

The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

An Analysis of Skill Qualification Test
and Common Tasks Test for Law Enforcement

An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for Graduation
from the Leadership Command College

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June, 2000

#704

ABSTRACT

The concept of an annual Common Task Test and a Skill Qualification Test or (Police skill test and Written Proficiency Test) is a new idea that would enhance the law enforcement community. This concept would give chiefs, staff officers and training officers the strengths and weaknesses of the police department. This important data would be used in planning to meet the realistic training needs of the department. The evaluation would show the short falls of police officers and where training needs to be focused.

Too often a police officer graduates from the police academy, goes to basic core courses, attends other law enforcement schools and does his or her twenty years. What system is in place to check to ensure that our officers are staying current with the ever-changing laws and the way we do business? How do we know that they have retained any of the important material from a class or course? With an annual Common Tasks Test (CTT) and Skill Qualification Test (SQT) we can ensure that we have the best trained and educated police officers in the world. We would have the means to identify our short falls and fix the problem through training.

The purpose of this research project is to justify a Common Task Test and Skill Qualification Test for law enforcement. To assess the needs for such a test program a sample of police departments were surveyed and the results were compared. The U.S. Army was the main source of information for this project.

It is concluded that an annual Common Tasks Test and a Written Skill Qualification Test are tools that are needed in the law enforcement community. It is also recommended that the Harker Heights Police Department incorporate this program as a form of evaluation.

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Introduction

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the need for a formal Skill Qualification Test and a Common Tasks Test for law enforcement personnel. This program is a new idea that will enhance the law enforcement community. This concept will be an important tool for chiefs, supervisors, training officers and the tested officers in identifying strengths and weaknesses in job performance and in training.

Too often a police officer graduates from a police academy, attends basic core courses and attends some other law enforcement courses that attract his/her attention. They go through their in-service training and they do their twenty years and retire. A system is needed to check and ensure that our officers are staying current with the ever-changing laws and the new technology. A plan for in-service training that meets the needs of the officer and the department is needed.

It is hypothesized that a common task and a skill qualification test for law enforcement personnel will assist in increasing job performance as well as moral. The research questions that will guide this study are "Are a common task and a skill qualification test needed?" "What are the benefits of implementing such tests?" It is hypothesized that common task and skill qualification tests are needed to not only evaluate personnel, but to plan for future realistic training. It is also hypothesized that the benefits of implementing such tests will include increased job proficiency and moral through incentives.

Multiple sources of information were used in this research. The primary source of information is the U.S. Army Field Manual and soldier's manual. A survey was also conducted of several police agencies in the state of Texas. The intended outcome of this project is to break

new ground in developing a hands-on common tasks test and a written skill qualification test that will better the training program of any police department. It is also intended to ensure that we have the best-trained and educated police officers in the world. This project will also open the road to enhance stellar performance through proficiency pay incentives.

Research of these issues will be conducted for the primary benefit of the Harker Heights Police Chief and command staff. The results of this research may be useful to other police agencies and Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education.

Review of Literature

Getting the most of all employees and providing feedback is a critical factor for any organization. Performance evaluations are important to law enforcement. The problem is apparent that many agencies are not effectively evaluating personnel. "The use of evaluation systems by police administrators is directly related to their concern for agency accountability, legal liability, and employee productivity, effectiveness and efficiency. Police chiefs have painfully become aware that, in this era of litigation, their department's performance evaluation system can be an important evidential factor in a litigant's case" (Fyfe, 1997, p 23).

"Often the supervisors are asked to give an opinion about an employee's attitude, reliability, ability to accept criticism, loyalty, demeanor, ETC. These opinions are actually meaningless because they are nebulous, inconsistent and unsupportable. These personality ratings communicate that it's not how a person performs but who they are that counts or in other words, who they know and how well they are liked." (Jones, 1998, p. 109). The purposes of evaluations is a managerial tool that is used by administrators, for the basis of employment

decisions regarding probation, training, promotion, discipline, transfer, termination, special assignment, and merit increase. Performance evaluation directly benefits employees by letting them know what they are expected to do and how well their department thinks they have performed. (Fyfe, 1997, p. 324).

