

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**Assignment and Movement of Personnel:  
Rotation versus Stagnation**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This research addresses the advisability and feasibility of a policy regarding the mandatory rotation of investigative and patrol personnel in law enforcement. Many law enforcement agencies experience the intertwined problems of investigators who stagnate due to permanent assignments. Agencies also encounter patrol officers who experience low morale because permanent assignments prevent steady, predictable movement within the department. Personal interviews, reviews of published works addressing this important issue, and a survey of law enforcement supervisors were among the methods used to research this subject and determine a possible solution. The author also drew upon his personal experiences of almost 20 years in law enforcement and assignments to both investigations and patrol. The findings demonstrate that there are strong opinions on both sides of the equation from established professionals with varied experiences in law enforcement. While the margin is narrow, the majority of sources (consulted or surveyed) suggest that mandatory rotation is worthwhile, practicable and could result in better service to the community by improving the performance of the overall department and officers individually. Based on the research, the conclusion reached proposes that a carefully constructed policy of mandatory rotation (applied uniformly and consistently) will result in a department populated by more satisfied, well-rounded officers working with increased motivation. This, in turn, will produce an improved department and a better served community.

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## INTRODUCTION

A problem common to many law enforcement agencies is officers who become dissatisfied with their job due to a perceived lack of opportunity for growth, movement and career development. A significant contributing factor to this frustration is often a policy that allows officers to transfer into investigative positions and remain in those positions indefinitely. Perhaps an equally important component of this equation is the fact that many investigators stagnate in their positions as they perform the same functions day after day, year after year. For a variety of reasons, most notably working hours and days off, many investigators never willingly transfer out of their positions. This can lead to work product and “customer service” below satisfactory levels.

The purpose of this research will be to address these problems. This paper will attempt to discover or develop a workable, equitable solution. Ideally, by the end of the research and conclusion of the paper, the question of the advisability and feasibility of rotating investigative and patrol personnel will be answered. Possible solutions will be proffered.

To attain these goals, the problem and question will be researched via Internet searches on the topic. Reviews of books and journals addressing the topic will be consulted. A survey will be conducted among supervisors from police departments across Texas. Additionally, the author will draw upon his own experiences as a patrol officer, an investigator, and, once again, a patrol officer.

It is the intent of this research paper to show that a well thought out, consistently administered policy of rotation of personnel can be a positive method of utilizing personnel. It is believed that the positive effects obtained by the implementation of such

a policy will be strong enough to cause many departments with adequate manpower to consider utilizing it. It is believed that the implications of such actions will create a mutually beneficial result for the law enforcement community, law enforcement officers, and the communities in which they serve. Law enforcement agencies would benefit by returning seasoned officers with investigative experience to the streets where their expertise can be put to use in different capacities.

Officers will benefit from higher morale obtained by becoming better-rounded professionals. They will feel they have more options and chances for growth in their careers. Additionally, investigators who have grown stagnant in their positions (whether or not they choose to admit it) will be given an opportunity to return to patrol work. Hopefully they will be reminded of why they once loved the job in the first place.

Finally, the community will benefit from a police force that takes full advantage of its personnel resources. The community will be served by officers committed to the job of patrol because they look forward to realistic opportunities for advancement. Patrol shifts will benefit from officers who have acquired years of experience and investigative expertise. Officers who are consistently enthusiastic about their work and the chance to learn new aspects of law enforcement will regularly rejuvenate investigations sections.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

For the purpose of this research paper, studies and literature specific to law enforcement personnel were examined. The studies include previous research papers on the topic. Articles written for law enforcement journals were examined. Textbooks by law enforcement executives were consulted.

Anthony V. Bouza retired as a New York City borough commander and went on to serve as the Chief of Police for Minneapolis, Minnesota. Bouza (1978) made the following observation on assignment of police personnel:

Police officers should be afforded maximum mobility possibilities. They should, in fact, be given the widest possible latitude in order to develop a sense of having a measure of control over their own fate. The department's needs are, of course, paramount, but serving this principle does not require that the preference of individual officers be completely ignored. (p. 110)

Bouza (1978) further states that departments *must* (emphasis added) consider the "rounding effects of rotation" and calls for "a conscious effort to develop and broaden the experience and background of the employees. . . ." (p. 110).

