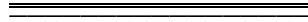


**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Mandatory Specialized Unit Rotation for Law Enforcement**



**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Mandatory specialized unit rotation for law enforcement is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it is a proactive approach to limit or stop many detrimental areas that have proven to be a headache for law enforcement managers. Monotony and a lack of motivation are inherent traits when someone remains in the same position for too long. The training provided to newer officers is improved because the training officers have seen varying areas of the department and can train to those strengths. The excitement of learning something new and being challenged at work will be present. The lure of corruption will be stifled, and the opportunities to work the system will be taken away when rotational policies are implemented. The department will have better supervisors and managers because they will have been exposed to all areas of the department.

The purpose of this research was to see if larger agencies, in particular, would be well suited to implement and reap the positive outcomes of mandatory specialized unit rotation. The researcher looked at the concept of a career development plan and saw the benefits to the employer and the employees. The method of inquiry used by the researcher included a book written about a narcotics investigator that was left in his assignment too long. The lack of a rotational policy was directly listed as a major contributing factor to the corruption that evolved from this. The researcher also located articles written about rotational policies outside of law enforcement. Professional journals and articles were used as well as a blue ribbon panel's official report on the LAPD Rampart scandal.

The researcher discovered that a rotational policy is beneficial to law enforcement. The discoveries showed that officers benefited from being offered and exposed to new and fresh assignments within the departments' specialized units. The departments benefited from better supervisors who have experienced different duties within the department. The department will benefit from a more motivated group of officers, who are energized to serve the citizens. Lastly, departments and citizens will benefit from a decrease in corruption.

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## INTRODUCTION

Specialized units allow officers to receive specialized training. These units are an asset to the department they serve. The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not officers allowed to remain in specialized units for an extended period of time do so to the detriment of the department. The author will pose that a mandatory rotation policy will have far more positive benefits than negative ones.

The relevance of mandatory specialized unit rotation to law enforcement is specialized skills are kept from patrol. Complacency creeps in to those who remain in specialized units. Division is created within the agency from the fact that there are rarely openings to specialized units. Patrol is normally the first responder to all incidents; therefore, they should be highly trained in all facets of law enforcement.

The purpose of this research is to propose that everyone within the department will benefit from mandatory rotation and cross training. Patrol officers will have the opportunity to get both a break from the monotony and receive training in areas that interest them. The officers who are rotated from the specialized units will have the opportunity to both share their specialized training and re-energize their own career. With both examples, the departments will benefit from a more rounded and better trained department.

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not the benefits outweigh the detractions of a policy of mandatory rotation within the department. Policies tend to be restrictive and too numerous for most agencies. It is also difficult to write a policy that covers every scenario or contingency. The author will try to address these very real issues as well as overall, general concerns.

The recommendation for a specialized unit rotation policy is not a new one. Several sources that recommend specialized unit rotation will be reviewed. These sources will vary and not be solely limited to the law enforcement field. The intended method of inquiry includes a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 26 law enforcement professionals.

The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research are to bring about a recommendation for policy change and increased opportunities for all members within a department. The opportunities will come from more openings within each department and the ability to cross-train into other areas. Productivity should increase and problems associated with stagnation should decrease. The department will benefit from happier and more motivated employees as well as the training being brought back to patrol from those rotated out of specialized units.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because most agencies have stagnation and complacency brought on by a lack of rotation opportunities. Officers in specialized units insulate themselves into these positions by becoming the “expert” in that field. Some specialized units, especially those associated with narcotics and vice, have other dangers associated solely with those disciplines. These dangers could include corruption and alcoholism. By rotating officers from these positions, the departments are protecting those officers and insuring that the moral compass keeps pointing in the correct direction.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

While researching this paper, three theories emerged regarding rotation. These theories were identified by Eriksson and Ortega in 2006. The three theories were

identified as: Employee Learning Theory, Employer Learning Theory, and Employee Motivation Theory. The first theory deals with the advantages available to the employee when a rotational policy is enacted. The second deals with the advantages available to the employer, and the last deals with the motivational aspects available.