All police departments and their officers need to be the best-trained possible. Shellow and Bard stated, "One of the highest priorities of any profession, if it is truly a profession, is the development of an appropriate educational methodology. Its absence is a major drawback for the emerging police profession." (1976, p. 30). Too often the training officers or staff officers will take notice of an upcoming school or course and see who can go according to the schedule, because we need to send somebody to the course. "The training function in criminal justice agencies should be established to meet legitimate training needs that contribute to the organizations overall goals, and should be organized to execute the training process in the most effective, cost efficient manner" (Skinner & Cheesebro, 1980, p. 1).

Harker Heights, as with many other departments, have sent many officers to some great schools and they have received training certification. I have been a part of and seen many local police departments put on classes and require that all officers attend. How do we know if they retained the important material? We know that they were exposed to the material, but how do we know that they are educated about the subject? Departments need to develop a training evaluation system. Performance evaluations are important to law enforcement. Many agencies are not effectively evaluating personnel. "Performance measurement and evaluations have been staples for law enforcement agencies since the 1960s" (Witaker, G., 1982, p. 88)

In the early 1970's the United States Army had the same problem as the law enforcement field, inflated written evaluations on job performance. The Army used a number system with a

maximum of 125 points. Everyone was obtaining 125. The answer to the Army's problem, after many dollars of research, was the Skill Qualification Test (SQT). The SQT was a performance-oriented written test. The test was written for every job in the Army and for different ranks. Understand that the Army had well over 212 jobs.

The SQT is a performance-oriented written test that evaluates soldier's abilities to perform tasks at skill levels in their MOS (Military Occupations Specialty or Job). Each test contains a set of multiple-choice questions. Each question has one correct answer. The SQT is approximately two hours long. All active duty soldiers will be tested every year. (DA Pam 600-25, p. 26)

The Army developed different skill levels. Skill level 1 was for privates to specialists. Skill level 2 was for sergeant. Skill level 3 was for staff sergeant. Skill level 4 was for sergeant first class. At skill level 1 the questions were basic questions about the job. At levels 2,3, and 4 they had more questions on leadership and technical matters but also included some of the basic skill level 1 questions. Those soldiers who scored over 90% received extra "proficiency" pay. This extra pay was \$120.00 per month. Here was an incentive to do the very best because all soldiers could use the extra money. Soldiers, commanders and trainers received feedback on areas that they missed and were weak on.

In the early 1980s the Army took the testing one step further. Again, after years of research they came up with an additional test called the Common Tasks Test (CTT). "CTT consists of 17 tests which primarily assess unit training. CTT is a hands-on test of fundamental combat and survival skills." (DA Pam 600-25, p. 26). All soldiers in the Army from private through sergeant first class regardless of their Military Occupations Specialty (MOS) would receive CTT evaluations annually. Out of 17 hands-on tests, soldiers would be tested on ten

tasks. Individuals receive a score of go (pass) or no-go (fail). Tasks range from setting the headspace and timing on the M-2 50 cal machinegun to putting on a gas mask. Common tasks that every soldier, regardless of his or her MOS, should know how to perform. Again, all the results are forwarded to the soldier, commander and trainer.

The Army put this information to good use. The Army identified areas that were weak, or tasks that needed to be improved upon. Commands then developed training plans to address weaknesses. "Training management is a continuous process. It consists of four phases: planning, resource, training, and evaluation" (FM 25-2, p. 17). The Army sent down a list, by units and MOS of where the short falls were or where training needed to be focused. The commander and trainers would plan classes to correct the weak areas. The Army took out the guesswork in training by identifying problems and giving a basis to start training. SQT and CTT results improved soldier and unit proficiency. These results also influenced promotion, school selection and performance evaluation. Raters could consider the SQT and CTT scores when preparing performance evaluations. The Army used this information for general and special assignments. The results were a better-trained Army. Soldiers were motivated because they received training that they needed. They were proud and moral was high. Reenlistment was at a all time high. The Army had the resources to study and implement and develop this program. When I left the Army in 1994, the Army was testing over a half million soldiers every year. This was a highly successful program. Today's Army is the best-trained army in the world. The ultimate test was combat and they proved that they had the right stuff at Desert Shield and Desert Storm. It is believed that this same methodology will work in law enforcement also.