This author believes that, ideally, all police departments should be more than merely the sum of their parts. In order to effectively accomplish this goal, all of the "parts" must be empowered to attain positions in which they feel they are a part of the whole. Investigators should always be cognizant of how their roles play into the larger picture of the department. Investigations division is never an entity unto itself and must rely on the initial call response and reports of patrol officers.

Similarly, patrol officers must be granted the opportunity to experience other aspects of the department. An officer with no experience but patrol often has no real concept of what happens to his work on the street once it leaves his hands. The opportunity to work in investigations serves a dual purpose. The officer's importance to the department and diverse abilities is recognized. Secondly, the officer gains an

appreciation for what is needed in follow-up investigations. Both of these experiences should serve to make for better officers upon return to patrol duties.

Gary Cordner and Robert Sheehan also encourage personnel rotation in their text, *Basic Functions of Police Management*. "The transfer of personnel should be looked on as a healthy application of the systems concept to the police management function" (Cordner & Sheehan, 1989, p. 229).

Cordner & Sheehan (1989) specifically address the subject of police personnel rotation in the following excerpt:

There is much to be said for regular, periodic shifting of personnel. It not only develops more well-rounded employees, but by re-challenging [*sic*] them to learn new and more interesting jobs, it also lessens the likelihood that they will stagnate in one position. (p. 230)

Once again, rotation is seen as a possible solution to two problems inherent to police work. This author feels that officers who remain in one position, be it investigations or patrol, for an extended period tend to develop tunnel vision. They begin to perceive their assignment as the only meaningful pursuit within the department. Conversely, officers who remain in one position due to a lack of opportunity to move tend to stagnate due to the lack of variety. Interestingly, it appears to this author that officers who remain in one position due to a lack of impetus to move experience the same stagnation, but are often reticent to admit it.

In 1992 Tom Gabor was serving as a Lieutenant for the Culver City Police Department in Culver City, California. The Culver City Police Department practices mandatory rotation of personnel. The department's experience with rotation showed it

to be a productive manner of dealing with personnel and beneficial to both the department and the community. Based on this positive experience, Gabor submitted an article to the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*. Gabor (1992) feels that departments without a rotation system face two specific problems. Certain employees develop the perception of being indispensable. Other employees experience stagnation due to being forced to remain in one position for an extended period. Neither of these is a desirable situation.

Gabor (1992) specifically cited personnel rotation's two-fold benefit of returning seasoned officers to the streets and increasing overall morale. The Culver City Police Department found rotation enabled the department to build a more mature patrol force. Additionally, the officers returning to patrol from investigations were able to use their experiences to provide a more clear vision of the department's overall goals. The resultant increase in morale, though difficult to measure, was evidenced by increased productivity, reduced response times, and higher case clearance rates.

Douglas R. Marvin was a Captain with the New Providence Police Department in New Jersey in 1998 when he wrote an article for *The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*. In that article Marvin delineates his views on the detrimental effects of a lack of movement within police departments. Marvin emphasizes the importance of a well-rounded career in creating effective leaders. Marvin also emphasized the importance of returning experienced officers to patrol "where 90 percent of the department's work is done" (pp. 22-23).

This author took particular note that the issue of fostering poor attitudes among investigators transferred out of detectives was addressed. As previously noted,

investigations divisions and investigators should never be portrayed as a separate part of the department. Their importance to the department, and to the community it serves, is only enhanced when their experience is returned to the streets. This author feels it is incumbent upon the department leadership to clarify that role to investigators and clearly define the importance of a patrol division comprised of diverse experiences.

