

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**Mandatory Rotation Assignments for  
Patrol Officers to Investigative Units**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Law enforcement agencies dedicate a significant amount of resources to attract, train, and retain an officer. With current personnel challenges facing most departments nationwide, administrators should look for ways to promote a working environment that encourages job training and skill development for their officers. These types of opportunities can help demonstrate to officers that they are valued and appreciated within their organization. One strategy an agency should consider is to create a temporary rotation program for patrol officers to an investigative unit. This type of program could provide officers with professional skill development, provide opportunities to expand their perspective of the investigative process, and help with officer retention by improving job satisfaction.

Millennials, those born in the 1980s and 1990s, will make up 50% of the labor force by 2020 and possibly as high as 75% by 2025 (Miller, Hodge, Brandt & Schnieder, 2013). Millennials have a desire to better themselves and want to learn new skills to stay motivated (Delung, 2015). Creating a temporary rotation program for patrol officers to enhance their skill set could help millennial officers meet their professional goals and improve their overall job satisfaction. The mission of any law enforcement agency should be to provide the best possible service to their community and establishing a temporary rotation program for patrol officers could help meet that objective.

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## INTRODUCTION

It has been generally accepted for quite some time that employees are the most important asset in an organization (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). This is especially true in law enforcement. Administrators who fail to recognize the true value in their officers could lose an important, and possibly limited, opportunity to invest in them.

Administrators have the responsibility to examine ways to provide opportunities for job development, to provide relevant training and to explore effective strategies to retain qualified officers. By creating mandatory rotation assignments for patrol officers into an investigative unit, administrators would take proactive steps to address these areas.

Law enforcement agencies have the responsibility to train their officers so they can effectively and efficiently perform their job duties. Any agency that only provides minimum training opportunities to their officers does not adequately prepare their officers for the difficult job they are required to perform. The issues facing police officers today are more complex than from years past and the dynamics of the issues are making the job more difficult. One of the ways an agency can help prepare their officers to perform these tasks is by having a rotation system in place for patrol officers to be temporarily assigned to an investigative unit. This opportunity would provide patrol officers a unique opportunity to gain a better perspective of the investigative process.

Law enforcement agencies invest a considerable amount of time, money and resources to train an officer to perform their duties. It is in the best interest of any agency to look for additional ways to provide officers the job growth opportunities they may be interested in pursuing. Permanent investigative assignments do not become

available on a regular basis and this could be frustrating to an officer who is ready to expand their knowledge base in investigations before those permanent assignment opportunities become available (Barnes, 2010). By creating temporary opportunities for officers to experience the investigative process, it will not only enhance an officer's job skill level but also help improve their job satisfaction. With those officers being more satisfied and fulfilled in their job, it would be an expectation those officers would be motivated to stay with their supportive agency which would be an extremely positive benefit for any agency.

Depending on the size and manpower availability of an agency, this may require transitioning a permanent investigative position into a rotational position that is constantly being filled by patrol officers who would be rotated into that investigative assignment for a specific period of time. If an agency has the manpower and resources to add an additional investigative position that would strictly be used for a rotational position, that would be preferred. Whatever the situation, all agencies should explore the possibility of creating such a program to provide their patrol officers a more complete investigative perspective within their agency.

When patrol officers complete their temporary rotation assignments in investigations, they will have gained a fresh, firsthand perspective of the investigative process. Those officers will then rotate back to patrol with a better understanding of the expectations for patrol so cases they are involved with can be more thoroughly investigated. The knowledge an officer will gain from this temporary assignment will help them see the investigative process firsthand and to know what is needed in their initial investigations. This, in turn, will result in a better initial investigation performed by

the patrol officer and will give an investigator assigned the case more complete information to work with in order to try to resolve the case. The goal of any police agency should be to provide the best service to their community as possible and this should help meet that objective.

## **POSITION**

Mandatory rotation assignments for patrol officers into an investigative unit would provide patrol officers with opportunities for professional growth and development. It is estimated those born in the 1980s and 1990s, commonly referred to as millennials, will make up approximately 50% of the labor force by 2020 and possibly as high as 75% by 2025 (Miller, Hodge, Brandt, & Schneider, 2013). With millennials being such a large percentage of the workforce, it is important for agencies to understand their motivators. According to a Deloitte study conducted in 2010, millennials prefer job enhancement and more responsibility over job security (as cited in Mallory, 2015). Another study completed in 2012 showed 41% of millennials would be willing to take a pay cut if it resulted in them having more flexibility in their job (as cited in Miller et al., 2013). By recognizing this information, administrators should attempt to create opportunities to meet the needs of not only the millennial officers, but of all officers who want to pursue professional development.