“Most recruit patrol persons receive training in the entire myriad of police procedures, very few police agencies are able to adequately assess the utility of that training, or more importantly, assess how much of that training has been retained” (Mullins, 1985, p. 2).

The key point is that every police agency in the great state of Texas has been doing a form of Common Task Testing every year and is mandated to do so by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education. TCLEOSE requires every law enforcement officer to qualify with his or her duty weapon once a year. So in reality police departments have been doing a portion of the Common Task Test or hands on test every year.

METHODOLOGY

The question that must be asked is, can the law enforcement community use tests like the Skill Qualification and Common Tasks Test? Are the tests needed and what are the benefits of implementing such a test? It is hypothesized that the answer is yes. That a new approach is very much needed and wanted.

The methods of inquiry were telephone surveys and questionnaires. As this is a new idea in law enforcement the basic concept had to be explained. Eighteen surveys were conducted. I received a response from all eighteen, thirteen written surveys and five phoned surveys. Both surveys asked the same questions (See Appendix 1). Training officers filled out most of the surveys. Three Chiefs did respond to the surveys and supported the project. The surveys were sent to various departments throughout the state, from Corpus Christy PD of 420 sworn officers to White Settlement ISD of six sworn officers. Included in the surveys were large police departments to small ones, Independent School Districts to Medical Center police departments.

The survey asked if they saw the need for hands on test that would be expanded to several common tasks combined with a written test that was related to the duties of the police

officer. A written test made up for the patrol division, detective division, community service division, and one for the administration division. It was also asked how did they plan or identify future training that is needed in their department. The last question was did they see a need for a hands on performance test and a written examination and would their agency support such a program. With this being a new concept in evaluation of police officers the size of the department is immaterial, as it will work with all departments.

FINDINGS

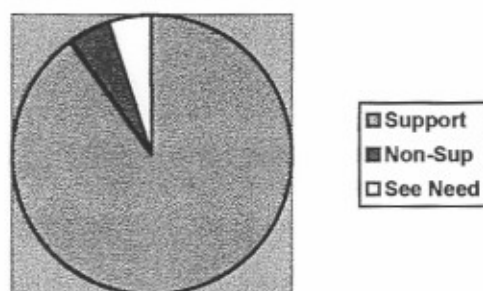
The response from police departments from within the State of Texas was overwhelming. I received positive feedback from the majority of police departments surveyed. Sixteen trainers agreed that a form of this type is very much needed and they wanted to know more about how to implement this program in their departments. The information that I received from the surveys confirmed that not only is a CTT and SQT test needed, but is wanted by the vast majority of police department in the state.

One of the key points that hit home is that every police agency in the great state of Texas has been doing a form of the Common Task Testing every year and is mandated to do so by Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE). TCLEOSE requires every law enforcement officer to qualify with his or her duty weapon once a year. So in reality police departments have been doing a portion of the Common Task Test or hands on test every year.

The two negative responses received were from County Sheriff's Offices. One of the Sheriff's Offices doesn't plan training and they have no evaluation of their deputies. This SO sees a need for the program but the agency would not support it. The other SO did not support

the program and leaves the training to the training department, they too have no evaluation for their deputies. Three chiefs of police, eight staff officers, three sergeants and two training officers all supported this new concept of training and evaluation. All wanted to know more and how to set it up for their departments. Police departments ranging from 420 officers down to six were surveyed.

