LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

ASSESSMENT CENTERS FOR POLICE PROMOTIONAL EXAMINATIONS

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One of the major considerations in personnel administration, and one that generates a great deal of controversy in today's police organization, is the promotional process. There is a near-constant level of complaints and grumbling about how we choose people for promotion. If the person promoted isn't questioned, the methodology of the selection process will be. 1

In the past, usually one of two "old standards" was used to select officers who were to be promoted into a supervision role. First, was the "good ole' boy" system; whoever played the best office politics was the man most likely to succeed. This method did little for improving work relationships between the line personnel and the administration. Also it created a sort of fragmented organization because each "politician" as it were was constantly jockeying for a better position.

The other method of promoting was rewarding those who produced or accomplished the most, having its basis in the theory that those who can do the work the best can inspire others with the same abilities. Although these types of promotions are usually accepted by subordinates, the promotees do not progress very far on past accomplishments, and the aforementioned grumbling and complaints begin again. This sometimes stems from a false sense of being able to motivate and lead.

Some of the more "enlightened" police agencies have begun to improve their promotional process by incorporating assessment centers, pencil-and -paper tests, oral interview boards, to supplement those factors historically used in the promotion process.

The term "assessment center" carries a variety of meanings. Some interpret it as a complex set of exercises designed to evaluate personnel. To others, it is a less complex process involving various screening techniques. An assessment center is not, however, a series of pencil-and-paper tests, nor is it a place where personnel come for training. An assessment center is:

a comprehensive, standardized program in which participants are systematically observed over one or two days and evaluated for any of a variety of purposes, including selection. promotion, career development, training needs, and supervisory or managerial potential. Trained assessors observe and evaluate each participants' performance in a number of job-related group and individual exercises and relate this performance to defined dimensions or traits characterizing a specific job. Observational techniques such as situational exercises, in-depth interviews, objective job knowledge tests, and peer ratings, among others, are employed.

The assessment exercises are developed/designed to elicit dimensions of pre-defined behavior responses. The exercises attempt to simulate real-life situations which the individuals may encounter in the job to which they are seeking promotion. The trained observers, usually consisting of qualified persons who have no direct supervisory capacity over

the participants, assess and make recommendations regarding promotibility. The results are then generally communicated directly to higher administration for consideration in reaching final promotion decisions.

Chapter II

History

An early recorded use of a situational technique to assess people is found in the Bible, Judges, Chapter 7. Here the Lord provided Gideon with a method for choosing the best among his men. The first recorded modern-day experiments with the use of an assessment-type approach for the selection of officers was in post World War I Germany. By the mid-1930's, German psychologists had expanded the procedure to a multiple-assessment one for selecting and training officers. The psychologists' work involved areas of special aptitude tests, studies of personality (characterology), ethics, and psychology of military organizations. The objective here was to select the best of men for intelligence assignments. The most relevant part of the German psychologists' work in relation to management assessment centers was selecting future officers. The assessment procedures were built on the guiding principles of holistic and naturalistic evaluation.4 This meant that the total abilities of potential officers were the focus, rather than separate abilities.

The German version of the assessment center usually lasted two or three days, and the assessors consisted of a minimum of two officers, a medical physician, and psychologists. The board prepared written assessment reports on the candidates and forwarded them to higher command.

The German military made important contributions to lay the ground work for what is considered the current system of assessing. These military and medical personnel established a program which was the first to attempt use of multiple assessors and multiple assessing techniques. The Germans based their measurement of the candidate on a holistic or total character measurement, instead of trait measurements. And lastly, they were attempting to obtain behavioral responses (characteristics) more complex than relying on pencil-and-paper tests, or oral interviews as the basis for their observations and data.

Even though the German method of assessment was critized as weak, some of their innovations served as models for both the British and United States assessment efforts in the 1940's. The British developed the War Office Selection Boards to meet the need of identifying good British officers during the Second World War. The boards relied mainly on 20 minute interviews and made selection on that basis. This method was unsuccessful, so the war boards were instructed to pattern their techniques after the German assessment program.

The boards ran potential officer candidates through three or four day programs, consisting of individual and group exercises, physical and psychological testing, interviews, leaderless group exercises, and various others. By the end of World War II approximately 140,000 candidates had been evaluated and 60,000 had been selected as officer material.

