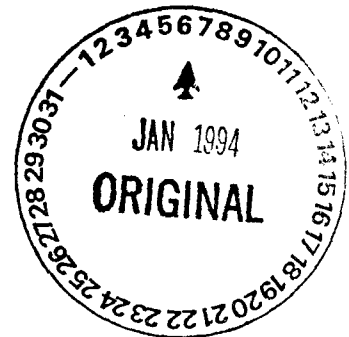LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

ASSESSMENT CENTERS: A DIFFERENT APPROACH

TO POLICE PERSONNEL PROMOTIONS

A RESEARCH PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

MODULE III

BY

GERALDINE STEWART

HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

HOUSTON, TEXAS

DECEMBER, 1993

#194

PREFACE

One of the most significant effects a police executive can have on an organization is in the personnel chosen for promotion. Ultimately, it will determine the future course of the agency. At the same time, the promotion process is one of the most complex problems facing an organization. Identifying those who will become competent supervisors and managers is a difficult task, with managers and candidates alike concerned about the quality of personnel selected for promotion.

Predicting a candidate's ability to succeed is not an empirical process, but rather is based on judgement -- difficult, important judgements. Organizations that want to be effective in the long run need a process for continually assessing and developing management potential.

In an attempt to design a promotional process that ostensibly can evaluate a candidate's ability to perform, law enforcement began using the assessment center testing process. This approach is designed to identify individuals with managerial or supervisory potential who have had little or no opportunity to demonstrate their abilities.

The Police Executive Research Forum, in its publication "The Assessment Center as a Police Promotional Selection Device," defined the assessment center as a process whereby candidates perform realistic management tasks under the scrutiny of trained assessors. The assessment center provides a means of gathering information under standardized conditions about an individual's capability of performing a supervisory or managerial job. Candidates are observed individually and in groups performing exercises and scenarios that simulate conditions and situations a manager or supervisor might encounter in real life. Basically, it is a multiple assessment technique. It is multiple in that it uses a number of assessors, a group of individuals are assessed at the same time, a variety of exercises are used, and an assessment of several dimensions is made.

Assessment centers may be successful simply because candidates have an opportunity to display their behavior over a longer period of time and in more varied situations that in the traditional hour-long selection interview. Observing an individuals performance over a day lends itself to the collection of a considerable amount of valid information about the individual's

behavior. This reason alone may account for a great deal of the appeal of assessment centers.

The Houston Police Department, as many agencies in the law enforcement profession, currently promote their supervisory personnel by means of a written exam and seniority points. This paper is intended to describe the development of the assessment center approach and show how it is presently being used by several governmental agencies as an improved method, or set of techniques, for making police personnel decisions.

ASSESSMENT CENTERS: A DIFFERENT APPROACH
TO POLICE PERSONNEL PROMOTIONS

One of the greatest challenges facing police executives today is the management and administration of personnel. The policing problems of the 1990s call for the highest quality men and women at every level of law enforcement. Rising taxes and inflation, together with demands for additional police service and productivity, demand that only the most qualified men and women enter the police service and rise through the ranks to management positions.

Present methods of selecting police managers have not changed to any appreciable extent in several decades (Tielsch & Whisenand, 1986), while types of services provided by state and local jurisdictions are becoming increasingly more complex and crucial. Typically one or two tests are used to select police managers responsible for the social control of literally thousands of people. A large percentage of jurisdictions still cling to written examinations, oral interviews, appraisal of promotability (office recommendations), and in some cases, seniority and veteran's preference to select their police managers (Tielsch & Whisenand, 1986).

Due to their subjective nature, many of the aforementioned testing techniques are not overly popular with police officers who view them as being nothing more than a "popularity contest" (Stone & DeLuca, 1985).

While it is recognized that techniques such as oral boards may contribute something useful to the evaluation process by getting at job-related characteristics not readily assessed by a written test, they are also seen as having potential for abuse. There is fear that some individuals may be downgraded for characteristics like race, religion, or appearance, that have nothing to do with their job competence, or that other candidates may be given preferential treatment because of group affiliation, social contacts, and other factors (International City Management Association, 1960).

What merit systems, and managers administering and complying with merit systems, need is additional and more detailed information on which to base promotional judgment. It is recognized that qualifications for management responsibilities differ from those required on non-management assignments. Outstanding technicians or craftsmen do not necessarily have the characteristics required to be effective managers. Although non-management assignments do provide opportunities to discern important skills and talents, they rarely provide sufficient and clear indications of an individual's qualifications for management.

The law enforcement profession is demanding more education and training and consequently is attracting more educated men and women to its ranks. The new breed of police officer dictates that supervisory promotions be consummated through recognized professional and competitive procedures such as assessment centers and other, job related evaluation methods (Garmaire, 1977; O'Leary, 1979). Long standing practices are being challenged today, not only by practitioners in the field, but by state and federal compliance agencies who are demanding that testing procedures be job related, as well as non-discriminatory (Tielsch & Whisenand, 1986).

Private industry, and to a growing extent government agencies, have come to use the assessment center approach to identify management potential in their organizations. Research findings on assessment centers tend to show that assessment center evaluations predict success as a manager considerably better than tests alone, biographical data alone, supervisor's evaluation of performance, or ratings of promotional potential (Bopp & Whisenand, 1980).