Figure 1



Survey of Police Departments

Out of the eighteen departments surveyed, only four departments evaluated the skills of their officers after field training. All departments stated that they evaluated the skills of the officers when it comes to firearms. It is also noted that the same four departments evaluated their officers on certain functions of the officer's duty. Four other departments also evaluated their officers on certain functions.

Two important questions were raised from the surveys. What will this cost our department to set up and run and what are the benefits? All-important questions which will be answered later.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research paper was to explore the need for a formal Skill Qualification Test or another name could be Police written examination and a Common Task Test for law enforcement personnel. We have all experienced that our evaluations are over inflated and never test the knowledge of the individual officer. Training almost never covers areas that officers may be weak in and if it does, how do departments know that the officers have retained the knowledge? This program is the answer to all of those questions.

It was hypothesized that a Skill Qualification Test and a Common Task Test for law enforcement personnel will assist in increasing job performance as well as moral.. The outcome is that the tests are not only needed to evaluate personnel but are most needed to plan realistic training. It is believed the benefits of implementing such a test program will increase job proficiency and moral through incentives. Some of the incentives could be a proficiency pay for officers who score above 90%, a ribbon for their uniform, or just plain self-pride.

The names for the Common Task Test and the Skill Qualification Test can be renamed to anything we want, Police hands on evaluation or Police performance test. As stated before, we all have been performing a Common Task Test. We, in the law enforcement community, must qualify with our firearms a minimum of once every year. We have been doing one common task test for years, now we just need to expand on the testing. Another CTT could be handcuffing. This is a hands on performance task and one that every officer must be able to perform. Many lawsuits have been fought in courts because of improper handcuffing not to mention injured officers and subjects. Several tasks in suspect control, restraint and defensive tactics can and should be added to the CTT. The list just keeps growing. All the data and the feedback that I have received support the need for this program.

I spent several years in the U.S. Army and was a top trainer. I have seen both of these programs work. The Army has done all of the research and spent millions of dollars in developing the programs. The programs were designed to work from the individual rifleman to a division of 17,000 men and women in all kinds of different jobs. Some of the jobs ranges from 76Y supply clerks to 95B military police. This program will work from the smallest police department to the largest. The program can be tailored to fit the needs of the patrol division to the SWAT section. Departments will have the means to identify problems in training and procedures. Departments will have the means to plan real training that is needed based on the officer needs and shortfalls. With this program departments can better evaluate their officers. Departments can improve moral and know that you have the best-trained officers in the world.

The questions on what are the benefits and cost? The cost for this test will be a few hours of overtime unless the department can manage to have the test taken on duty time. The benefits will out weigh this small cost factor. Departments will have self-motivated officers that want to do well on the test. Departments will see an increase on job performance and moral. Departments will identify areas that need to focus through training. Imagine that 50% or more of your officers missed questions on the proper way in deploying oleoresin capicum spray. With that data the department can plan realistic training that is needed to correct a problem area. The intent is to take both the Common Task Test and the Skill Qualification Test and identify problems areas that need to be trained. The tasks must be prioritized and incorporated into the training schedule. There is never enough time to train everything. Prioritizing will be the key. Officer safety issues should be paramount and scheduled first. The U.S. Army found out that the most difficult job for a leader is preparing and conduction training. This job must be attacked aggressively and consistently by leaders in order to instill the can do attitude within their units and provide

challenging training. This is the same thing that we in law enforcement face. With the Common task test and the Skill Qualification test we now have the means to identify problem areas in any department in any state in the United States. We can now take this data and plan training that is needed and that will challenge the officers.

The "Army Training and Evaluation Program is a guide on how to prepare, conduct, and evaluate training." (US Army 1987p.11). This manual can be the basic guide on how to set up an evaluation and training program. We can all benefit from this program. This is a win win situation. Setting up the basic program will take some time. Determining what you want to test on for the common test and making up the written test will also take time. Scheduling your officers has always been a problem. These are problems even the army had to face. All police agencies can use a form of these testing procedures to evaluate the knowledge of their officers and identify problems in training. With this information any department can plan future training that is needed and correct training problems.