Marvin succinctly addresses the subjects of stagnation and officer retention experienced by departments nationwide:

One of the most serious ailments affecting small to midsized police departments across the country remains the fact that, too often, effective and enthusiastic police officers become stagnant and bored when they see no opportunities for advancement. Young officers especially may become disillusioned if they do not see a light at the end of the promotional tunnel. Many police administrators feel that once officers are assigned to a particular division, they should remain in that assignment until they receive a promotion. This situation severely hinders opportunities for growth, both for the department and the individual officer. For law enforcement to remain effective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this concept needs examination. (pp. 23-24)

In November of 2001, Robert Stachnik was a Lieutenant with the Schaumburg, Illinois, Police Department. Stachnik submitted a research paper to the Northwestern University Center for Public Safety School of Police Staff & Command and presented his thoughts and research on assignment rotation. In preparing the paper, Stachnik (2001) consulted various reference materials and articles, but also relied heavily on personal interviews with current or former members of the law enforcement profession.

Stachnik establishes himself as a strong opponent to rotation of personnel in any manner. A cursory review of articles and authors supporting rotation is given. However, the remainder of the paper is dedicated to denigrating the idea of rotation. All personal interviews were conducted with opponents of personnel rotation.

The research asserts that rotation theory is faulty due to several factors: It wastes the training received by detectives. Rotation damages morale through the involuntary transfer of employees. Rotation undermines the supervision of a detective unit. Finally, it is based on the belief that detective work makes a limited contribution to the overall function of a police department (Stachnik, 2001).

This author would take issue with each of these assertions. In fact, Stachnik appears to contradict himself through his own research. Stachnik cites a 1983 Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) study's findings that patrol officers and investigators work equally in solving crimes. Later, Stachnik, through a source, alleges that the contributions of patrol are minimal and certainly insinuates that only investigators solve crimes. This assertion does not ring true based on this author's experiences in law enforcement.

Several interviews by Stachnik (2001) disparage the contributions of patrol officers and characterize patrol work as rudimentary to justify citing loss of experience in investigations as a shortcoming of personnel rotation. For example, Chief Charles Wernick of the Highwood Illinois Police Department likens rotation to "Xerox taking its most successful salesman and transferring him to the loading dock" (p. 9). Assistant Deputy Superintendent Charles Roberts of the Chicago Police Department avers the training received in investigations would seldom if ever be used if a detective were

returned to patrol. Finally, Lieutenant Commander (Retired) Vernon J. Geberth of the New York City Police Department portrays patrol work and investigations as entirely different entities with patrol dominated by service related issues and investigations dealing with criminals.

This author has spent significant portions of a 20-year police career working in both patrol and investigations. He finds these views to be short sighted and disingenuous in their characterizations of patrol work and patrol officers. The sources are almost certainly far removed from patrol work to make such statements. They border on irresponsible and completely discount the crucial, irreplaceable contributions of patrol work and patrol officers.

Most police officers are taught from day one in the academy that patrol is the backbone of every department. As noted earlier, Marvin asserts that 90% of the department's work is done by patrol (1998, p. 23). Almost without exception, the first arrivals at any major crime scene are patrol officers. Almost every experienced investigator will concede that a case is often made or lost in the vital time immediately after a crime is committed.

Yet, patrol shifts are most often populated by a majority of officers with no investigative experience. The experienced investigator could thrive in patrol. By being the first one on scene, he could apply the lessons learned in investigations. He would be able to secure witnesses and evidence that investigative experience tells him will be vital to the investigator arriving later.

Stachnik quotes Geberth as alleging he has traveled the country for 20 years meeting and teaching thousands of police investigators and "he has never met one

investigator that supported mandatory rotation” (Stachnik, 2001, pg. 11). It would be irresponsible for this author to question the veracity of this statement. However, this author resolutely makes this claim: In researching and writing this paper, this author traveled the state of Texas for less than 12 months. This author met at least a dozen police supervisors with varying degrees of investigative experience who strongly espouse the benefits of personnel rotation throughout a department.