As stated above, millennials can make up a large segment of the workforce and skill development is very important to them. Millennials, more so than in the past generations, are more interested in self-advancement and have higher expectations on the availability of development opportunities, regardless of how long they have been on the job (Curtis, 2017). New officers, especially those who just graduated a police

academy, are routinely assigned to a patrol section to perform general police duties. Most officers cannot transfer out of patrol unless they are selected for a new assignment or promote to a supervisory rank (Cook, 2013). This can lead to frustration if perceived advancement opportunities are slow to develop when an individual is ready to expand their knowledge base and work experiences.

It is not uncommon for permanent investigative positions to be occupied by officers who spend many years in the same position and some may stay in their same position until they retire from the agency (Cook, 2013). This can be an issue with millennials because the availability to move laterally in an organization is a workplace factor that increases their overall job satisfaction (Delung, 2015). With agencies creating temporary rotational assignments, those opportunities would be available on a more frequent basis to those patrol officers who are interested.

Millennials have a desire to better themselves and want to learn new skills to stay motivated (Delung, 2015). This is important for agency administrators to consider. A lack of motivation can become an issue within an agency which can negatively affect the morale of an officer which could then affect others in the same unit or section. Research suggests that millennials have an inherent need to want to develop and enhance their skills set, but they are also not afraid to leave a job if those needs are not met (Tyler, 2016). In order to create an environment that encourages professional development and also enhances the skills/experiences of their officers, agencies should create opportunities for lateral job movement (Delung, 2015).

Law enforcement agencies must continually look for ways to provide useful and relevant training to their officers to attempt to improve or enhance their skill level. The

priority for every agency should be to have well trained and experienced officers to serve their community. One way this can be accomplished is by having patrol officers temporarily assigned to an investigative unit.

Several companies in the private sector utilize job rotations and realize the importance of allowing an employee to gain a working knowledge in a variety of positions (Cook, 2013). This information can be very useful to a patrol officer because of the limited information that may have been provided to them about the investigative process during their police academy training. If an officer has only been assigned to patrol, they are left with a limited view of how investigations are completed (Cook, 2013). By expanding the officer's perspective about how investigations are conducted and processed, it can enhance that officer's ability to be more effective as a patrol officer in their job functions. Officers who only experience one area of the police function are at a disadvantage to the department and their community because they have a one dimensional perspective about how their department operates (Marvin, 1998).

Depending on the size of the agency, investigative units can also become very fragmented, which can result in some officers not knowing other officers within their own agency. By allowing patrol officers to temporarily rotate into an investigative unit, the opportunity allows for the introduction of those patrol officers to another group of officers they may not know, and vice versa. This can lead to an improvement in the relationships and help with information sharing between the two sections (Bandics, 1997).



An additional benefit of patrol officers being temporarily rotated into an investigative unit is that it may help retain those officers from leaving their current agency. Because of the training aspect involved in this type of rotational assignment, the officer may view it as the agency investing in their development and their future (Campion, Chersaskin, & Stevens, 1994). This could be a strong motivator for that officer to stay with their agency because that officer believes they have been deemed worthy of the opportunity. Many officers highly value additional training opportunities given to them, and this may help increase their job satisfaction (Orrick, 2008). Creating development opportunities, such as rotational job assignments, may be less problematic than dealing with the continued loss of qualified officers caused by a lack of lateral job movement (Delung, 2015).

The recruitment process, hiring process, and training that is required to replace qualified officers is costly both in terms of monetary expenditures and resource utilization. Agencies should be doing all they can to create a supportive atmosphere to ensure their officers are motivated to stay and remain productive team members. Agencies have a lot invested in every officer within the organization and that investment should continue after the officer graduates from the police academy.

It is in the agency's best interest to provide development opportunities for current officers and do what is possible to help increase their job satisfaction. A patrol officer may have such a positive experience during their rotational assignment that they decide they want to pursue other permanent opportunities in an investigative unit when those positions become available. This also gives the supervisors in those investigative units an opportunity to evaluate the abilities of the patrol officers who participate in the

program for future permanent assignments in their respective units. The supervisor will also know the officer has learned the basic fundamentals for investigating cases and will have an understanding of the investigative process so there will be less initial training required than someone who has no experience at all.

## **COUNTER ARGUMENTS**

Opponents of a temporary rotation of patrol officers into investigative units may believe the training requirements are too much for this to be effective since this is only a temporary assignment. It could take up to four weeks for an officer to learn the basic fundamentals of the new assignment and it may also require a one week training course to learn the basics of conducting a criminal investigation (Stachnik, 2001). Along with the learning of the basic fundamentals of the new assignment, it stands to reason there may also be lost productivity and increased workloads if those investigators are away attending any additional training courses. These potential issues are consistent for all positions within an agency, not just those who are involved in a temporary rotation. Anytime an investigator attends training, progress in their current investigations temporarily stops because they are not there to investigate their cases.

