

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

ROTATION OF SELECTED POLICE PERSONNEL INTO SPECIALIZED FUNCTIONS:
AN ASPECT OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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ROTATION OF SELECTED POLICE PERSONNEL INTO SPECIALIZED FUNCTIONS:
AN ASPECT OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Career development is defined as a personnel management system that uses the human resources of an organization in the most efficient and effective manner.¹ It is the identification and work-life enhancement of an organization's employees. Career development programs encourage the best use of human resources. Organizations must be willing to dedicate the fiscal and human resources necessary to tailor a program for their representative department. Each employee must be motivated and allowed to reach maximum potential.

A management commitment to career development reflects an awareness that the potential capability of an organization can only be realized if employees are allowed to fully develop job-related interests and abilities.² This concept requires police managers to accept Douglas McGregor's Y theory of management, a theory which advocates that most people want to work, are willing to accept responsibility for themselves and their work, and are ready to accept a challenge if there is a reasonable chance to meet that challenge. Traditionally police managers have handled their personnel according to McGregor's X theory, which purports that people must be forced to work and must be closely supervised to make sure that they work. Effective use of police personnel requires movement away from the para-military philosophy of many police administrators and toward

a more employee-oriented model.

Improving the quality of personnel is the cornerstone of improvement of police services. The improvement of personnel may be partially accomplished by developing and implementing programs designed to allow growth and enhancement of human resources to meet the needs of the department and the employee.³ It is incumbent upon a police organization and its employees to develop and seek opportunities to improve individual development in the area of job knowledge, skills and ability.

One of the primary objectives of a police organization should be to assist its employees in improving their ability to accomplish their current jobs and to prepare them for movement upward or laterally in the organization. A second objective should be to motivate personnel in a positive manner which will more than likely enhance job satisfaction. Individuals with higher job satisfaction leave jobs less frequently, have less absenteeism, are more productive, file fewer grievances, are late less often, and live longer.⁴

Consideration should be given to creating the type of organizational environment that will help to make work more satisfying. Employee consideration and input will result in less distrust and antagonism toward the organization. Job satisfaction and job challenge are two important motivational tools of the police administrator. Employee competence and job mastery lead to job satisfaction and increased productivity.

When officers master their current assignment, they begin

to feel that the current position holds little challenge, causing a corresponding reduction in performance and job satisfaction. Effective techniques in reducing job dissatisfaction include promotion, lateral transfer to another division, or reassignment to another patrol area. Many officers possess great expertise but are prevented from using it because of their place within the organization.⁵

Work assignment/environment modification affords officers the opportunity for "advancement" in an informal status by reassignment to more prestigious jobs. It should be possible to recognize and reward officers for a job well done by reassignment to further their knowledge.

An organization gains by improving the abilities of its employees and then making the best use of those employees. Both the organization and the employees suffer when they are prevented from attaining the highest position for which they are competent.⁶ Police administrators have an obligation to see that both the needs of the organization and the needs of individuals are served by making the best possible use of the organization's human resources, its most precious commodity.

The patrol officer is the key factor in the delivery of services to the community, and in most departments, is given the least amount of recognition.⁷ Career paths should be developed for those individuals who desire to transfer to special functions divisions as well as those individuals who desire to remain in the patrol function. The lack of proper development may keep the

organization from providing the services for which it was created.

In order for the organization to continue providing quality service, a substantial number of its employees must be competent and motivated. Police managers and supervisors must be alert for declining interest in an assignment before lack of interest adversely affects morale and performance.

The best interest of an organization is addressed when every position is filled by the most competent person.⁸ At the same time, it is in the interest of the individuals to achieve the highest position they are competent to fill. Competence is not inborn and is partly acquired through a person's experience, i.e., formal training and on-the-job training.

Police administrators must establish good career development programs if their agencies are to be able to retain motivated, self-starting employees. Non-managerial career paths should provide incentives necessary to encourage personnel with proven professional and technical expertise to remain within the functions they choose, while continuing to provide efficient and effective delivery of police service.