The British assessment team consisted of a military officer and his assistant, a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and a military testing officer. Since the psychologist administered the tests and questionnaires, it was his task to continually evaluate the assessment operation using validity and reliability studies. The British improved on the German efforts by using more realistic situational exercises and placing more emphasis on leadership. They designed exercises to reveal different behaviors, and left the responsibility for assessment decisions with the military personnel.

The United States made contributions to current assessment procedures in 1943, by the pioneering work of the Office of Strategic Services. The purpose of the Office of Strategic Services Management Program was to develop a set of procedures to evaluate the personalities of candidates for a variety of positions in the Strategic Services. The personnel were being tested for a variety of assignments, both in field operations and officer work in the United States as well as foreign countries.

The Office of Strategic Services outlined eight steps for the assessment program creating a model for the assessor staff to follow:

- 1. Analyze job(s) for which candidate is being assessed.
- 2. On the basis of the first step, list all personality determinants of success and failure in performance on the job, and then select variables to be assessed. (variables - motivation for the assignment, energy and initiative,

- effective intelligence, emotional stability, social relations, leadership, and security.)
- 3. Define a rating scale for each of the personality variables on the selected list as well as one overall variable of job fitness.
- 4. Design a program of assessment procedures to reveal the strength of selected variables. Include a number of situational tests in which the candidate is required to function at the same level of integration and under somewhat similar conditions as he or she will be expected to function under in the field.
- 5. Construct a sufficient formulation of the personality of each assessee before making specific ratings, predictions, and recommendations.
- 6. Write in nontechnical language personality sketches that predictively describe each assessee as a functioning member of the organization.
- 7. At the end of the assessment period, hold a staff conference for the purpose of reviewing and correcting the personality sketch and to decide on the rating and recommendations of each assessee.
- 8. Construct experimental designs to evaluate assessment procedures so that all the data necessary for the solution of strategic problems will be systematically obtained and recorded. 6

The Office of Strategic Services Management Program placed emphasis on situational testing. Therefore, they surmised that there had to be a relationship between testing and job performance. This gave way to more realistic situational exercises, both individual and group. Also, the assessment staff met at the conclusion of the assessment program to discuss and evaluate the candidates instead of forwarding results to a higher administration to make decisions. These two processes, plus the steps outlined

previously, were probably the most important contributions to current programs, especially on the part of the Office of Strategic Services.

Chapter III

Management Issues

Determining Objectives of the Assessment Center

Once the decision is made to use an assessment center as part of a promotional process, one of the first important issues is to determine the objective of the center. This will determine the procedures for the center, the expense and how it will impact the organization. The objective used will usually be based on the management need, and the choice of objectives should be based upon management priorities.

The first of three objectives is personnel selection. This is simply testing personnel to fill immediate and specific job openings. The assessment candidates can be drawn from existing personnel as well as new applicants. The end product of assessment element is a decision to select or not select from among the various candidates.

The second objective of an assessment center might be individual officer development. This can be an assessment all to itself or as a secondary objective to personnel selection. Many of these assessment center participants have already been targeted as possessing potential, and their participation is geared toward self-development and career development. Participation in assessment processes is an attempt to start these persons on a career developing path and determine what type of assistance they need from the organization.

The third objective for which assessment centers can be used is evaluating of management potential. Usually these candidates are individuals who have been selected for longer term progression into middle and upper management positions within the organization. The intent would be to not identify any one participant for immediate promotion to a middle or upper management job, but to give the participants an opportunity to display their abilities and resourcefulness in dealing with higher level management problems. This, along with their present job performance ratings and assessment feedback, will become part of their promotional information package for later management level promotion.

In designing an assessment center, a job analysis <u>must</u> be conducted and the results available. A job analysis is identify clusters of designed to job activities that constitute important aspects of the manager's job. These clusters consist of the kinds of things managers actually do -during their work day and should include all the important tasks, responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships for the job. This is the main objective in conducting a job analysis. A secondary objective, which relates to assessment centers, is to determine the factors required in completing job activities effectively. A very good source for assisting administration with job analysis are supervisors directly associated with the unit having the vacant position. These people should be able to define specific job tasks or

requirements and aid in the development of assessment center exercises. Also, higher supervisors would be another good source because of their management observations and insights. The critical thing to remember about the job analysis is that it provides the guidance for selecting and developing assessment center exercises in addition to its critical function in personnel administration.