The temporary rotation assignment itself should be considered a training opportunity for those who pursue it. Administrators should remember the long-term goal of these assignments: to improve an officer's ability to better serve their community and to provide opportunities for professional development. The results will include officers with improved job satisfaction, better motivation and an increase to their knowledge base that will assist them in performing their duties (Della, 2005).

Opponents could also argue that a temporary rotation into an investigative unit would lead to a loss of productivity due to an increase in errors, slower clearance of cases, and a general disruption in the overall workflow of the investigative unit (Williams, 2002). While some of these issues may occur, it is important to remember that agencies may have to make small sacrifices in order to make larger gains for the future. Training will always involve sacrifice whether it involves cost of agency time, money or a temporary loss in productivity. It is important to focus on the lasting benefits that will be gained from the rotational assignments. Like with most other training, the benefits may not be immediately recognized but long-term results will occur (Della, 2005). It is the goal that these experiences will result in higher job satisfaction of the officers who completed the program, officers becoming more well-rounded when they rotate back to patrol and higher morale among those who participated. If those benefits can be realized, then it is well worth it to the agency to create these opportunities.

Lastly, opponents may argue the temporary rotational assignments may result in job dissatisfaction if an investigator is involuntarily transferred from a permanent position in order to create a temporary rotation position. This may be especially true if the investigator being transferred out of investigations is motivated, has a productive work history and has received extensive training for the assignment. To those being involuntarily transferred from an investigative assignment, it may feel like a demotion and can lead to frustration (Stachnik, 2001). An agency may decide it is best to choose entry-level investigative positions that do not require extensive experience or training, such as a misdemeanor investigator position, to be the only positions available for a temporary rotational assignment by patrol officers. This would still allow patrol officers

to gain experience in investigations to see the investigative process perspective but also keep the most experienced, well trained investigators in positions such as homicide or other major crime areas. Agency administrators should discuss different options with those from within their department and determine what plan would work best for their particular agency (Barnes, 2010).

If experienced investigators are involuntarily transferred out of investigations to create a temporary rotational position, they should be encouraged to request a transfer when a permanent investigative position becomes available. Especially if they were motivated and had a positive work history, they would likely be the ideal candidate for a permanent position. It would be important to have discussions with those who may be adversely affected by this change. The goals and the anticipated benefits of the program should be explained with the hope they would understand why this change is necessary. While it may not be ideal to remove someone from an assignment, especially if they are motivated and have a positive work history, administrators must look strategically at the direction their agency is headed (Johnson, 2016). The temporary rotational program has the potential to have long-term benefits for their agency that are immeasurable.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Law enforcement agencies are faced with many challenges, some new and some that have been around for a number of years. Addressing some of these contemporary challenges with obsolete strategies is no longer a viable option. Forward-thinking administrators are expected to find creative solutions to new

challenges. Change is sometimes necessary to meet the needs of the new demands placed on an agency.

Law enforcement agencies should implement a temporary rotational assignment for patrol officers to an investigative unit to create opportunities for professional development for those who wish to pursue them and to better prepare their officers. This initiative could have lasting positive results for the agency, an important one being increased retention of experienced officers. Every agency should place a priority on providing training to their officers whether it be in the classroom or hands-on learning. After having completed the rotation into investigations, officers will be able to rotate back to patrol with new knowledge and skills to enhance their role as a patrol officer. As mentioned, millennials now make up a large percentage of today's workforce, and their expectations of their agencies are different from prior generations. It is important for administrators to change their approach on meeting these new expectations to keep officers fulfilled and motivated. This will benefit the agency by retaining experienced and motivated officers who will be better prepared to serve their community.

Opponents of the temporary rotation assignments into investigative units may argue the training associated with a new investigator is too much for a temporary position or that this plan would lead to a loss of productivity. This should always be considered as a trade-off due to any small, immediate sacrifices that may occur when any officer attends training. Agencies will need to develop their program to meet their needs and ensure the training time involved in the rotation is worth it. Opponents may also argue the investigator who is transferred out of investigations in order to create the

rotation assignment position may develop job dissatisfaction and a decrease in morale. While these decisions may not be easy, the end goal should be the focus.

A contemporary idea to a contemporary challenge may help an agency find a positive solution to a bigger problem. Agencies may need to tailor the rotation program to fit their needs and experiment with different areas to find a plan that works for them (Barnes, 2010). Agency administrators have the responsibility to their officers and the community they serve to develop their officers and try to find creative ways to train them as well as explore ways to retain experienced officers. A temporary rotation assignment to investigative units for patrol officers has potential to accomplish those goals.

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