In order to lay an appropriate foundation for achieving effective career development, the following steps should be considered:

- 1) identification of tasks performed and the requirements necessary to perform those tasks;
- 2) identification of individual attributes and interests, including an on-going assessment of those attributes

and interests;

- 3) comparison of task requirements with the attributes and interests of available human resources; and
- 4) development of programs to integrate task requirements with individual attributes and interests.⁹

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office career development program is often identified as the "Cadillac" of such programs. Its broad objectives include:

- 1) to effectively use the agency's human resources;
- 2) to provide a system of identifying and fulfilling organizational and individual needs;
- 3) to improve the effectiveness of selection, placement, development, promotion, and retention of personnel;
- 4) to assist personnel in assessing and developing their individual abilities;
- 5) to achieve a more effective match between the officer and the job;
- 6) to improve morale;
- 7) to decrease the rate of employee turnover for reasons of job dissatisfaction; and,
- 8) to develop personnel at all levels of the department.¹⁰

Most police agencies do not possess either the human or fiscal resources to provide a program similar to that of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office, but many have the ability to provide employees with some means to broaden expertise and improve job satisfaction. One of these means is the periodic transferring

of personnel into a specialized function to obtain additional experience and job knowledge.

A lateral transfer program is effective, but only if vacancies are made available through rotation or turnover. Positions can be more readily available by specifying the length of assignment for various specialized functions. Officers are rotated through the various specialized units and then back to patrol services. This practice continually upgrades the investigative skills of police officers while creating vacancies for new assignments on an on-going basis.

Sworn personnel of the Abilene Police Department were surveyed to determine:

- 1) How important career development was to the officers
(survey questions 1, 2, 3, 4)
- 2) If burnout and/or stagnation was a detriment to the
department (survey question 5)
- 3) If the assignment of personnel to various specialized
units enhanced that individual's overall performance
(survey questions 6, 7, 8)
- 4) How the officers viewed the administrations's method of
assignment of personnel to special function units (survey
questions 9, 10)

Seventy-eight percent of the surveys were returned and 30.4% of those returned were from special function units. Generally, the survey indicated that:

- 1) 98.8% of the officers agreed that career development was

important;

- 2) 94.7% of the officers agreed that burnout and/or stagnation was a detriment to the Department;
- 3) 76% of the officers agreed that the assignment of personnel to various specialized units enhanced that individual's overall performance;
- 4) 57.5% of the officers agreed that, once officers were assigned to a specialized unit, they should remain indefinitely; and,
- 5) 42.9% of the officers agreed that the department made assignments to specialized units based upon the individual officer's merits.

Additionally, the officers were asked to identify the advantages and disadvantages of an assignment rotation scheme. Their comments on advantages included:

- 1) broaden base experience, job knowledge and improve performance;
- 2) improve morale, reduce jealousy among different divisions, and improve interpersonal relationships after the initial impact of implementation;
- 3) give officers a sense of accomplishment;
- 4) reduce "burnout";
- 5) provide means within department to promote individual interest in police work;
- 6) exposure to a variety of investigative techniques and in-depth follow-up investigations;

- 7) better understanding of overall working of the other divisions within the department;
- 8) gain first-hand knowledge of problems, workloads, and special situations within other divisions;
- 9) produce, over a period of time, an officer that is better able to perform more police functions in a more efficient manner;
- 10) fresh minds accepting new challenges;
- 11) on-going education;
- 12) improve case reports and investigations;
- 13) motivate those already assigned to special functions to be more productive in order to remain within the special function unit;
- 14) improve flow of information and paperwork within the department;
- 15) alleviate the "us vs. them" syndrome.

Disadvantages included:

- 1) morale problem because special function officers would not want to rotate back to patrol;
- 2) short-term rotation would hamper department effectiveness;
- 3) initial drop in quality of work due to lack of experience;
- 4) resistance to program from special function unit personnel;
- 5) "returning" unhappy special function unit officers

to patrol would reduce quality of police service to citizens;

- 6) overall performance may not improve because of lack of motivation, no self-discipline, or little desire to work;
- 7) loss of cohesiveness within special function unit;
- 8) eliminates incentive to work hard in order to be selected for a permanent assignment to a special function unit;
- 9) loss of technical knowledge and interrogation techniques;
- 10) retraining is expensive;
- 11) loss of productivity and experience;
- 12) might be seen as a demotion by personnel in special function unit;
- 13) working relationships with other agencies would not be as developed.

Some officers took the time to suggest ways to incorporate some rotational scheme within the department. These comments included:

- 1) designate a specific number of positions within each special function unit for rotation;
- 2) develop a "plain clothes" assignment within the patrol division;
- 3) add positions to special function units that will be designated for rotation;

- 4) create a committee from a cross section of personnel from various units/division to formulate a workable plan;
- 5) consider community-oriented policing;

The rotating of every person within a specialized unit would not be feasible nor advisable because the constant turnover would adversely effect police services, the ultimate concern of the police administrator. But a rotation plan is good for the department and the individuals that make the department function.

One of the most difficult jobs within a police department is that of the patrol officer because of the wide variety of tasks patrol officers perform and the time frame in which they must perform these tasks. Additionally the patrol division is usually staffed with the youngest, least experienced officers and provide the vast majority of service to the community. To upgrade the quality and develop job skills within the line officer can only improve the quality of police service.

Some police administrators advocate specialization within their department because they believe single purpose units are the most effective. However, the following fallacious assumptions regarding specialization should be noted:

- 1) specialization will always increase performance;
- 2) specialization will increase professionalism;
- 3) specialization is the primary route to career development;
- 4) specialization is the best method for effectively using

the most qualified personnel;

- 5) specialization will always increase employee motivation and job satisfaction.¹¹

The implementation of a well planned employee-created rotation plan will more than likely improve morale and prove to be a practical method of upgrading individual police officer job satisfaction. Encouraging extended assignments to special function units may invite complacency, job dissatisfaction, and possible "burnout", which will lead to the inefficient and ineffective delivery of police service to the public.¹²

Because the police are a customer service oriented agency, the service provided to the community should be the most efficient and effective possible. The planned rotation of selected personnel into and out of special functions, if implemented in the proper fashion, can be a valuable asset to the police administrator as well as the individual police officer.

DEPARTMENT SURVEY

Please complete the following survey with your honest opinion. Please rate each statement in the following manner: 4-strongly agree; 3-agree; 2-disagree; 1-strongly disagree.

1. The Abilene Police Department has an obligation to fully develop personnel within the organization. _____
2. Career development should be important to our police administrators. _____
3. Career development is important to me. _____
4. Cross-training is essential for the development of a professional police officer. _____
5. Burnout and/or Stagnation are a detriment to the police professional. _____
6. Most officers within this department should be given an opportunity to function within a specialized unit. _____
7. The rotating of officers/supervisors or equal rank within the department's divisions should enhance each one's expertise and knowledge. _____
8. Supervisors who have been assigned to more than one division within the department do a better job of supervision and assisting their subordinates. _____
9. Once an individual has been appointed to a specialized division, he should remain there until he is either promoted, desires to leave the division, is disciplined, or terminates with the department. _____
10. Most individuals assigned to specialized divisions are selected on their own merits. _____

Do you believe that the rotation of personnel into various specialized divisions on a regular basis will improve the overall performance of this department? Why?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of a rotation scheme?

SURVEY RESULTS

The following chart indicates the number of responses to each question by category.

Question #	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	83	30	2	0
2.	77	37	1	0
3.	79	35	1	0
*4.	53	46	15	0
*5.	70	38	5	1
6.	49	49	14	3
7.	40	55	12	8
*8.	32	36	38	7
9.	27	39	27	22
10.	13	36	36	29

* Some individuals chose not to answer every question on the survey.

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ENDNOTES

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3. Swank, Personnel System, 286.
4. Ibid., 299.
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