Identifying the Candidates

In order to conduct an assessment center there must be candidates. In the research of this topic, basically two methods of identifying candidates were identified. Many departments rely on candidate's supervisors to nominate employees who are performing adequately in present positions and who the supervisor feels has potential for management positions. There may be some weaknesses in this approach. To often, departments will have a weak or unqualified supervisor making candidate nominations. Also, bias and unfairness may enter in if the supervisor nominates a candidate because they are good friends. These situations can result in a waste of time, money, and effort in evaluating unqualified candidates.

A second method for identifying candidates could be the use of pencil-and-paper tests. Many departments use a subjective test permitting the candidate to develop answers in an essay format. This is a fairly comprehensive way to narrow down a field of candidates. Such tests enable the candidate to

demonstrate analytic and interpretive skills as well as display proficiency in written communication. The essay questions are often carefully defined "scenarios" so that the responses elicited will indicate the candidate's knowledge of accepted management practices.

Of course, if the number of candidates is large, the time commitment to grading is great. Ideally, there should be two evaluators, each grading all papers to address the issue of bias. Certainly, the evaluators should be knowledgeable in the law enforcement and administration fields to interpret and accurately assess a candidate's responses.

Multiple choice examinations represent an alternative to the subjective test approach. Candidates might qualify to proceed into the next phases of the promotional process if they have a passing score on the test, for example 70 percent. This type of test would be easier to grade, but should still use a minimum of two evaluators to allay bias. The important factor associated with this test is to develop questions based upon factors drawn from job analysis. The test could very well be challenged if it has little to do with the position for which candidates are tested.

Development of Assessment Center Exercises

In developing exercises to be used in an assessment center, a primary goal must be to focus on the administrative and supervisory requirements of the job in question. For example, if a police organization is conducting an assessment center for a sergeant position, the dimensions to be measured might include such factors as communication skills, decision making, leadership, and judgement (Appendix I). These dimensions are specific, measurable behaviors used everyday by an individual performing that particular job.⁸

An example of an exercise which would measure communication skills might be the development of a speech for presentation to a local civic group (Appendix II). The candidate would be evaluated on presentation, content, written organization, and public speaking. Another exercise might be entitled "A Promotion Awareness Quiz" (Appendix III). This could be used to evaluate the candidate's technical and common problem solving knowledge as it relates to the persons contacted in the course of police activity.

A most important exercise that an assessment center should contain is some form of "in-basket" exercise. Normally, these are designed to measure the candidate's management skills, and ability to organize, prioritize, recognize key issues. The candidates might be given a manila envelope filled with samples of typical memorandum, reports, letters, complaints, officer requests or other materials a supervisor might deal with on a day-to-day basis. They are also provided with the necessary paper, pens, forms, etc. with which to

complete the exercise. The candidates are given specific instructions for the project as well as an appropriate time limit.

After the in-basket exercise is completed, all materials are collected and given to the assessors. Assessors review the responses and make notes or comments. Each candidate then has a panel interview with the assessors to discuss the exercise. The candidate may be questioned about the answers given providing the assessors further opportunity to evaluate the candidate. This may be a very high stress situation and may provide an opportunity to evaluate the candidates' response to one form of stress. These are just three examples of exercises which can be used to assess candidates and evaluate aspects of a given job. Certainly, other examples of test options exist, and organizations should take advantage of their personnel resources as they establish the assessment center program.

Assessor Training

Therefore some assessors may need training on how to observe and evaluate candidates in an assessment center setting. Large police agencies may use middle and upper level management personnel as assessors. Small departments may not have personnel suited to the task. For those who cannot use existing personnel, there are two choices. First, outside

assessors can be brought in to serve as assessors; however, this can be expensive as the agency must pay lodging, food and fees. If the agency chooses outside assessors, they should have law enforcement experience as well as experience in assessment activity.

