. This component explains why fragmentation can survive formal review. CALEA describes accreditation as a standards based process through which public safety agencies demonstrate compliance with established professional standards (CALEA, n.d.-b). NJSACOP similarly describes law enforcement accreditation as a standards based process involving agency self analysis and adaptation of operations to professional objectives (NJSACOP, n.d.). Those descriptions establish accreditation as a compliance structure. They do not establish accreditation as a comprehensive relational audit of every cross directive dependency. The theoretical distinction comes from policy integration literature: policy coherence requires attention to relationships among instruments, not merely the presence of instruments or their separate conformity to objectives (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019).

The fourth component is **persistence and scaling**. Once fragmentation is undetected, it becomes embedded in the agency's formal policy system. Institutional theory explains why this occurs. Meyer and Rowan argue that formal structures can confer legitimacy by demonstrating conformity to institutional expectations, even when those structures are loosely coupled from operational practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Pierson's account of path dependence explains why institutional arrangements become self reinforcing once actors adapt to them and the cost of replacement increases (Pierson, 2000). Streeck and Thelen's work on gradual institutional change explains how drift and layering allow older structures and newer additions to coexist without full reconstruction (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). In police directive systems, these processes mean that once a fragmented provision is approved, used, trained, cited, revised, or copied, it becomes harder to remove and easier to reproduce.

Scaling occurs when fragmentation moves beyond the original defect. A redundant provision becomes the basis for later contradiction. A layered update produces future drift. A borrowed model policy creates misalignment inside the receiving agency's existing architecture. DiMaggio and Powell's theory of institutional isomorphism explains how organizations within a field adopt similar forms through coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This means fragmentation can scale not only inside one agency, but also across agencies when policy language is borrowed, reused, or imported without local integration. The mechanism is institutional rather than conspiratorial. Fragmentation spreads because legitimate looking policy material travels through professional channels and is then absorbed into systems that may not test relational coherence.

The fifth component is **system level inconsistency**. System level inconsistency is the endpoint of the model. It exists when the directive system cannot reliably provide unified formal guidance across related operational, supervisory, documentation, and accountability domains. This inconsistency may not be visible in any single directive. It appears when the system is examined relationally. Perrow's Normal Accident Theory supports the broader analytical point that system failures can emerge from interactions among components rather than from one defective component or one negligent actor (Perrow, 1999). Reason's organizational accident framework

similarly explains that latent conditions embedded in formal systems can remain dormant until they align with operational pressures or triggering events (Reason, 1997). In police policy systems, structural inconsistency functions as a latent condition within the formal guidance architecture.

The model also explains how a directive system can be **locally rational**, **formally compliant**, and **structurally inconsistent** at the same time. It may be locally rational because each policy addition responds to a real legal, operational, accreditation, or administrative concern. It may be formally compliant because required policy content exists and can be demonstrated during standards based review. It may nevertheless be structurally inconsistent because the relationships among directives have not been integrated. This is the central synthesis of the paper. The problem is not that each component is necessarily defective. The problem is that the system has no adequate mechanism to control the relationships among components.

This model also clarifies why fragmentation should not be reduced to poor drafting. Poor drafting may produce confusion within a single document, but fragmentation is a system relationship problem. It concerns how directives interact across subjects, functions, units, and time. A professionally written directive may still contribute to fragmentation if it duplicates, conflicts with, drifts away from, layers onto, or misaligns with related directives. The correct unit of analysis is therefore the directive system, not the individual directive. Public administration research on coordination and policy integration supports this shift because it treats governance failure as a relational problem among instruments, actors, and institutions rather than merely as a defect within one program or rule (Bouckaert et al., 2010, Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Peters, 1998).

The synthesis model therefore makes the paper's causal claim explicit. Decentralized production creates the conditions for fragmentation because it distributes policy authorship without system level architectural control. Fragmentation mechanisms convert that structure into redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment. Lack of coherence detection allows those mechanisms to survive compliance review. Institutional persistence and scaling reproduce the fragmented architecture through approval, practice, precedent, reuse, and incremental update. The endpoint is system level inconsistency, a condition in which the agency's directive system may appear complete and compliant while failing to operate as a coherent whole.

XII. IMPLICATIONS

The first implication is that fragmentation should be understood as a structural condition, not merely as a drafting problem. If the source of fragmentation were only poor writing, the remedy would be limited to clearer language, better formatting, or more careful editing. The analysis in this paper points to a deeper issue. Fragmentation is produced when policy authorship, ownership, revision, and maintenance are distributed across multiple actors without a corresponding mechanism for system wide integration. Organizational theory supports this interpretation because differentiated work requires integration mechanisms when outputs are interdependent (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, Thompson, 1967). In police policy systems, the defect is therefore not simply that a particular directive is unclear. The defect is that the production architecture allows related directives to evolve without sufficient coherence control.