The referenced sources agree on a number of key points regarding rotation of personnel within a police department. Even Stachnik asserts that rotation of personnel can have an invigorating effect on an officer’s career and increase the efficiency of a department. Cordner, Sheehan, Bouza, Gabor and Marvin all point out that rotation should result in a department being more rounded or balanced. Officers at all levels will have experience in a variety of assignments due to the opportunities created by rotation.

Bouza, Cordner, Sheehan, and Marvin advocate using rotation as part of a system that encourages movement within the department. In doing so, it also encourages promotion by officers and helps to ensure that supervisors will have experience in a wide variety of assignments when they are promoted. With the exception of Stachnik, all referenced sources believe rotation is an effective method for combating stagnation. Further, these same sources believe stagnation is a significant problem for most departments and the cause of many good, young officers becoming discouraged about their careers. Stachnik does not address the issue of stagnation.

In contrast to the other sources, Stachnik is strongly opposed to rotation. Stachnik concludes that rotation penalizes investigators doing a good job. Stachnik

further believes any reward to the department is negligible due to the loss of experience and lowered morale of those involuntarily transferred. Little or no credence is given to any positive aspects listed by other experts in the field.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Is the regular, mandatory rotation of police personnel from investigations to patrol a viable option for many departments? If so, does mandatory rotation result in a benefit to both the department and the officers involved? The only sure thing regarding this topic is that opinions are varied. It is this author's hypothesis that mandatory rotation will result in a better-rounded department, a majority of officers more contented in their careers, and, as a result, a better work product at both the patrol and investigative levels.

To explore this premise, veteran supervisors from 41 Texas law enforcement agencies and one Alaskan agency will be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding mandatory rotation. The survey will ask respondents about the size and nature of their departments (Municipal, Sheriff's office, etc...). Respondents will then be asked several "yes/no" questions regarding policies at their respective departments. Finally, respondents will be asked to give their opinions regarding rotation, stagnation and the advisability/feasibility of a policy of mandatory rotation.

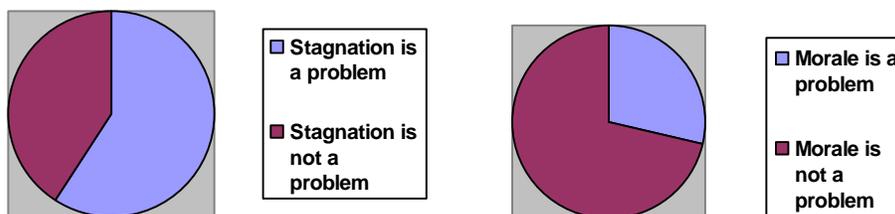
The survey responses will be tabulated and examined to construct a general view of current professional viewpoints on rotation based on current policies and opinions of veteran law enforcement supervisors.

## FINDINGS

Mandatory rotation of investigative personnel has strong proponents on both sides of the equation. The sample group is composed of law enforcement professionals and from departments ranging in size from fewer than 50 officers to well over 300. More than two-thirds of the eligible respondents (22 of 30) have some experience serving in investigations. Thirty-three completed surveys were returned- a completion rate of 79%. Of the 33 responses, two were discarded due to the department having no separate investigations division and one was discarded due to the department having no patrol division (fire marshal's office).

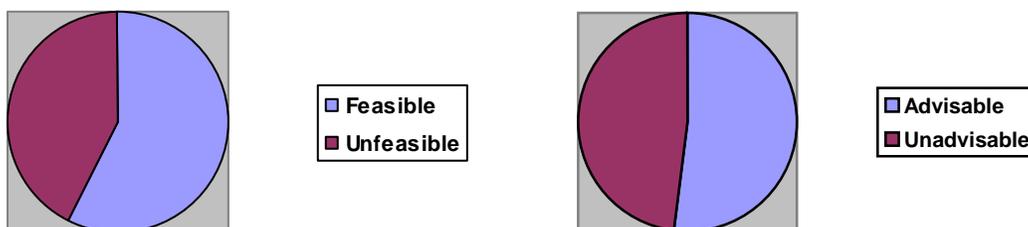
The most pressing issue involving investigative personnel appears to be the issue of stagnation, as evidenced by the chart on the left below. Over half of the respondents felt stagnation is a problem at their departments.

Conversely, only 40% of respondents felt morale of the department was an issue that should be considered in rotation of personnel.



The more relevant responses were garnered through the question of whether or not personnel rotation is feasible and/or advisable. In each case, a slight majority of respondents felt that rotation is both feasible and advisable. Interestingly, some who think it is feasible do not feel it is advisable and some who feel it is advisable do not feel

it is feasible. In each instance, the numbers do not equal the total number of respondents due to some responses for these questions being left blank.



Perhaps more telling than mere numbers or graphs are the comments from respondents to this survey. Again, the evidence points to strong feelings and some valid comments on both sides of the equation. Not all respondents chose to make remarks beyond a simple yes/no response. Not all comments are summarized or included below due to some being illegible.

A recurring theme of those against mandatory rotation is the loss of experience. Some respondents felt that regular rotation of the most experienced investigators would cause instability in the unit(s). Others noted that it would cost money to train new investigators that are transferred from patrol. It is this author's opinion that neither of these objections negate the positive effects of personnel rotation.

While the loss of experience certainly can't be overlooked, this view fails to consider the department as a whole. Experienced investigators would not be "lost". They would return to patrol duties where their experience would continue to be invaluable. This experience would simply be used in another context.

Additionally, an investigator returning to patrol will be able to use his expertise in more mundane matters. Examples of this would be preparing search warrants and taking statements from witnesses or suspects after hours on cases that are important,

but don't warrant a "call out" of investigations. These tasks would be second nature to an experienced investigator. They are often a mystery to the career patrol officer.

Interestingly, of the respondents who believe that mandatory rotation is either unfeasible, unadvisable, or both almost half believe that stagnation is a problem for investigators allowed to remain in an assignment indefinitely. While no respondent worded it in such a manner, this seems to indicate that an unmotivated investigator is preferable to a change for a patrol officer eager for the chance to work investigations. This argument would seem to be illogical, at best.

It is true that while mandatory rotation would bring new enthusiasm to investigations sections, experience would be lost. It's important to note that rotation should never be done in such a way that leaves investigations devoid of experienced investigators. Investigators should only be transferred in such a way that enough experienced investigators remain to investigate major crimes. Further, there should always be experienced investigators in place to train the newly rotated personnel who will eventually become the experts for the department.

No officer should ever be, or believe that he is, indispensable to a department. By its very nature, police work requires constant change and the good of a department must always come before the good of an individual's assignment. Sometimes change is tragic and must simply be dealt with. Sometimes change is planned for and anticipated.

Most officers know this when they sign up for the job. Regular rotation would create standard, planned changes. It could also lessen the effects of replacing personnel when it becomes necessary due to undesirable or unplanned for

circumstances. Change is not as daunting, even in traumatic circumstances, when personnel are accustomed to dealing with it in the regular course of events.

Another concern among respondents involved the possible negative effects on morale. Again, respondents seemed to only consider the morale of investigators. Some would no doubt argue that rotation would simply make everyone equally unhappy. This premise seems to discount the patrol officers for whom rotation provides a chance at new experiences and respite from patrol work, which had become drudgery in their eyes.

Patrol division is the largest division of any department. In theory, patrol officers' morale would rise if given regular opportunities for growth and career development in areas that were previously only available sporadically. Rotation would recognize the role of patrol officers as equally important in prestige. It would help to level the playing field for movement within the department.

The author spent 10 ½ years working as an investigator under a system that did not require movement other than by promotion. As a result, the author experienced significant burnout at his position caused by staying too long simply to retain the schedule (0800-1700, M-F) of an investigator. A promotion to supervisor came with an automatic transfer to a patrol position. The author experienced a rejuvenation of his career and a renewed respect for the work that patrol officers perform.

