

The Professor *and the* Chief

OU-Tulsa's Brigitte Steinheider
found an unlikely ally in her
organizational psychology classroom,
Broken Arrow's top cop, Todd Wuestewald.

BY JERRI CULPEPPER PHOTOS BY ACE CUERVO

An expert in organizational psychology, recruited from Germany to build a new graduate program for the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa to serve the needs of the Tulsa-area business community, has found a niche in a most unlikely place: police work.

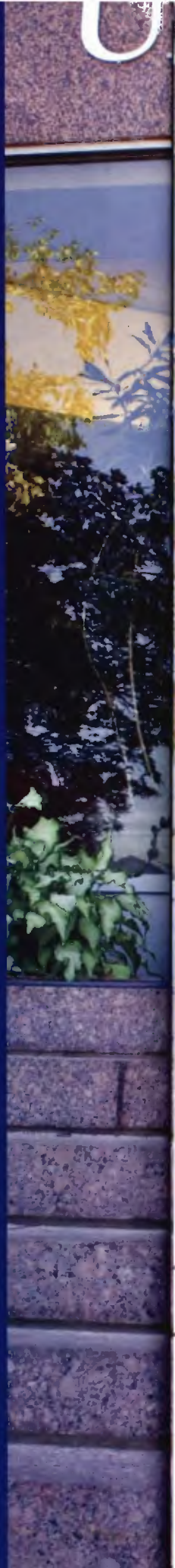
Brigitte Steinheider was a research scientist and project leader at the Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering in Stuttgart, Germany, when OU-Tulsa recruited her in 2002 to establish a Master of Arts Program in Organizational Dynamics for the new Tulsa campus. Tulsa's telecommunications industry had identified a critical need to develop employee leadership skills for managing people, projects and processes in a turbulent business environment. OU-Tulsa approached Steinheider to develop a program for the industry's middle management.

Today, many proponents of the five-year-old program—including all 41 of its graduates—can be found in leadership roles in companies throughout northeastern Oklahoma and beyond. None is more enthusiastic than OU-Tulsa graduate Todd Wuestewald, who currently heads the Broken Arrow Police Department.

Wuestewald, who graduated from the OU Public Administration program, took only two Organizational Dynamics classes—but he took them at the right time. While in Steinheider's "Teams and Motivation" class, he was appointed chief of police and had to decide how to lead his agency.

"I knew I wanted to change our management style. Most police departments are bound by traditional hierarchy and autocratic notions of chain of command. And I had seen how this management style negatively affected employees' motivation and commitment," Wuestewald says.

Learning how other organizations used teams for decision-making and experiencing the potential of teams in a classroom setting convinced him to try Steinheider's concept on the job. In her classes, he points out, students are seen as partners who help struc-



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Broken Arrow Police Chief Todd Wuestewald meets with members of the department's newly formed Leadership Team, composed of individuals from all ranks of the agency and representatives of the two unions. Wuestewald says the team is critical to the success of the restructured department.

ture the class and determine the priorities. They even determine what proportion of their grade is team- or individual-based.

Inevitably, Steinheider says, students vote to be graded predominantly as a team.

During the class, Chief Wuestewald's team did a study of the Harley Davidson Motor Company, which had to drastically change its corporate environment to compete in a global market. The company embraced diversity, quality improvement, and high-level employee and customer input, ultimately resulting in its resurgence as a leader in the motorcycle industry.

While the motorcycle company and the Broken Arrow Police Department seem to have few similarities, Steinheider and Wuestewald saw some common factors and opportunities. "How they turned around their organization was the same," Wuestewald says. Like Harley Davidson, the police department needed to rework its rigid hierarchy in a way that would allow its people to

make decisions and participate in needed change.

"The dynamics of crime problems are more complex today," the chief says. "We also have a different type of employee in our police organizations—more educated, more enlightened, more technologically savvy. He or she expects to be consulted and has lots of ideas. We hamper ourselves if we don't listen.

"Furthermore, if police departments fail to adapt to the changes in the workplace, employees find the work a poor fit, and they won't stay long."

So, the professor and the chief got down to putting theory into practice by designing a management system that empowers employees and opens lines of communication. They term the philosophy "Shared Leadership." Probably the most significant change was the implementation of a Leadership Team,

which is composed of individuals, selected by peers from all ranks of the agency and representatives of the two unions within the department.



BROKEN ARROW



Brigitte Steinheider addresses a breakout session during the Knowledge Management Symposium on Organizational Dynamics called “What We Have Learned,” held at the Schusterman Center. She and Broken Arrow Police Chief Todd Wuestewald have given numerous invited talks to police officials around the country and overseas.

The Leadership Team, which meets approximately three times a month and additionally as needed, is critical to the success of the restructured department. Its members are responsible for a

interviewed by a researcher: ‘Happy chickens lay better eggs.’ That sort of sums it up. We’ve seen innovation increase tremendously because people felt their opinions and ideas mattered.

“One employee put it this way when interviewed by a researcher:
‘Happy chickens lay better eggs.’”

myriad of critical decisions, including such issues as hiring, discipline, training, promotions, equipment purchases and strategic matters.

“This team makes global decisions; they make policies that govern the whole department,” Wuestewald says. “They also

We’ve won several national awards that have grown out of this inclusive decision-making process, and the BAPD is regularly approached to pioneer new approaches to policing. For instance, the International Association of Chiefs of Police recently selected Broken Arrow as one of just eight agencies nationwide to help

regularly engage in process improvement, looking for ways to improve our procedures and provide better service to the citizens. They tackle organizational change initiatives and take suggestions on issues from the rank and file.”

Two years into the program, Wuestewald asked the University to step in and conduct an outside evaluation of the organizational changes.

“The study found some pretty dramatic indicators, like increased commitment to the department, better communication, more community involvement, greater job satisfaction, greater pride, better union-management relations, lower turnover and improved morale,” he says.

Wuestewald credits the theories of the Organizational Dynamics classroom with helping to turn his employees “from people who ‘rented’ the police department for eight hours a day to people who ‘own’ it.”

“Professor Steinheider helped the department move from a traditionally authoritarian workplace to a democratic, inclusive one, which has been somewhat of a sea-change for us. We saw morale and pride in the agency skyrocket, union-management relations improve tremendously, communications improved—even productivity increased.

“One employee put it this way when

develop a new model for serving the needs of crime victims.

"I think our organization now runs more efficiently, is able to adapt to changes more quickly, and is more resilient when times are tough, such as during this time of lean city budgets."

Wuestewald sees benefits to the BAPD's mission—service and crime control. He notes that since implementing the changes, Broken Arrow has experienced a considerable drop in crime even as the city continues to grow. Major crime is down 16 percent since 2004 and, while members of the community may not know what changes have taken place within the police department, they have voiced increased satisfaction. Community surveys have found that citizen satisfaction ratings with the police have steadily climbed from 68 percent in 2002 to 93 percent today.

The impacts of Professor Steinheider's work with the Broken Arrow Police Department have earned her considerable attention in the police field. She and Chief Wuestewald have been busy educating others in law enforcement on ways to retool their police forces.

The chief and the professor have given numerous invited talks to police officials at regional, national and international conferences. They have been published in leading professional and academic journals and have responded to requests for information from some 240 police agencies and researchers in 35 states and 13 foreign countries.

The program also has earned awards from the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the National League of Cities. Steinheider continues to receive solicitations from international journals for papers about the concept.

Even police agencies in Steinheider's home country of Germany have taken an interest in her approach to collaboration in the workplace. She and the chief recently returned from an official visit with German Ministry officials in Mainz, where they met with police executives and gave a talk at the State Police College and were invited to return in September to meet with more police leaders.

Steinheider says it was an honor to help build a new Organizational Dynamics program for OU-Tulsa. She knew the project would introduce her to many interesting people in the Tulsa and Oklahoma business communities, but she never guessed that her work would take her so deeply into the world of police work. That has been an eye-opening experience.

"Law enforcement is a fascinating field to study. I gained a lot of respect for police officers," says Steinheider. "I am impressed how much interest there is in our leadership approach and how some of the agencies implement it."

Professor Steinheider plans to expand and improve the Master of Arts Program in Organizational Dynamics at OU-Tulsa. In August she headed a panel discussing the first five years of the

ODYN program at the Knowledge and Project Management Symposium, held on the Tulsa campus. Conducting organizational consulting and training for the Tulsa business community is also on her agenda, as is research of interdisciplinary collaborations and knowledge-sharing processes in organizational and research institutions. And, of course, she will not neglect her new-found specialty of Shared Leadership in police organizations.

Jerri Culpepper is coordinator of news and publications in the OU Office of Public Affairs and writes freelance articles for Sooner Magazine.

Serving the Business Community

OU-Tulsa's Organizational Dynamics Program offers condensed weekend courses and includes specialization tracks in human resource management and project management. From its inception in April 2003, the program has been very popular, attracting working adults from a broad variety of professional backgrounds and all levels of the business community. In line with the non-traditional, working-professional nature of the students, the program uses a variety of adult learning strategies and combines cutting-edge research with practical application.

Courses are structured on a team model where students develop solutions for real-world problems, often problems some of the students themselves have faced or are facing. They work on projects for such companies as American Airlines, Hilti, NORDAM and State Farm, presenting their findings to panels of senior corporate and government leaders from the community.

Case- and team-based learning helps students form a close network with classmates and facilitates the transfer of the learned concepts. The networking opportunities, as well as the practical application focus, are seen as strong points by Linda Maloukis, human resources director of Cox Communications and an ODYN student. "The ODYN program works," she says. "I can immediately apply what I have learned—every day. And it has given me the opportunity to meet and recruit HR professionals who make my department stronger."