The Employee Learning Theory deals with the advantages set forth to the employee. These include, but are not limited to, opportunities, training, new challenges and exposure to areas of the department other than patrol. The Employer Learning Theory deals with the benefits afforded to the department. The benefits varied and included well rounded officers, better training to newer officers, and better suited supervisors and staff officers. Lastly, the Motivational Theory contends that an officer allowed to remain in the same position for too long is normally unmotivated. The monotony of doing the same thing day in and day out has no challenge. A rotational policy would create new challenges and motivate each officer (Eriksson & Ortega, 2006).

Specialized units are mentioned throughout this paper, but what exactly constitutes a specialized unit? A specialized unit is anything that has a specialized function like the gang/street-crimes unit, the traffic unit, the K-9 unit, the housing unit, or the narcotics unit, just to name a few. These units normally receive specialized training that could be very beneficial to daily normal patrol operations. This training though is normally exclusive to members of these units.

In the late nineties, Los Angeles, California dealt with a police corruption scandal in the Rampart area. Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH) is a specialized unit designed to attack street gangs. Two sources were referenced to

research the corruption aspect. The main source was a summary from a blue-ribbon panel commissioned to research the Rampart scandal. Blue Ribbon Rampart Review Panel (2004) was an executive summary that detailed what they believed went wrong and what they should do to ensure that type of scandal never happened again.

Klein (2004) detailed the story of, Paco, a member of a specialized gang unit. This book will be referenced as it details what might lead to this corruption and how it can be avoided. The author in no way states that every member of a specialized unit will become corrupt. Every person has the ability to make choices, and not every person will succumb to the subtle lure of corruption. The story of Paco is a powerful story, and it detailed just how easily someone could become corrupt.

Corruption: the mere word is appalling, and it accounts for much of the public outcry against police officers and departments (McNamara, 1975). Corruption is a blemish that has been around for ages. The author found research from past and present sources. The sources give credence to the fact that corruption, while perhaps not completely correctable, does have stopgaps that can be put into place to slow it. It is incumbent for police managers to stem corruption before it is allowed to flourish. The ability to do this though is a task that is not so easily mastered. An age old saying comes to mind: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." This saying rings true when the root causes of corruption are not stopped.

Corruption is defined as dishonesty for personal gain, depravity, an undesirable change, or a corrupting of something/someone (Encarta, 2008). Wood (2001) contended that corruption is an overall process that takes a varying amount of time. He listed a definitive progression that starts when the young officer graduates the academy



and is trained and assigned to the inner city. The first exposure to corruption begins when a small amount of money from a search that is left behind is passed to the newer officer from senior officers that he/she respects. It is quite possible that the newer officer does not want to accept the money and personally feels that it is wrong, but, begrudgingly, they accept it. This acceptance in the group quickly turns to power drinking, gripe sessions, and continued indoctrination into how things “really are.” Phase two is later in the career, and the younger officer has worked their way into a specialized unit or a detective position. The younger officer mentioned earlier has seen how difficult it is to follow all the rules and knows the frustration of getting the critical evidence. The “right” thing to do to ensure a conviction is simple: plant the needed evidence (Wood, 2001).

The next exposure, which can blend seamlessly with others, is when the opportunity for selective enforcement arrives. The selective enforcement could be for a dope dealer that is causing particular problems or it could be for the subject’s chief rival (for a small fee). The final part of the progression Wood (2001) identified is when the younger officer has now progressed and takes a supervisory role. This can sometimes come as a reward for all of the “positive” impact that officer has had on crime. This promotion then completes the cycle as the supervisor is now doing the training and starting the process all over. Wood (2001) made a statement that really shows the subtle power of corruption: “Once that cloak is worn for any length of time, as convincingly as it must be in order to avoid disclosure, it is not easy to shuck off” (p. 3). Wood (2001) stated that a rotational policy is important to avoid corruption.