The other choice is for the potential assessors to be trained in the function. When an organization draws from within, the assessor, or potential assessor, should have no direct supervisory responsibility over any of the candidates.

Assessor training should focus on the following key skills in the assessment process:

- Understanding the organization's dimensions
- Observation of behavior in exercises
- Categorization of behavior by dimensions found important to the organization
- Rating behavior by dimensions (see Appendix I)
 Processing information from various exercises to reach consensus among the assessors for a quality or quantity rating on each dimension
- Determination of overall judgements relative to participants' promotibility, training needs, etc. 9

For assessors to fully understand how to apply these skills it is useful for the training to include an opportunity for assessors to function as candidates and participate as if they were actually testing for the promotion. They should then better understand the exercises and gain insight into various behaviors that might be exhibited by candidates. Training time may vary depending on the background of the prospective assessors, but could extend to several days. If your assessor group is small, the above mentioned simulation could also be accomplished by using substitute candidates.

After the exercises have been completed, assessors should assemble and discuss each candidate's performance, their assigned ratings, and develop an overall rating for each performance dimension and for each candidate. Individual assessors should present ratings (high or low), with reasons, It is important for assessors to and come to a consensus. remember that they are evaluating each candidate against a predetermined standard or norm, and not against the other candidates. Assessors should focus on behavioral observations, not subjective impressions of individuals. Lastly, the assessors put together each candidate's strengths weaknesses in a critique and make a judgement on their potential for management success.

Most often, the candidates are provided a feedback session with an assessor or the assessors as a group. Many times this can be a most important outcome of the assessment center because it gives to those who were not chosen for the promotion some indication of the areas they should focus on to develop their career and prepare for a future assessment center.

Budget

It is obvious assessment centers are not inexpensive. Costs will vary depending upon length, location, assessor and candidate time. Generally, the cost of operation should be proportionate to the importance of the decision to come out of

the assessment. You would place more time and money on assessing candidates for middle and upper level management positions than on low or entry-level positions.

Today, there are many assessment center consultants to assist organizations with the development of assessment programs. Consultants costs differ depending on the experience offered, travel, length of time, etc. There are also companies who develop and sell commercial assessment exercises ranging in price from \$3.00 to \$15.00 per exercise.

If the organization chooses to use internal personnel as assessors, consideration could be given to possibly employing an assessment center administrator to oversee the program. This arrangement could be handled on a contractual basis and could add an element of professionalism to the center program. These, in summary, are the more important center budget considerations.

Assessment Center Effectiveness

Assessment centers, if properly conducted, can be an effective way to evaluate personnel and reach sound employment or promotional decisions. Program content validity is important. The assessment center <u>must</u> be based on thorough job analysis and must be constructed on this foundation. Exercises are considered valid if they reflect operational job elements and are representative of the expected response required for effective job performance. Studies also indicate that

assessment centers are more valid than other methods or means for identifying or assessing a candidate's management potential.

There are also other benefits the agency accrues from the assessment center concept. The candidates who participate in these promotional exercises should grow in the process. They are experiencing first hand, some of the problems and issues which confront supervisors. They should gain some new understanding of the job. The candidates also receive a chance to demonstrate their skills and abilities which should have a positive effect on their morale and job performance.

Another valuable benefit for the organization is assessor training. A supervisor who performs as an assessor and completes assessor training will bring back to the job the observation, interview, and evaluation skills learned during the training phase. This should make the supervisor a more well-rounded evaluator, motivator, and team leader. In summary, serving as an assessor strengthens management skills.

Legal Issues

Today the personnel decisions made by agencies receive close scrutiny, especially decisions regarding selection, promotions, and assignment to training programs. This issue relates to the concept of "adverse impact," set out in the Uniform Guidelines from the Equal Employment Opportunity

Commission (EEOC). Organizations must now be able to provide documented evidence substantiating validity and fairness in hiring and promotion. This includes the aforementioned job analysis and is related to the many court cases and EEOC suits heard by the courts in recent years.