The second implication is that compliance systems cannot correct what they do not measure. Standards based review can identify missing policies, incomplete documentation, absent proofs, or failure to address required subjects. That function has administrative value. But if the review process does not evaluate cross directive relationships, it cannot reliably detect redundancy,

contradiction, drift, layering, or misalignment. Public policy literature supports this distinction because policy coherence and integration require analysis of relationships among instruments, actors, and goals, not merely confirmation that separate policy instruments exist (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). The implication is direct: a compliance framework aimed at policy presence may improve documentation while still leaving system architecture untested.

The third implication is that accreditation should be understood as necessary but insufficient. Law enforcement accreditation can professionalize agency practice, create administrative discipline, require formal documentation, and establish external standards. CALEA describes accreditation as a process through which public safety agencies voluntarily meet an established set of professional standards, and NJSACOP describes accreditation as a standards based process involving agency self analysis and adaptation to professional objectives (CALEA, n.d.-b; NJSACOP, n.d.). Those functions are meaningful. The critique advanced here is not that accreditation is valueless. It is that accreditation should not be equated with a comprehensive coherence audit of an agency's full directive architecture. A system may satisfy standards while still containing relational inconsistency among directives.

The fourth implication is that police policy governance must be treated as system governance. The relevant object of analysis is not the individual directive alone, but the directive system as an interdependent administrative architecture. Open systems theory supports this shift because organizational outcomes emerge from the relationships among components rather than from components viewed in isolation (Katz & Kahn, 1978, Scott & Davis, 2007). Public administration literature similarly treats coordination and integration as system level governance problems rather than as isolated program defects (Bouckaert et al., 2010, Peters, 1998). For police agencies, this means that policy review must ask not only whether a directive is current, compliant, and well written, but also whether it aligns with all related directives.

The fifth implication is that fragmentation functions as a risk multiplier. It multiplies risk because it affects multiple downstream organizational functions at once: supervision, documentation, accountability, review, discipline, operational coordination, and policy maintenance. Reason's organizational accident framework explains that latent conditions embedded in systems can remain dormant until they combine with operational pressures or triggering events (Reason, 1997). In a police directive system, redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment are latent structural conditions. They may not produce visible problems during routine operation, but they weaken the formal architecture that the agency relies on during critical incidents, complaints, litigation, audits, internal investigations, and supervisory reviews.

The sixth implication is that policy modernization cannot be evaluated only by the production of updated directives. A policy system can become more current in parts while becoming less coherent as a whole. Streeck and Thelen's concepts of drift and layering explain why institutions can change incrementally without being fully redesigned (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). In police policy systems, modernization by addition may insert new legal language, technology requirements, review procedures, or accreditation provisions while leaving related directives unreconciled. The result may look modern because many policies have been updated, but the architecture may remain fragmented. Modernization therefore must be evaluated at the system level, not only at the document level.

The seventh implication concerns responsibility. If no person or office owns the directive system as a system, then coherence failure becomes predictable. Distributed responsibility is not the same as shared governance. Organizational design theory emphasizes that coordination mechanisms must match the degree of interdependence among organizational tasks (Galbraith,

1973, Thompson, 1967). A directive system is highly interdependent because rules governing reporting, supervision, documentation, force, complaints, evidence, pursuits, technology, discipline, and review often overlap. Without a clearly assigned architectural authority, the agency may approve many individual policies while no one is responsible for the coherence of the total system.

The eighth implication is that fragmentation reframes how agencies should understand policy failure. A traditional view might locate the problem in a missed update, an unclear paragraph, or an individual policy owner. The structural view asks how the production system allowed inconsistency to emerge and persist. Perrow's theory of complex systems supports this reframing because system failures can arise from component interaction rather than from a single defective part (Perrow, 1999). Applied to directives, the relevant question is not only "Which policy is wrong?" but "What policy production structure allowed related policies to become inconsistent?" That question moves the analysis from correction of isolated errors to governance of the policy architecture.

The final implication is scholarly. Police policy research should move beyond evaluating whether agencies possess written policies and toward evaluating the structure, integration, and maintenance of directive systems. Police accountability literature recognizes the importance of written policy for controlling discretion and establishing reviewable expectations (Mastrofski, 2004, Walker & Archbold, 2018). This paper extends that literature by arguing that the mere existence of written policy is insufficient. The coherence of the policy system matters. If directives are the formal architecture of organizational guidance, then fragmentation is not a peripheral administrative issue. It is a central problem in police governance.

XIII. LIMITATIONS

This paper develops a theoretical and structural model of police policy fragmentation. It does not present an original empirical dataset measuring the prevalence of redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, or misalignment across a representative sample of police directive systems. The argument is therefore conceptual and explanatory rather than statistical. Its contribution is to identify a plausible and theoretically grounded causal structure, decentralized production leading to fragmentation, non detection, persistence, scaling, and system level inconsistency. Future empirical research would be necessary to test the model across agencies, accreditation systems, policy vendors, agency sizes, and jurisdictional environments.

A second limitation is that police agencies vary substantially in administrative capacity. Large agencies may have legal units, accreditation managers, policy committees, risk management personnel, technology staff, and specialized command structures. Smaller agencies may rely on a Chief, a command officer, an accreditation manager, an outside attorney, a consultant, or a policy vendor. Police accountability and organizational scholarship recognizes that agencies differ in structure, capacity, and reform implementation conditions (Bayley, 1994, Skogan, 2008, Walker & Archbold, 2018). The model advanced here should therefore not be read as claiming that all agencies experience fragmentation at the same level or through identical pathways. The claim is structural: where authorship, ownership, revision, and maintenance are decentralized without sufficient system wide coherence control, fragmentation becomes predictable.

A third limitation concerns accreditation variation. Accreditation programs differ by state, accrediting body, standards manual, assessor practice, agency preparation process, and local implementation. CALEA and NJSACOP describe accreditation as a standards based process involving agency self assessment and demonstration of compliance with professional standards,

but that does not mean every accreditation review is conducted identically or with the same degree of relational scrutiny (CALEA, n.d.-b; NJSACOP, n.d.). Some assessors, program managers, consultants, or agencies may identify inconsistencies across policies during review. The narrower claim in this paper is not that accreditation never detects policy inconsistency. The claim is that standards based compliance review is analytically distinct from a comprehensive system wide coherence audit of all interdependent directives.

A fourth limitation is that the paper does not fully analyze the legal consequences of fragmented policy systems. Fragmentation may affect civil liability, failure to train claims, deliberate indifference analysis, internal discipline, public records disputes, administrative grievances, or credibility in litigation. However, those legal questions require a separate doctrinal inquiry. This paper's framework is organizational and structural. It asks how fragmentation emerges and persists, not how courts would evaluate a specific fragmented directive system under a particular legal standard. That boundary is necessary to preserve the paper's analytical focus and avoid collapsing structural systems analysis into legal doctrine.

A fifth limitation is that the paper does not develop cognitive load theory, instructional design theory, training failure analysis, or modal verb analysis. Fragmented directives may increase interpretive burden, complicate training, weaken comprehension, or distort obligation signals, but those are downstream questions. The current paper examines the production structure that generates inconsistency in the formal policy system itself. This boundary is consistent with the governing research design, which requires the paper to focus on structural system failure and not fully develop cognition, training, instructional systems, or language mechanics.

A sixth limitation is that cross domain evidence is analogical rather than directly empirical. Healthcare, aviation, military doctrine, and public administration literature demonstrate that fragmentation, weak integration, procedural misalignment, and latent system conditions are recurring problems in complex organizations (Institute of Medicine, 2000, Perrow, 1999, Reason, 1997, Weick et al., 1999). These domains strengthen the theoretical plausibility of the model, but they do not prove that police directive systems operate identically. The paper uses cross domain evidence to validate a systems pattern, not to erase differences among professional fields.

A seventh limitation concerns source type. The paper relies on peer reviewed organizational, institutional, public administration, safety, and policing literature for its theoretical claims. It uses official accreditation materials to describe accreditation structures and stated processes. Official accreditation sources are necessary because they show how accrediting bodies describe their own programs, but they are not treated as peer reviewed theoretical evidence. The analytical distinction between compliance and coherence is therefore supported by public administration and policy integration scholarship rather than by accreditation materials alone (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019).

Finally, the model does not imply that centralization alone solves policy fragmentation. Centralized authority can improve coherence only if it possesses adequate expertise, system visibility, revision discipline, and integration methodology. Organizational theory does not support the simplistic claim that centralization is always superior to decentralization. Rather, it supports the more precise claim that interdependent outputs require appropriate coordination and integration mechanisms (Galbraith, 1973, Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, Thompson, 1967). A poorly designed centralized process could also produce error, rigidity, or blind spots. The argument is therefore not centralization for its own sake. The argument is that decentralized policy production without system wide coherence control predictably produces fragmentation.