Departments can have their officers perform the CTT on the day of qualification. We all know that there is always lag time on the range. Take this time and set up eight to ten different stations. Each station will be one task or test that the officer will demonstrate his or hers knowledge of the task. The officer will receive a go or a no-go depending on how they perform. Rotate all the officers through each station and the firing line and you have completed a Common Task Test. Departments have kept the cost down as the officers had to be at the range to qualify anyway. It is believed that the benefits are several; most officers will study on their own time for the test. You can prove in court that the officers are proficient in the tasks and this will keep lawsuits down and injuries. You will have a better-trained department. The biggest benefit is that it will help departments to identify problems within the department in training.

Departments take all the test sheets and categorize them and identify what tasks were missed the most. Take that data and now they can plan future realistic training that the officers are weak on. Thus you have fixed problems that may never have been identified.

The Skill Qualification Test could be named the Police Proficiency examination. This is a written test, which is multiple-choice and is performance-oriented. This test requires some planning. First, several written tests must be developed, one test for each division or section in the police department. Most departments have some form of testing for promotions, which could be a good start in developing the test. Each division supervisor and their staff could develop a test for their division. Many questions can and should be asked to all officers within the department. An example could be the proper burst of oleoresin capsicum spray or new laws that went into effect. These tests or examinations could be fifty to one hundred and fifty questions or more. Most supervisors know where their people are weak. Take that information and develop a test question. Ask questions on policy and procedures, before you know it you will have the examination written. As with the Common Task Test the benefits are very much the same. Most of the officers will study on their own time. All the department has to do is to inform them of the test date and put out a references list of the test subjects.

It is concluded that this program is very much needed in today's law enforcement. Laws change every year and new rulings come out constantly. Plus with the new technology in fighting crime the individual officer must keep abreast. A check must be in place to ensure that he or she retains that knowledge. This program is the answer. No two officers are the same or do they perform the same. With this testing program we can ensure that they are performing the common tasks that we have been doing for years the same. The reward for a little time will out weigh in a better-trained police officer and a better training program for any police department in any city.

I have seen this work. Look at the U.S. Army in the last twenty years. Their record proves that they have the right methodology in evaluation and training. We can use this knowledge in law enforcement to become the best in the world. All the hard work has been done for us.

Implementing the program is the only thing left for us to do.

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Appendix 1

A Survey on Common Task Test and Skills Qualification Test
For The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute
Of Texas
Administration Research Paper
Prepared by
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This survey will be used to assist the researcher in determining the need for a program such as the Common Task Test and the Skill Qualification Test for the law enforcement community.

1. Do you have a program that evaluates the skills of an officer?
Yes No
2. Do you have a written evaluation on certain functions of an officer's duty?
Yes No
3. Do you require your officers to do performance test such as hands on?
Yes No
4. How do you identify future training that is needed in your department?
Please explain:
5. In your opinion, do you see a need for hands on performance test and a written examination for evaluation and to identify training problems?
Yes No
6. Would your agency support a program that would evaluate the officer with both hands on test and a written examination?
Yes No
7. What is the number of Sworn Personnel? _____
8. What is name and position of the person completing this survey?

9. Agency Name _____
10. Address _____
11. Phone number () _____

Thank you for your support on this project.

Charlie Gee

Appendix 2

Survey Police Departments

1. Harker Heights PD	Supported
2. Killeen PD	Supported
3. Temple PD	Supported
4. Belton PD	Supported
5. Bell County SO	See the need. Agency no support
6. Austin ISD	Supported
7. Brownsville ISD	Supported
8. Brenham PD	Supported
9. Freeport PD	Supported
10. Univ. of Tx Medical Center PD	Supported
11. Webster PD	Supported
12. White Settlement ISD	Supported
13. Galveston PD	Supported
14. Collin County SO	No Need. Agency no support
15. Westworth PD	Supported
16. Corpus Christy PD	Supported
17. Nolanville PD	Supported
18. Morgans Point PD	Supported