In 1976, a court case, Berry v City of Omaha, was the first time the assessment center was challenged in court. The suit was based upon questions raised about assessor competency and the general administration of the program. The Standards of Ethical Considerations for Assessment Centers (Task Force, 1975; revised 1978) were established as a result of this case and related consensus about these issues. This document sets forth minimum professional standards for assessment centers. 10 In summary, this court case illustrated the importance of a systematic and documented approach to the use of the assessment center process. As long as administrators, assessment center program developers, assessors, and all others involved follow equitable procedures, based upon a thorough job analysis, courts can be expected to uphold the assessment center concept.

Chapter IV

Future

A properly administered assessment center process can be a productive alternative to traditional selection and screening methods commonly used in police agencies. Assessment centers have their greatest value when a candidate is aspiring to reach a job significantly different from a current position.

Since 1984, a new concept has been introduced as a supplemental exercise in an assessment program. It is termed "subordinate participation". Basically, the concept is an oral board of subordinate employees who would be supervised by the candidate selected to fill the vacancy. These employees participate in the examination process and have some impact on the rating of the various candidates.

Participation on the board is voluntary. Employees should be selected based upon criteria such as time with the department or experience in the field. Those who are on the board will have to be briefed by the top-level administrators regarding their general role in the selection process.

Assessment centers and the newer subordinate participation boards can both be fair and sound methods to use in promotional processes. The assessment center requires much preparation, sometimes a large expense, but the end result can be some measure above results achieved with other methods. If the agency follows appropriate guidelines with thorough job

analysis and effective assessor training, the assessment center program should clearly identify the best candidate for a vacancy in question.

ENDNOTES

- 1. Leonard F. Trombley, "The promotional Process: A Subordinate Buy-In," The Police Chief, January 1984, 57.
- 2.Ibid., 57.
- 3. Deborah A. Kent, Charles R. Wall, Raymond L. Bailey, "A New Approach to Police Personnel Decisions," <u>The Police Chief</u>, (June 1974): 72-76.
- 4. George C. Thornton III, William C. Byham, "Assessment Centers and Managerial Performance," New York: Academic Press, 1982.
- 5. Ibid., 39.
- 6.Ibid., 40.
- 7. Ibid., 126.
- 8. Ibid., 117.
- 9. Joseph L. Moses, William C. Byham, "Applying the Assessment Center Method," New York: Pegamon Press, 1977.
- 10. George C. Thornton III, William C. Byham, "Assessment Centers and Managerial Performance," New York: Academic Press, 1982.

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APPENDIX I

ASSESSMENT CENTER DIMENSIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Rating Scale:

- 5 A great deal of the dimension was shown (excellent).
- 4 Quite a lot was shown.
- 3 A moderate amount was shown.
- 2 Only a small amount was shown.
- 1 Very little was shown or the dimension was not shown at all (poor).
- 0 No opportunity existed for the dimension to be demonstrated.
- 1. COMMUNICATION SKILLS (Oral) Ability to listen and understand what is being said; speak in a clear, precise manner; listen to others; make logical, incisive commands; able to communicate with different groups, citizens, other agencies, intradepartment, subordinates, peers, and superiors; able to read and understand.
- 2. COMMUNICATION SKILL (Written) Able to write in an understandable, precise, thorough, accurate, positive manner; able to review written material of others.
- 3. DECISION-MAKING Act in a decisive manner; use good judgement (common sense); able to assess problem and situations; avoid overreactions; able to identify and focus alternative actions; able to handle stress and stressful situations; flexibility to adjust to situations; assume responsibility and support for decisions; Knowledge and utilization of appropriate
 - 8 resources; carry out decisions.
- 4. DEVELOPMENT OF SUBORDINATES Knowledge of others' abilities; able to train and develop others; motivate others to accomplish task; monitor individual performance; assist in career development of others.
- 5. INITIATIVE Actively influences, self-starts, originates actions.
- 6. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS Be consistent in dealing with people; integrity (personal); sensitivity to others' problems; able to identify and assist in resolving personal problems; knowledge of others; ability to delegate to others; minimize personal biases; able to discipline and accept it; tact and diplomacy; accept feedback and act on concerns; political sensitivity.