Additionally, due to his experience as an investigator in Juvenile Crimes Section, the author instantly became the recognized expert on shift for matters involving juveniles. The experience was certainly not lost. Patrol officers regularly encounter situations in which they have little or no experience. Juvenile issues can be particularly

difficult, but are by no means the only sticky situation encountered. Experienced investigators from all areas are eagerly and enthusiastically welcomed back to patrol where their expertise can be put to use immediately and regularly.

In preparing for this project, the author informally interviewed numerous officers now serving on patrol at his department. Career patrol officers have long decried the perceived impartiality of a system that allows investigators to request a transfer back to patrol at any time. Movement in the other direction was only allowed when an investigator has voluntarily moved to create space. In very rare instances, investigators were involuntarily transferred due to disciplinary issues. All patrol officers spoken to agree that the lack of parity in moving into investigations has a negative effect on morale at the shift level.

Similarly, former investigators now on patrol were interviewed. Some of these officers had transferred back voluntarily. Some had been transferred against their wishes for various reasons. All of them had been assigned to investigations for an extended period of time, in most cases more than 10 years. The one constant was the expression by each of them regarding their gratification at being back on patrol. Most of them expressed regret that they had not moved sooner and admitted to significant stagnation at their previous positions. Supervisors speaking about those transferred back tout the luxury of having the investigative experience on patrol.

Respondents to the survey repeatedly spoke of the rounding effects of rotation. In one form or another, all of the referenced sources, with the exception of Stachnik, spoke to the positive aspect of rotation creating a more rounded officer and department. In each instance, this was portrayed as a positive aspect of rotation and a constructive

contribution to an officer's career and the overall good of a department. It's safe to say that it certainly wasn't seen as a loss of the experience the investigator had acquired.

Several respondents spoke to the ability of rotation to provide supervisors that are well versed in investigation techniques. A lack of mobility in a department can result in a superior officer being asked to supervise positions and assignments with which he is completely unfamiliar. This places the supervisor at a disadvantage. Additionally, investigations could be compromised if an investigator, even an experienced investigator, has no option of seeking advice from a supervisor with investigative experience.

Finally, along the same line of developing quality supervision, both referenced sources and informal interviewees spoke of the role that rotation can make in the career path of an officer. It's probable that many exemplary investigators would most likely make estimable supervisors and contribute to the betterment of the department in that capacity. A competent investigator is one who knows what needs to be done and simply does it. He requires little or no supervision or direction. These qualities are highly desirable in supervisors at every level.

Only three of the 30 respondents to the survey answered that their departments allow an investigator to remain in investigations upon promotion. For many officers, a stripe and a small raise is simply not enough incentive to leave the relative comfort of an investigations position. The new challenge of beginning the path towards being a supervisor and a return to shift work can be daunting. Many investigators interviewed readily admitted that they had eschewed taking promotional exams because it meant a return to shift.

One investigator interviewed recently promoted to Corporal after spending over 10 years in investigations. He said he was experiencing significant feelings of stagnation at his position and was ready for a change. He quickly agreed that he would have promoted several years earlier if he had been faced with the prospect of being rotated out of the position anyway. He now plans to continue further promotion at every opportunity.

The author's department practices a quasi-system of rotation. Anyone in place before the system went into effect is exempt from rotation. Another investigator will soon promote to Corporal and return to shift. This officer is among the first group to be rotated back to shift following an investigative assignment. Despite being with the department approximately 15 years, it was not until he was rotated out of investigations that this officer was motivated to study for a promotional exam.

Finally, the author considers himself a case study for the need for rotation. The author transferred into the Juvenile Crimes Section following approximately four years on patrol duties. The author became, judging by comments from peers and supervisors, a proficient investigator. As often happens with skilled investigators, the author was often consulted on or assigned to investigate difficult or high profile cases.

Despite feeling that promotion would be in his best interest, the author declined to take promotional exams for many years. The sole factor in not taking the exams was the loss of desirable hours and days off. Had the author been rotated out of investigations, he no doubt would have promoted earlier in his career. In hindsight, stagnation developed largely unnoticed by this author.

As a result of this declination to promotion, the last three years spent in investigations were the author's least productive and least enjoyable. A once motivated, energetic investigator became a stagnant, bored employee. Trivial cases were neglected. It's safe to say the level of service to the department and the public dropped precipitously on anything short of serious injury or murder investigations.

Since making the decision to seek promotion, the author has promoted after each promotional exam taken. The author was promoted three times in just over five years. The author feels this is a typical representation of many investigators at departments across the country. Excellent supervisors are languishing in positions past the point of optimal efficiency because of their reticence to leave their comfort zones.

A lack of proficiency is not what keeps numerous officers from promoting or seeking other career paths. A reluctance to embrace change and get out of their comfort zone is what holds many back. Mandatory rotation could well be the impetus that many investigators need to become excellent supervisors. Conversely, mandatory rotation could provide the opportunities for many patrol officers to become outstanding investigators.

Most experienced investigators consulted for this paper agree that, upon transfer to an investigative position, 18 months to two years are needed for a motivated patrol officer to become a dexterous investigator. Most investigators will spend approximately the next five years at or near peak performance as an investigator. At about this point, stagnation begins to creep in as an issue. The officer/detective, while now capable as an investigator, has been working cases and dealing with a caseload day in and day out for seven years.

This point in time would seem to be the ideal time to transfer the detective, and the investigative experience, back to patrol. The open position created by this transfer provides the opportunity for an experienced patrol officer to move into investigations. Past instances have shown that this process can rejuvenate both the investigator returning to shift and the patrol officer eager to learn the investigative process and leave behind a position in which he may have begun to languish. Additionally, the community is better served by having more highly motivated officers in each position.

Certainly at inception, a policy of rotation has the potential to negatively affect the morale of investigators being transferred to patrol, or anticipating the transfer in their future. It's worth mentioning that the effect on morale in patrol would be positive. To be successful, the program requires commitment on the part of the department and *must* be applied consistently. All personnel should be included equally.

As with any significant change, there will be a period of adjustment. However, if the policy is consistently adhered to, it will become the norm. Patrol officers transferring to investigations will do so knowing that the assignment is for a finite term. The time should be used to enjoy the change of pace and learn valuable insights to be used upon return to patrol. Ideally, the time should be long enough that the return to patrol is desirable.

Detractors to a policy of rotation raise the issue of an individual's suitability for investigations. This should not be an issue in a well thought out plan. The author knows of no departments of considerable size in which an assignment to investigations is mandatory. This policy should not change.

Any officer knowing that an assignment to investigations does not play to their forte can simply choose not to ask for such assignment. Ideally rotation policy creates movement opportunities for those that wish to take advantage of them. No sound policy would force officers to take investigative positions for which they are not suited. Conversely, the seven-year term should not be mandatory. If an officer transfers to investigations and discovers it's not for him, he should be allowed to return to patrol with no negative consequences.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Law enforcement agencies often struggle to maintain morale and a high level of performance. These issues exist in both investigative and patrol divisions. Often a lack of, or perceived lack of, opportunity for movement from a patrol assignment is a factor that contributes a considerable amount to this malaise. This study was done to examine the feasibility and advisability of a policy requiring mandatory rotation of police personnel.

Can a policy of mandatory rotation increase morale? Will such a policy simultaneously decrease the negative effects of stagnation? Are any negative consequences of a rotation policy outweighed by the positive aspects? The research was expected to show that a sound policy, consistently applied, is ultimately in the best interest of a department, individual officers, and a community.

The research and subsequent conclusions support the hypothesis. Rotation can and will work for many departments. The upside to a policy of rotation greatly overshadows the possible downside for most departments. Patrol officers will be encouraged in their positions knowing that movement is assured and their opportunities

will come sooner rather than later. Advancement in rank will become more attractive if an officer is not allowed to linger in one spot indefinitely. Supervisors will be more capable having had the experience of investigations that might not have been available to them without a policy of rotation.