Knowing what corruption is and the generalized way of how it begins, the next question is how to stop it. McNamara (1975) summarized that “an awareness of the potential danger of corruption led to the formation of a wise policy of rotation of assignments in positions sensitive to corruption” (p. 44). The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) suffered through a very public corruption scandal that originated from a specialized gang unit. Klein (2004) went into great lengths to describe the causes of corruption as it related to Paco. Paco was a member of an elite gang unit in Los Angeles, and the book detailed the evolution toward corruption. A blue-ribbon panel made the recommendation that career paths be rewired to include multiple tours of duty in patrol. This recommendation for rotation was made to avoid pitfalls of corruption.

A mandatory rotational policy for members of specialized units would serve several purposes. Stagnation would be minimized as patrol officers would be afforded the opportunity to rotate into differing specialized units (Gabor, 1992). Training of newer officers would be enhanced as more training officers would have a broader knowledge to include than just patrol functions (Marvin, 1998). This is also an additional benefit to the department and falls in with the Employer Learning Theory fostered by Eriksson and Ortega in 2006. Future leaders will have a broader base of knowledge to draw upon to ensure that departmental goals are being met (Graham & Cameron, 1985). Lastly, but perhaps the most important benefit, is the fact that corruption opportunities are stemmed (Blue Ribbon Rampart Review Panel, 2004; McNamara, 1975; Wood, 2001).

Stagnation leads to morale problems (Gabor, 1992). As a person remains in the same position, the absence of something new and sheer monotony add up to boredom and, consequently, stagnation and morale problems. A coach of a winning soccer team

went so far as to rotate starters on the team to avoid stagnation and morale problems. This coach wanted all of the team's personnel to be desirous of a victory, and to avoid those members becoming complacent, a rotational policy was enacted (Northcroft, 2006). Officers who have high morale present a better face for the department to the public (Marvin, 1998). An additional reason for departmental managers to want to avoid stagnation is that employees will have negative outlook. This negativity will make the department look bad in public and create problems within the department. These problems will arise from disdain toward policies, disdain for change, and laziness. A rotational policy will allow officers to constantly be challenged by learning a new job, receiving new training, and allowing them to have an overall knowledge of the job.

Future leaders will be able to ensure that departmental goals are being met because they will have experienced multiple areas of the department. When discussing this aspect of a mandatory rotational system, Gabor (1992) stated, "It adds vigor and vitality to the organization, and it promotes high morale and fresh ideas" (p. 18). Eriksson and Ortega (2006) stated that, "both studies found that employees who had been involved in job rotation programs were more likely to be promoted" (p. 655). This plays back into the Employee Learning Theory that was mentioned earlier. These officers and supervisors that participate in the mandatory rotation policy have been exposed to different jobs within the department. This exposure will naturally make them better managers of police personnel and assets.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research question to be examined considers whether or not a mandatory rotational policy for specialized units is needed. A rotational policy should benefit the

employer. A rotational policy should also benefit the employee. A rotational policy should aid in stemming the possibility of corruption. A survey will be distributed to 26 law enforcement professionals, and the results of this survey will be looked at. The author was curious about mandatory rotational policies. On the surface, this type of policy seems to be beneficial to all parties, and the research proves this to be true.

The researcher hypothesizes that mandatory rotational policies will be beneficial to all parties involved. The rotational policy will benefit the employee, giving him/her the opportunity to serve in areas of the department that interest them. The employee will be motivated as there is always something new to learn. The rotational policy will also benefit the department, giving upper management a well rounded department. Having supervisors and staff officers that have served in varying areas of the department will create more flexibility and a better respected staff.