XIV. CONCLUSION

Fragmented police policy systems are predictable products of decentralized, multi author, compliance driven production structures. The central problem is not merely that individual directives may be outdated, poorly written, or incompletely revised. The deeper problem is architectural. Police agencies govern conduct through interdependent directive systems, but those systems are often produced through distributed authorship, decentralized ownership, incremental revision, legacy accumulation, and external policy borrowing. Organizational systems theory supports the premise that system outcomes emerge from relationships among components, not from components examined in isolation (Katz & Kahn, 1978, Scott & Davis, 2007). When the relationships among directives are not governed as a system, fragmentation becomes a predictable structural output.

This paper has argued that decentralized policy production generates fragmentation through five mechanisms: redundancy, contradiction, drift, layering, and misalignment. Redundancy multiplies obligations across policies. Contradiction creates incompatible formal instructions. Drift allows related directives to diverge across different revision timelines. Layering adds new provisions onto existing policy structures without architectural reconstruction. Misalignment prevents related directives from coordinating definitions, thresholds, duties, reporting requirements, supervisory responsibilities, and review processes. These mechanisms are relational. They do not necessarily appear when one directive is reviewed alone. They emerge when directives are examined as an interdependent policy architecture.

The persistence of fragmentation depends on the gap between compliance and coherence. Accreditation and compliance systems can require written policies, impose documentation expectations, and validate conformity with professional standards. Those functions have value. CALEA describes accreditation as a process through which public safety agencies voluntarily meet established professional standards, and NJSACOP similarly describes accreditation as a standards based process involving agency self analysis and adaptation to professional objectives (CALEA, n.d.-b; NJSACOP, n.d.). But standards based compliance review is not analytically identical to a system wide coherence audit. Public administration and policy integration scholarship demonstrates that policy coherence requires attention to the relationships among instruments, not merely the presence of separate instruments or their individual conformity to objectives (Cejudo & Michel, 2017, Trein et al., 2019). A directive system may therefore be formally compliant and structurally incoherent at the same time.

The paper also showed why fragmentation scales. Once fragmented provisions are approved, published, trained, referenced, reused, or incorporated into accreditation files, they acquire institutional legitimacy. Meyer and Rowan's theory of formal structure explains how organizations use formal arrangements to demonstrate conformity with institutional expectations, even when those arrangements may be loosely coupled from operational practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Pierson's theory of path dependence explains how institutional arrangements become self reinforcing over time (Pierson, 2000). Streeck and Thelen's work on drift and layering explains how institutions can accumulate new elements without full reconstruction (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). In directive systems, these processes allow fragmentation to become administrative sediment, accumulated through approval, precedent, practice, incremental update, policy borrowing, and compliance cycles.

The cross domain evidence reinforces the structural nature of the problem. Healthcare safety literature shows that professional competence cannot compensate for fragmented processes

and poorly coordinated systems (Institute of Medicine, 2000, 2001). Aviation procedure research demonstrates that reliability depends on integrated procedural architecture, not merely the existence of checklists or written procedures (Degani & Wiener, 1993, 1997). Military doctrine literature shows that distributed actors require coherent formal guidance if organizations expect coordinated action under uncertainty (Cohen & Gooch, 1990, Posen, 1984). Public administration literature shows that fragmented authority and multiple decision points predict implementation and coordination problems unless integration is deliberately managed (Bouckaert et al., 2010, Peters, 1998, Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). These domains differ from policing, but they converge on the same systems principle: formal guidance must be integrated to function reliably.

The central contribution of this paper is to shift police policy analysis from individual directive adequacy to directive system architecture. A single directive may be legally current, professionally formatted, accreditation compliant, and locally rational while still contributing to system incoherence. That distinction matters because police agencies do not govern through isolated documents. They govern through policy systems. If the directive system is fragmented, then inconsistency is not incidental. It is embedded in the structure through which the organization defines authority, assigns responsibility, documents conduct, supervises behavior, reviews incidents, and maintains accountability.

The synthesis model developed here explains that process: decentralized production creates fragmentation mechanisms, fragmentation remains undetected where review systems validate presence rather than coherence, undetected fragmentation persists through institutional legitimacy and path dependence, persistence becomes scaling through reuse and incremental update, and scaling produces system level inconsistency. The model does not require a claim that policy actors are careless, that accreditation is valueless, or that every agency experiences fragmentation equally. Its claim is narrower and stronger: when interdependent directives are produced through decentralized structures without system wide coherence control, fragmentation is a predictable outcome.

Fragmentation in police policy systems is therefore not an accidental byproduct of poor drafting. It is the structural output of a policy production model that distributes authorship, validates presence, and lacks a mechanism for system wide integration. A policy system can look complete, remain formally approved, and satisfy standards based review while still failing to operate as a coherent whole. That is the danger of fragmented directive architecture. It preserves the appearance of compliance while allowing inconsistency to persist inside the formal system of police governance.

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