The majority of resources consulted for this paper agree that rotation can work and produce positive results. No system or policy is perfect or foolproof. Rotation policy is no different. There are negative aspects to be considered.

The size of a department and its investigative section must be considered. Rotation should never be accomplished by replacing a whole section at once. No investigative division should ever be left without an adequate number of experienced, capable detectives. If the numbers don't allow for experience in investigations at all times, rotation should not be attempted.

Morale must certainly be considered. However, morale of all department personnel, not solely investigations, must be considered. The policy must be crafted and explained in such a way that all those affected by it are aware of the overall positive aspects. It may be a grudging awareness, but it must be shown clearly.

The policy must be continually applied across the board once instituted. All investigative personnel must be included. Failure to include all personnel allows for lingering sentiment that one division is somehow better, or at least disconnected, from another. Failure to continually adhere to the policy fosters resentment among those investigators displaced when the policy was in effect.

This study was somewhat limited in several aspects. There was a definite lack of material available addressing the possible downside of rotation. The sources found

tended to be vitriolic. Points were made based largely on emotion rather than sound research.

A larger survey could certainly have produced more first hand accounts. However, it is not believed that a larger survey would have altered the percentages either way. The results were consistent across two different groups surveyed. All respondents were accomplished professionals with varied experiences in law enforcement.

This study is relevant to all departments large enough to have separate patrol and investigations sections. All departments regularly assess how best to use manpower. The vast majority of departments struggle with the issues of morale and stagnation. People are the biggest, most valuable asset of any organization. The wise use of this resource determines the success of the organization.

Ultimately, if rotation is a success, everyone stands to prosper. The most valuable resource of the department is used in the most efficient, effective manner possible. The officers of the department work in an environment that is upbeat and acknowledges the need for varied and new experiences. The community is made better when served by motivated individuals dedicated to making a safer environment for everyone. Isn't that why someone becomes a police officer in the first place?

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Assignment Rotation Survey  
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I have attempted to allow for as many multiple-choice and short answer responses as possible. Obviously, some of the questions will require a bit more effort. Let me say in advance that I appreciate the additional effort and also that I am perfectly content with brevity that conveys the message. I'm not asking for entire policies and procedures; just enough to let me know your thoughts, or practices. Please feel free to use the margins or backs of pages if needed.

You may return these to me in class or via e-mail to: rbassett@mylubbock.us  
(no need to re-write questions)

1. What is the size of your agency? (sworn personnel)  
 <50     50 – 100     101 – 200     201 – 300     > 300
2. What is the nature of your agency?  
 Municipal Police Department     County Sheriff's Office  
 University Police Department    Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. Does your agency have an investigations section separate from patrol section?  
 Yes     No (if no, discontinue survey)
4. How are personnel selected for assignment to investigations?  
 Seniority  
 Merit (as determined by investigation and/or patrol supervision)  
 Tested positions  
 Other (please explain)
5. Is there a maximum period of time that officers can be assigned to investigations?  
 Yes     No
6. Are officers assigned to investigations allowed to retain that assignment if they promote?  Yes     No
7. If an officer promotes or rotates out of investigations, is he allowed any choice in where he is assigned (what shift/days off)?  Yes     No
8. Does your agency have a policy to foster movement between patrol and investigations?  Yes     No (if Yes, please explain)

9. If you answered "No", to number 8, do you feel your agency needs such a policy?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No (please give details if you feel they are pertinent)

10. Do you feel the current policy for assignment or transfer to investigations creates a morale problem for patrol officers? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

11. Do you feel stagnation is a problem for investigators allowed to remain in an assignment indefinitely? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

12. Do you believe a policy of mandatory rotation from investigations to patrol is feasible? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No;  
...advisable? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Why or who not?

13. Have you spent any part of your career assigned to investigations? \_\_\_\_\_ No  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes (If yes, how long and in what investigative section?)

14. Please share any other comments or thoughts you have on this topic.