The method of inquiry will include a review of articles. It also will use internet sites and periodicals. Lastly, a survey will be distributed. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of mandatory rotational policies will include a survey. The survey distributed will consist of ten questions. The first question asked will be about the size of the differing agencies. This question will be included because many smaller agencies do not have specialized units; therefore, a rotational policy would not be applicable. The next question will inquire about what type of agency the participant belongs to. This question is important because many state agencies are task-specific. The attorney general's office concentrates on investigations and investigations only. They might have differing specialties like voter fraud, cyber-crime, and child-support, but these would not be considered specialized units.

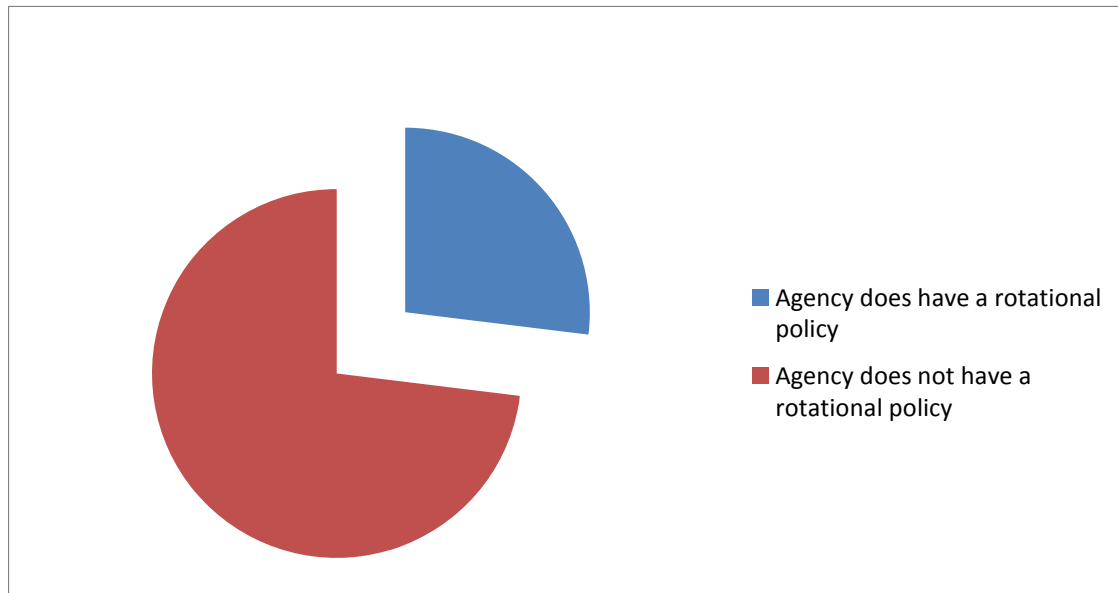
A simple question will be asked inquiring if their agencies currently have a rotational policy. Another question will ask if their agency has a separate investigative division from patrol. The next question asked will be if their agency currently has a rotational policy, and if so, if it is reserved only for the patrol division. The survey will then inquire about what the participant's current assignment is and how long they have been in that position. The next question will then ask, in their current pay grade, if they have switched assignments. A generalized question will be asked about the participant's view of morale within their department, and, lastly, any generalized thoughts on the subject of rotational policies will be inquired about.

Of 26 surveys distributed, 26 were returned. The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in a 100% return rate. The demographics included law enforcement officers from their late twenties to their early fifties. The races included were both whites and blacks, and both genders were included. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by two graphs.

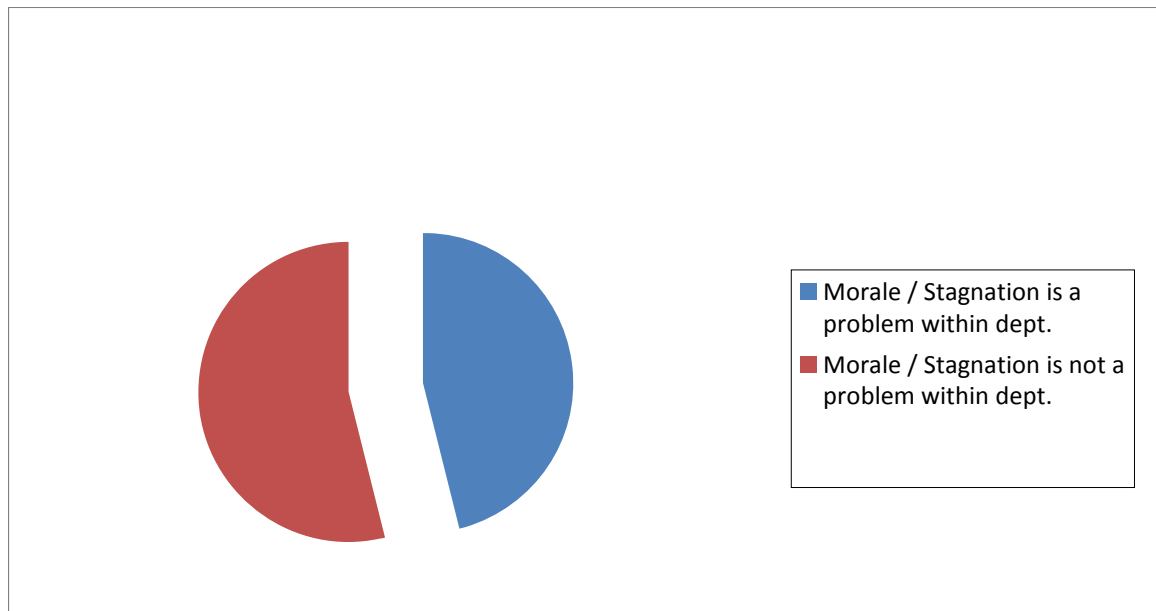
## **FINDINGS**

The survey that the author distributed revealed some interesting facts. The majority of the participants came from departments that have less than 50 personnel (11 of 26). The majority also come from municipal police departments (15 of 26). Twenty-one of the participants have a separate investigative division within their department. Twenty-seven percent currently use a rotational policy (7 of 26). The average amount of time that the participants have spent in their current assignment is seven years. The majority are currently assigned to the patrol division (11 of 26). Forty-six percent of the participants currently felt that morale is a problem within their department. Twelve of the

survey participants have never switched assignments within their department. The author found that the percentage of departments utilizing a rotational policy is low.



**Figure 1.** Rotational policy, which represents the breakdown of the surveys and shows the difference between agencies that have or do not have a rotational policy in place.



**Figure 2.** Stagnation / Morale, which represents the breakdown of the surveys and shows the participants view of Morale/Stagnation within their respective departments.

## **DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS**

The issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not a mandatory rotation for specialized units is beneficial for law enforcement. When a department manager can introduce policy that will improve his/her department, they should. When a department manager can introduce policy that could potentially stem corruption, they should. The benefits far outweigh any negatives that could be conceived.

The purpose of this research was to see if a mandatory rotational policy had merit. Research proved it is great for the employee. As members of the department progress through their career, they will be exposed to many new facets. Career opportunities will be present more often since members of specialized units will be rotated in and rotated out. Promotional opportunities will be present since members of the department will be more experienced in all areas of the department, hence more prepared for the examinations. Members of the department will be better trained since they will be exposed to all areas of the department. Stagnation problems will be alleviated since officers will constantly be challenged from new work.

The purpose of this research was to see if the employer will benefit from a rotational program. Many of the same benefits mentioned above have positive advantages for the department. Newer probationary police officers will be trained from more rounded field training officers. Departmental supervisors and managers will have a better perspective of what is needed to serve the citizens.

The research question that was examined focused on mandatory rotation and its effects on corruption. Corruption possibilities are stemmed before they can become a problem. The researcher hypothesized that officers routinely rotated would have less of

an opportunity to lean toward corruption. Officers will be rotated from positions that have a higher tendency of corruption. The agency will be taking a proactive approach to prevent something that becomes a drain on the agency, city, and those victimized by the corruption. Corruption weakens confidence from the citizens' law enforcement serves and forces agencies to settle huge lawsuits. A simple policy of mandatory rotation is a preventative measure that also works as part of a system of checks and balances.

The researcher concluded from the findings that rotational policies are beneficial. From New South Wales, Australia (Wood, 2001) to English soccer coaches (Northcroft, 2006), rotational policies have their place and function. From Culver City, Colorado (Gabor, 1992) to FBI journals (Marvin, 1998), rotational policies enhanced career opportunities. From Paco (Klein, 2004) to the blue-ribbon panel that looked at the LAPD Rampart scandal, rotational policies aided in stopping corruption. The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reason why the findings did support the hypothesis is probably due to the preemptive nature of a mandatory rotational policy. It is hoped that agencies will look seriously at the benefits enacting a rotational policy can bring. Limitations that might have hindered this study include a lack of a true nationwide study. This study could shed light on what types of agencies are best suited for rotational policies and which ones are not. A nationwide study could show the positive outcomes that this researcher has put forth and the negative impacts that this researcher might have missed.

Training is vital to the continuing development of not only the officer but the department also. Failure to train is a large area of liability and a concern for law



enforcement managers. A mandatory rotational policy would benefit those managers. Officers that have served in specialized units' will expose other officers to specialized training. A rotational policy will allow this training to be brought back to patrol. Field Training Officers (FTOs) will likely be the officers in line for positions in specialized units. This will leave openings in the FTO program, and these openings will be filled with officers that have just rotated out of specialized units. This will result in a better training officer who will have a broader base of knowledge to impart to the probationary police officers (PPOs). This broader training will make for a better finished product upon the completion of the field training program.

Mandatory specialized unit rotation for law enforcement is relevant to contemporary law enforcement in so many ways. First and foremost, it is the tenet of protecting and serving that is so familiar to law enforcement. A rotational policy will ensure that a well-trained and motivated officer is the one that will be answering the call. Secondly, the department as a whole will improved and better trained because those officers wishing to capitalize on the rotational policy will be exposed to different areas within the department and the associated training that will accompany these new assignments. Lastly, but definitely not least, a rotational policy will be another stopgap in an attempt by departmental staff to prohibit or lessen corruption. Officers in certain specialized units most closely associated with corruption will not have the window or the time to become entrenched in situations where rampant, institutional corruption can flourish.

Everyone within the department stands to benefit from a rotational policy. The employee is more well rounded in their overall job knowledge. The employer keeps a

motivated troop because they are constantly challenged. The department also has a well trained force to better serve the public. These are definitive benefits to implementing a mandatory rotational policy. Perhaps the ones who will benefit the most from this rotational policy are the citizens that are served. Officers that show up in the time of need who have worked different areas of the department are well equipped to handle the problems they were dispatched to solve.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Rotation Survey**

**Tim Bean**

#### **Beaumont Police Department**

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 Dept., ☐ County Sheriff's Office,  
☐ University Police Dept., ☐ State Agency,  
☐ Other (Please explain)
3. Does your agency currently have a rotation policy?  
☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Does your agency have an investigative division separate from the patrol section?  
☐ Yes ☐ No
5. If your agency utilizes a rotation policy, is it reserved only for units within patrol, or does it include the investigative division?  
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
6. What is your current assignment?  
☐ Patrol ☐ Investigations ☐ Administration  
☐ Specialized Unit (e.g., K-9, Traffic, Narcotics, Housing, Interdiction, Street Crimes, etc.)
7. How long have you been in your current assignment? \_\_\_\_\_
8. In your current pay grade, have you switched assignments?  
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ There are no other assignments  
within my current pay grade (e.g., Chief, or Deputy Chief)
9. Do you personally feel that stagnation / morale is currently a problem within your department?  
☐ Yes ☐ No
10. Please share any comments or thoughts you have on this topic.