____ 7. JUDGEMENT - Ability to reach logical conclusions based on the evidence at hand. 8. LEADERSHIP - Ability to organize people to accomplish tasks; command presence (positive individual impression); self-confidence; willingness to take responsibility and carry out actions; able to plan for potential situations; future vision; appropriate utilization of resources (equipment, manpower, referrals, time); develop trust and respect of subordinates, peers and superiors. 9. MANAGEMENT CONTROL - Skill in monitoring processes, tasks, activities of subordinates; ability to evaluate results. _ 10. PLANNING AND ORGANIZING - Ability to efficiently establish an appropriate course of action for self and /or others to accomplish a specific goal, make proper assignments of personnel and appropriate use of resources. _ 11. PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND PLANNING - Identify and focus on problem areas; use a systematic approach in analyzing problems; able to uncover key facts; quick analysis of situation; recognize when off-track and take corrective action; able to develop short and long-range plans. 12. PROFESSIONALISM - Positive attitude; emotional stability; self-motivation; loyalty and commitment to department and the city; willingness to take initiative; dependability; maturity in relations with others; personal appearance; self-confidence. ___ 13. STRESS TOLERANCE - Stability of performance under pressure and opposition. _ 14. TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE - Knowledge of manpower, equipment, resources (inside and outside department); willing and able to learn; knowledge of department policies, procedures, guidelines; legal knowledge (criminal/civil law, state laws, municipal laws); knowledge of geographical area; administrative knowledge (budget, personnel rules and regulations); keeping current in knowledge areas; knowledge of field tactics and

procedures.

ASSESSOR REPORT FORM

		EXERCI	SES: _		
				EXAMINATI	
PAR'	TICIPANT'S NAME				
ASS	ESSOR'S NAME				
	Rating Scale:				
	 5 - A great deal of dimensi 4 - Quite a lot was shown. 3 - A moderate amount was s 2 - Only a small amount was 1 - Very little was shown or at all (poor). 	hown (shown	averaç	ıε).	
	TRAITS	3			
1.	COMMUNICATION SKILLS (writte	n and	oral)	-	
	Comments:				
2.	DECISION-MAKING Comments:			-	
3.	INITIATIVE Comments:			_	
4.	INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS Comments:			-	
5.	LEADERSHIP Comments:			-	
6.	PROBLEM ANALYSIS, PLANNING AN				
•	Comments:				

7.	STRESS TOLERANCE	
	Comments:	
8.	TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE	
	Comments:	
	Additional Comments:	

APPENDIX II

SPEECH

The Chief of Police was scheduled to speak before the noon luncheon meeting of a local civic organization in your city. Thirty minutes before he was scheduled to leave for the meeting, he/she was advised of an emergency staff meeting called by his supervisor. You are assigned to attend the meeting and speak in his behalf on the same topic. He was on a panel and only scheduled to speak for ten minutes. Select one of the topics below. AFTER you verify no other candidates within your group have selected the same topic, begin your preparation. You have thirty minutes.

- 1. Police Patrol and Managing by Objectives
- 2. Leadership and Interpersonal Relationships on Patrol
- 3. Patrol Planning
- 4. Team Policing
- 5. Patrol Manpower Distribution
- 6. Crime Prevention and Community Relations
- 7. Community Policing

(This is an exercise example which can be used for Sergeant, Lieutenant, and Captain assessment centers.)

APPENDIX III

PROMOTIONAL EXAMINATION AWARENESS QUIZ

Cand	andidate's Name Date	
	ce in the correct name(s) criptions.	beside the following titles or
1.	Names of members current	cly serving on the City Council:
		d e f.
2.	Immediate supervisor of	the Chief of Police:
3.	Your city Police, Fire, Am	mbulance Emergency phone numbers:
4.	Your County District Atte	corney:
5.	Crime Stoppers Hotline No	Tumber:
6.	Name a Justice of the Perfalls:	eace in whose district your city
7.	Name a City Prosecuting	Attorney:
8.	The Chief Law Enforcement	nt Officer of your County:
9.	Your Police Department Ma	Mailing Address:
10.	Name the City Manager of	your city:

11.	Name the Governor of the State of Texas:
12.	Name any Patrol Sergeant in a neighboring city Police Department:
13.	Name the Deputy Chief in charge of Patrol:
14.	Name an Arson Investigator in your city Fire Department: