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The Psychology of Police Professionalism

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ABSTRACT

The challenges faced by law enforcement agencies in the 21st century are monumental. Our world has become increasingly complex and the demands on law enforcement officers are equally complex. Law enforcement personnel must be capable of a wide range of task from understanding new technology to keeping pace with a rapidly changing social and legal environment. Amidst the complexities of modern law enforcement are the fundamental values which prompt officers to serve others: integrity, compassion, and professionalism. The expectations are high, and viable applicants are sometimes few. Now more than ever, law enforcement officers must have the intellectual ability augmented by the right blend of character, emotional intelligence, and social skills to help attain agency goals and meet community expectations. No resource is more vital to a police agency than a police officer or police manager who is driven by a desire to do the right thing and has been called to serve others. This study examines the way we select personnel. How do police administrators identify police applicants who will exhibit professionalism in their careers? What types of psychological evaluations are currently being used in Texas to select police officers? What are the character traits that will create synergy in the agency and better serve citizens? How can police administrators improve the personnel selection process? This study examines these questions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Review of Literature	3
Methodology	11
Findings	12
Discussion	19
References	21

INTRODUCTION

As law enforcement agencies prepare to serve in an increasingly complex society, no issue is more critical to our success than selecting and promoting the right personnel. It is absolutely essential that law enforcement professionals possess the value systems and psychological attributes necessary to foster the success of their agencies. Communities have bestowed an enormous degree of authority, responsibility, and autonomy upon law enforcement officers. The demands placed upon law enforcement officers are equally profound. Law enforcement agencies have for decades wrestled with the challenges of selecting and promoting personnel worthy of the awesome responsibility placed upon us. This is a difficult endeavor. The psychological attributes that come together to create a law enforcement professional are difficult to define and often difficult to detect. It is a complex mingling of value systems, perspectives, self-concept, integrity, and conscientiousness. Professionalism is easy to recognize but extremely hard to define. One of the reasons for this is that professionals possess particular personality traits...his positive view and untiring devotion will pull him through when facing extreme adversity (Trautman, 1988).

Law enforcement administrators have relied on a multitude of strategies to identify personnel who possess the right combination of personality traits. Likewise efforts have been made to screen out personnel who possess psychological attributes contrary to the professional standards of law enforcement. Although predicting performance and professionalism is not an exact science, there are some means by which law enforcement managers can

increase the odds of hiring and promoting professionals. This paper will examine the question of: What are the psychological traits associated with police professionalism as well as the psychological traits, which are detrimental to the profession? The research is also intended to reveal important information regarding commonly used psychological assessment tests such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and the Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI).

Law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve will benefit from the analysis of this topic. The citizens of our country have relinquished some degree of their liberty and entrusted law enforcement officers with enormous autonomy and authority. These citizens deserve law enforcement professionals, who represent the best of American society. It is essential that leaders within the profession be worthy to become the gatekeepers. Few have such unbridled power to impact lives more than a law enforcement officer. This power should only be granted to those who demonstrate the psychological capacity and the aptitude to maintain the highest standards of professionalism.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much research has been done in an effort to correctly diagnose mental illness and compile a profile of a person's psychological attributes. However, there is far less research related to hiring and promoting police officers whose psychological attributes will support the success of the police agency. Law enforcement agencies have persistently searched for ways to screen applicants and promote individuals with the right psychological profile. Many agencies

across the United States have relied upon the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) to screen police applicants. The MMPI is by far the most widely used personality inventory (Colligan & Offord, 1992). The MMPI-2 is a revised version and was revised under the supervision of a team of psychologists. The MMPI-2 was published in 1989. However, use of the MMPI or MMPI-2 to identify desirable police officer applicants may be ineffective or even problematic. Comer (1992) stated that the MMPI consist of 550 self-statements to be labeled “true,” “false,” or “cannot say” about numerous areas of personal functioning, including the respondents physical concerns, mood, morale, attitudes towards religion, sex, social activities, and possible symptoms of psychological dysfunction such as phobias and hallucinations. Comer goes on to explain that the MMPI was constructed by a method called criterion keying whereby quantities of statements were gathered from already-existing scales of personal and social attitudes, textbooks, medical and neurological case-taking procedures, and from psychiatric examination forms. The authors then asked almost 800 “normal” people and almost 800 hospitalized mental patients to indicate whether each statement was true for them. Only those statements that differentiated the hospitalized subjects were incorporated into the inventory (Comer, 1992). Upon completion of the MMPI, the respondent’s answers are compiled and plotted on a chart containing various scales, which indicate the respondent’s profile. The scales are hypochondria, depression, conversion hysteria, psychopathic deviate, masculinity/femininity, paranoia, psychasthenia,

schizophrenia, hypomania, and social introversion. Essentially the MMPI and MMPI-2 measure these indicators of mental illness.

The MMPI-2 also contains a lie scale, which is designed to detect dishonesty. Graham (2000) describes test subjects who have a high L-scale as trying to create a favorable impression of themselves by not being honest in responding to the items of the MMPI-2. They are defensive, denying, and repressing. They claim virtues to a greater extent than most people. They manifest little or no insight into their own motivations. They show little awareness of consequences to other people of their own behavior. They over evaluate their own worth. They have a poor tolerance for stress or pressure. They are unoriginal in their thinking and inflexible in problem solving (Graham, 2000).

Two researchers from the University of Evansville and two researchers from a research center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana teamed up to examine the use of the MMPI-2 as a predictor of police job performance, and their research revealed that, "the L-scale does appear to have value as a selection device for police applicants" (Weiss, Rostow, Kinsman, & Davis, 2003, p.60). Dr. Weiss and his associates conducted research involving 938 police officer applicants in various police departments throughout Louisiana. The applicants were given the MMPI-2 prior to their service and then their performance was evaluated one year later.

The L-scale scores were incorporated into a formula whereby the researchers could examine the correlation between L-scale scores and job performance. The formula was designed so that a correlation coefficient is significant at $< .01$. The research strongly indicated that police applicants who scored high on the MMPI-2

L-scale are likely to exhibit problematic behavior. Officers with high L-scale scores are much more likely to be terminated. When the researchers examined the relationship between high L-scale scores and termination the formula yielded a correlation coefficient of .047 (Weiss, Rostow, Kinsman, & Davis, 2003).

Another such psychological assessment test is the Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI). Robin Inwald, Ph.D. and colleagues developed this 310 item true-and-false instrument, the IPI, to specifically assess psychological functioning in law enforcement settings (Mufson & Mufson, 1998). The IPI much like the MMPI consist of a series of questions answered by the test subject. These answers are then examined, and the results placed on a scale of indicators. There are 26 indicators on the IPI which include: guardedness, alcohol use, drug use, driving violations, job difficulties, trouble with the law and society, absence abuse, substance abuse, antisocial attitudes, hyperactivity, rigid type, type A, illness concerns, treatment programs, anxiety, phobic personality, obsessive personality, depression, loner type, unusual experience/thoughts, lack of assertiveness, interpersonal difficulties, undue suspiciousness, family conflicts, sexual concerns, and spouse/mate conflicts (Mufson & Mufson, 1998). Diane Mufson and Maurice Mufson's research was conducted in Huntington, West Virginia, a city of approximately 50,000 residents. The subject of this research was a group of 33 police officer candidates who were selected from a pool of over 200 applicants. The study group included 29 white males, 2 white women, 1 African-American man, and 1 Hispanic woman. The study was conducted over a period of time from 1991 until 1995, and 5 of the participants left the police

department for various reasons prior to the conclusion of the study. However, in 1995 Mufson and Mufson compiled data regarding the remaining 28 officers.

The study began by administering the IPI to each study participant prior to their entry into the police training program. The data collected in 1995 consisted of ratings obtained from 3 supervisors, two of whom had interacted with the entire study group during the entire recruit training period. These supervisors rated each officer's performance on a 5-point scale, with a score of 5 representing the ideal officer, a score of 1 representing the least desirable officer, and middle-range scores indicative of moderate ratings. Desirable qualities included acceptance and adaptation to organizational rules, and positive interaction with fellow officers, supervisors, and the public. Capacity to cope with stress and capacity to understand job requirements were also deemed desirable. Negative qualities were represented by immaturity, problematical ethical issues, timidity, interpersonal difficulties, and driving problems.

Initial analysis showed significantly poor performance of the study group officers was associated with just 3 IPI scales: Elevated scores on Driving Violations, Elevated scores on Lack of Assertiveness, and Lowered scores on the Type A scale. Since the lowered score on the Lack of Assertiveness scale was an indicator of poor performance, additional analysis was done to determine if there was a correlation between other lowered scores on other IPI scales was predictive of negative performance. This analysis showed that lowered scores on the Rigid Type scale also was a predictor of poor performance. Mufson and Mufson also observed that when a combination of three scales: Rigid Type scale,

Driving Violations scale, and the Lack of Assertiveness scale together predicted poorer evaluations from the supervisors. These three IPI scales correctly predicted 77% of the successful officers and 67% of the problem officers (Mufson & Mufson, 1998).

Forrest Scoggin, PhD., Joseph Schumacher, PhD., Jennifer Gardner, MA, and William Chaplin, PhD, all of the University of Alabama, conducted a significant study entitled, "Predictive Validity of Psychological Testing in Law Enforcement Settings". The aforementioned researchers examined the usefulness MMPI versus the IPI in predicting police performance and problematic behavior in a law enforcement setting. The study was conducted at the University of Alabama Law Enforcement Academy. 82 police recruits participated in the study and took the MMPI and the IPI prior to the completion of their training academy. One year later performance evaluations were gathered on 69 of the original 82 participants. The performance evaluations were completed by the officers' supervisors and included such factors as loyalty to the organization, adherence to physical appearance codes, knowledge of the law, and response to supervision. Personnel records were also obtained to examine other meaningful criteria such as the number of verbal reprimands, number of written reprimands, number of reprimands for improper use of vehicle, and number of citizen complaints. Supervisors also provided subjective ratings. The results of the study indicated that the IPI was substantially more predictive than was the MMPI, and combining the two scales did not appreciably improve predictive power over that observed with the IPI alone (Scogin, Schumacher,

Gardner, & Chaplin, 1995). Particularly important is the fact that these researchers found the IPI to be significantly more effective at predicting citizen complaints.

It is important to note that there are individual character traits that police personnel may possess that are subtle and may not be detected or measured by a self-assessment test such as those described above. These veiled personality traits may be fundamental to the success of a police organization or they may be detrimental to the organization and to the community. It is critical for police administrators to seek out police applicants who possess the character traits that are at the core of police professionalism. These character traits include a complex mix of interpersonal skills, knowledge, a strong work ethic, emotional maturity, and integrity. These characteristics enable a police professional to excel while promoting the success and the well-being of the organization. Two researchers, Van Scotter and Motowidlo (1996), explain that when an employee works within an organization, contextual performance becomes an additional factor in job performance. Contextual performance involves performance not formally prescribed by any specific job but rather inherent in all jobs. These behaviors support the social fabric of the organization and have two dimensions: job dedication and interpersonal facilitation. Self-disciplined behaviors such as following rules, working hard, and taking the initiative to solve a problem at work is known as job dedication (Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996). The researchers go on to explain that interpersonal facilitation involves interpersonally oriented behaviors that contribute to organizational goal accomplishment. These

interpersonally oriented behaviors include building and mending relationships, compassion and sensitivity, putting people at ease, cooperation, consideration, and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996).

Another researcher suggests that conscientiousness is often the single greatest predictor of job performance. Conscientiousness is the strongest individual predictor of job performance, with the exception of general mental ability (Behling, 1998). The resulting characteristics of conscientiousness include dependability, thoroughness, and goal directed behavior. Goal directed behavior includes thinking before acting, following norms and rules, planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks. It should be noted that some of the characteristics of goal directed behaviors are also basic management functions. (Behling, 1998).

Despite our efforts, individuals such as those described in the book , "Coping with Difficult People," sometimes beset the workplace (Bamsom, 1988). Bramsom describes a host of difficult people who can cause irreparable harm to an organization. He has described these people as the hostile aggressive, the complainer, the silent unresponsive, the super-agreeable, the negativist, the know-it-all, and the indecisive (Bramsom, 1981). These personality traits are likely to be present to some degree in every law enforcement agency. Unfortunately, these are the individuals who are often working to achieve goals contrary to the goals of the agency. They will also limit the efficiency of the agency often preventing the agency from meeting the needs and expectations of the community. It is vital that police executives be aware of these personnel and

attempt to limit their negative impact on the agency and the people they are supposed to serve.

According to Tab Cooper, Director of Program Development and Training for SoTelligence, discusses the importance of these attributes in a training session entitled, "Building Successful Workplace Relationships." Cooper describes the emotional intelligence as E.Q. His training focuses on E.Q. as well as social intelligence. Cooper contends that successful workplace relationships are the result of the timely and appropriate application of specific and learnable interpersonal skills. The challenge for law enforcement professionals is to hire and promote those personnel who possess those characteristics and practice the proper interpersonal and social skills.

METHODOLOGY

Based upon the research discussed, what is the psychological profile of a police professional? What personality characteristics should police administrators be seeking to bring into their agency? How might police executives identify these desirable employees? What personality characteristics are most destructive to a police agency? To answer these questions I will conduct a survey, which will include responses from police executives across Texas. A survey of twenty agencies will be conducted to determine the most desirable personality traits within the law enforcement agency and the most destructive personality traits in the police agency. These characteristics will then be ranked in order from most important to least important and from most

destructive to least destructive. The type of psychological screening methods used by the agency will also be examined. Findings will be distributed to the participating agencies for their review. Information regarding the relative effectiveness of the MMPI versus the IPI will also be distributed.

FINDINGS

The results of the study indicate that the law enforcement managers surveyed most want to see that the personnel in their agency possess integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness. They were most concerned about major psychological illness such as schizophrenia. They were also concerned about social difficulties such as heavy alcohol usage, hostility, trouble with the law, and history of drug use. These social difficulties tend to indicate tendencies, which are contrary to integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness. These responses were arranged on a chart. Scores of -10 indicate characteristics most damaging to the agency/profession and scores of +10 indicate characteristics most beneficial to the agency/profession. A model illustrates how these attributes degrade law enforcement's ability to attain agency goals and meet community needs and expectations (Appendix A) (Table 1).

Table 1.**Survey Results Regarding Attributes Beneficial and Harmful to the Agency****/ Community.**

SCHIZOPHRENIA	-9.0
HEAVY ALCOHOL USE	-8.8
TROUBLE WITH THE LAW	-8.6
HOSTILITY	-8.5
HISTORY OF DRUG USE	-8.4
DEPRESSION	-8.3
ABSENCE ABUSE	-8.0
ANTISOCIAL ATTITUDES	-8.0
FAMILY CONFLICTS	-7.1
PARANOIA	-6.9
PSYCHOPATHIC DEVIATE	-6.9
ANXIETY	-6.8
HYPOCHONDRIA	-6.8
LACK OF COURAGE	-6.7
INDECISIVENESS	-6.5
LOW CAPACITY TO COPE WITH STRESS	-6.4
FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES	-6.3
IMMATURITY	-6.2
JOB DIFFICULTIES	-6.2
CHRONIC COMPLAINING	-5.7
NEGATIVITY	-5.6
UNDUE SUSPICIOUSNESS	-5.6
NEGATIVE RESPONSE TO SUPERVISION	-5.2
LACK OF ASSERTIVENESS	-5.0
SPOUSE/MATE CONFLICTS	-4.9
INTERPERSONAL DIFFICULTIES	-4.8
TROUBLE WITH SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS	-4.7
OBSESSIVE PERSONALITY	-4.4
TIMIDITY	-4.2
PHOBIAS	-4.1
KNOW-IT-ALL	-3.8
HYPO MANIA	-3.7
SEXUAL CONCERNS	-3.5
SOCIAL INTROVERSION	-3.4
PASSIVENESS	-3.1
ILLNESS CONCERNS	-3.0
UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES / THOUGHTS	-3.0

DEFENSIVENESS	-2.8
PSYCHASTHENIA	-2.6
LONER TYPE	-2.2
RIGID BEHAVIOR TYPE	-2.0
CONVERSION HYSTERIA	-1.0
HYPERACTIVITY	-1.7
MODERATE ALCOHOL USE	-.5
TYPE A PERSONALITY	+1.7
NO ALCOHOL USE	+4.3
SENSITIVITY	+5.8
CONSIDERATION OF OTHERS	+6.1
TAKING INITIATIVE	+6.3
LOYALTY TO ORGANIZATION	+6.4
POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH COWORKERS	+6.5
POSITIVE RESPONSE TO SUPERVISION	+6.8
COMPASSION	+6.9
COOPERATION WITH OTHERS	+7.2
GOAL DIRECTED BEHAVIOR	+7.2
UNDERSTANDING JOB REQUIREMENTS	+7.2
THOROUGHNESS	+7.3
ADHERENCE TO PHYSICAL APPEARANCE CODES	+7.4
HIGH CAPACITY TO COPE WITH STRESS	+7.4
SERVICE ATTITUDE TOWARDS COMMUNITY	+7.4
DEDICATION TO THE JOB	+7.6
ENTHUSIASM	+7.6
SELF RESTRAINT	+7.6
CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	+7.8
FOLLOWING RULES	+7.8
WORKING HARD	+7.8
KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW	+8.0
GOOD INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	+8.1
RESPONSIBILITY	+8.4
ACCEPTANCE OF DEPT. RULES	+8.7
DEPENDABILITY	+8.8
EMOTIONAL MATURITY	+8.8
TRUSTWORTHINESS	+9.1
HONESTY	+9.5
INTEGRITY	+9.5

The respondents were asked to write down three essential character traits for police professionals to possess. The results included a list of 21 attributes. The most common attribute listed was integrity. 75% of the respondents listed integrity. Honesty was the second most common response, and good moral character was the third most common response (Table 2).

Table 2.**Survey Results.**

ESSENTIAL CHARACTER TRAITS	NUMBER OF REPONSES	PERCENTAGE
INTEGRITY	15	75%
HONESTY	10	50%
GOOD MORAL CHARACTER	5	25%
ETHICAL	4	20%
KNOWLEDGE	3	15%
RESPONSIBILITY	2	10%
COMMON SENSE	2	10%
COMPASSION	2	10%
DEPENDABILITY	2	10%
GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS	2	10%
HARD-WORKING	2	10%
INTELLIGENT	2	10%
CREDIBILITY	1	5%
DEDICATION	1	5%
INDEPENDENCE	1	5%
MULTI-TASKING	1	5%
OPEN-MINDED	1	5%
PREDICTABLE	1	5%
RATIONAL	1	5%
RESOURCEFUL	1	5%
SELF-CONFIDENT	1	5%

The law enforcement managers were asked to reveal what type of psychological evaluation was used in the hiring process at their agency. The results were somewhat surprising. 45% of the respondents were unsure what type of psychological evaluation was being used. The respondents also indicated only moderate confidence in the effectiveness of the psychological evaluation process for police applicants (Table 3).

Table 3

Psychological Screening in Texas Law Enforcement Agencies

<u>Type of Psychological Evaluation Used</u>	<u>Responses</u>
MMPI	6 or 30%
IPI	3 or 15%
BOTH MMPI AND IPI	2 or 10%
NOT SURE	9 or 45%

<u>Effectiveness of Psychological Evaluation</u>	<u>Reponses</u>
VERY EFFECTIVE 100%-90%	4 OR 20%
SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE 70%-90%	7 OR 35%
NOT VERY EFFECTIVE 50%-70%	5 OR 25%
NEEDS UIMPROVEMENT 30%-50%	2 OR 10%
NEEDS MAJOR CHANGE <30%	2 OR 10%

DISCUSSION

This research examines the challenge of selecting, retaining, and promoting those persons who possess the right blend of personality characteristics and social skills to promote the effectiveness and health of the law enforcement profession. Prior to beginning the research, the hypothesis was that this issue was not given appropriate attention by law enforcement administrators. Moreover, law enforcement managers often select and promote based on intelligence and other skill sets, which may not necessarily promote the welfare of the agency and lead to the achievement of agency goals. The research contained herein supports that hypothesis. The results of the research indicate significant shortcomings in the MMPI as it relates to the selection of law enforcement personnel. The research also indicates that the IPI also has shortcomings in detecting mental illness. It appears that these two psychological assessment tools will be most effective when combined or supplemented with other types of psychological tests. It is important to note the effectiveness of the MMPI in detecting mental illness, and therefore the MMPI does play a critical role in psychological screening of police applicants.

Because the psychological attributes discussed are inevitably linked to emotional maturity and social skills, perhaps the best assessment can be made by a well-qualified mental health professional who has a deep understanding of the law enforcement profession. The mental health professional must also

understand the culture, which exists inside the police agency and the dynamics of a career in law enforcement.

Although the findings suggest a need for more comprehensive psychological evaluations, such testing will present enormous challenges to some agencies. Across the United States, as in Texas, 75% of law enforcement agencies employ fewer than 25 full-time officers (Reaves, 2000). These agencies are confronted with serious budget constraints, which may prohibit such extensive psychological testing. Additionally, the applicant pool from which they hire may not withstand such high standards and thorough scrutiny. These agencies may elect to continue minimal psychological testing to meet the standards set forth by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education and reserve additional funding for those personnel who are seeking advancement in the agency.

This issue immensely impacts all law enforcement personnel. We work in agencies where human potential abounds and can be unleashed by a positive working environment. When law enforcement personnel exhibit emotional maturity and social skills inside the agency, they will better serve those in the community. Law enforcement officers are called to exemplify a strong work ethic, cooperation, compassion, knowledge, and integrity. Law enforcement executives are called to uphold those ideals by hiring and promoting the best personnel available.

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Appendix A