HISTORY OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

To construct the historical setting dealing with personnel management practices, one must refer to the

19th century and the abuses of the "spoils system" that was created under President Andrew Jackson. Most Americans will agree that democratization of politics was a good thing, and the spoils system helped to accomplish this by paying the common man a government job for party work. Of course, he was expected to "kick back" some of his salary to the party. By 1865, however, the disadvantages of this means of staffing the federal government were so great that change of some kind was inevitable. The President was deluged with job seekers. He had to "bargain" with Congress by trading jobs for support for his programs. Public policy should not be decided by bargaining and it was certainly not in keeping with the dignity of the office to require the President to run an employment agency.

The reformers who attempted to modify the system made slow headway until the assassination of President Garfield by a disappointed office seeker, five months after his inauguration. Congress had no choice but to pass the Civil Service Act of 1883, commonly know as the Pendelton Act. Its principal requirements were:

o A three-member, bipartisan commission, appointed by the President, to administer the program and make investigations,

o   Open, competitive, practical exams, with

    appointment on the basis of grade rank,

o   A probation period before absolute appointment,

o   Veteran preference as prescribed by legislation,

o   Geographical apportionment of jobs in Washington

    on the basis of census data,

o   Freedom of the need to make contributions to

    render personal service to a political party,

o   Annual reporting by the Commission to the

    President for transmittal to Congress

    (International City Management Association,

    1960).

The Civil Service Commission became the leader in the testing field. By 1910, it was using five types of tests: achievement, general intelligence, performance, rating of training and experience, and oral. The techniques of devising, administering, and scoring these examinations have been considerably refined, but these are the basic types in use today. Although great dissatisfaction has been expressed by many, including test participants, little has changed in testing procedures in government service over the past eighty years (International City Mgmt. Assoc., 1960).

Today, seven general types of tests are in common

use in the public service:

1. Written test,

2. Evaluations of training and
   experience,

3. Performance tests,

4. Interview, individual and group,

5. Physical Condition tests,

6. Medical Examinations,

7. Personal Investigations (Tielsch &
   Whisenand, 1986).

Typically, at the entry level in the police service, a candidate is required to take a written exam, and oral interview, a medical exam, and undergo a background investigation. Several jurisdictions also conduct physical agility tests, polygraph examinations, and psychiatric evaluations.

When applicants for municipal positions have been recruited and subjected to one or more tests, three major steps remain to be taken before the selection process is completed. First, test scores must be combined and an eligible list prepared that ranks candidates according to their relative standings in the examination. Second, one or more candidates must be certified to appointing officers. Third, in most jurisdictions, the candidate

must serve a "probationary" period before receiving a permanent position with the city.

What has been said regarding testing techniques at the entry level also holds true for promotion in the police service. The same long standing practices have continued without significant change during the 20th century.

A review of the literature reveals that some scholars question the method used to select police supervisors. In the past, the conventional wisdom has decreed that experience as a police officer was the major criterion for assignment to management positions. This no longer holds true and today's manager must be a forecaster and long-range planner with responsibilities paralleling those of corporate officials (Earle, 1988).

Present day promotions to these police supervisory ranks seem to be largely based upon the "good ole boy" system, the "longevity" system, or the "good police officer-good supervisor" system (Bopp, 1974). The "good Ole Boy" system favors the individual who is the most loyal and popular with the incumbent departmental administration, and he or she is a person who doesn't "make waves". The "longevity" system favors the individual who has "been around" longer than anyone

that are identified as important to job success in the target-level positions for which the candidates are being considered.

Assessment center results relate to the future performance of a candidate at higher levels, not to current job performance. By observing a candidate handling the problems and challenges of the higher level jobs simulated in the exercises, assessors are able to get the feeling for how the individual would perform in a higher level job. Regardless of the actual format of the exercise, each is intended to elicit observable, job-related behaviors in one way or another. At the conclusion of the process, raters pool their detailed observations of each candidate's performance in an effort to obtain consensus as to those who posses management and/or supervisory skills.

Almost all assessment centers provide feedback to candidates. Career counseling and planning discussions are often combined with feedback. This enables each individual to be aware of his/her own strengths and weaknesses and gives some guidance as to possible avenues for improvement.

A typical assessment center is located at a site away from the work environment in order to prevent distractions and for the convenience of the candidates.

The usual assessment center lasts one to two days. Its length depends on the complexity of the jobs at the target level for which the assessment is aimed, and the need for specific developmental insights. A center designed to help make only a selection decision may be shorter than one designed to diagnose the candidates' strengths and weaknesses for management development purposes.

After the center, candidates return to their jobs while the assessors spend from four to eight hours discussing individual observations of each candidate. Considering all the candidates' specific actions and behaviors during the center, assessors rate the candidates' effectiveness relative to each of the dimensions sought. After his/her ratings have developed, the assessors as a group, discuss the overall ratings of the candidates to be sure that they can be fully supported by clear detailed and complete statements of a candidate's actions and behavior during the exercise. At the conclusion of this process, the pooled judgement of the observers leads to an order-of merit ranking for each participant.

ASSESSMENT CENTERS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Assessment centers, in one form or another, can be traced to man's earliest attempts to organize themselves. The first recorded use of situational techniques to assess people can be found in the Bible in Judges, Chapter 7, when the Lord provided Gideon with a means of choosing the best among his men. By choosing the 300 men that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, rather than those who bowed down on their knees to drink, Gideon was able to select a superior force by use of a situational technique (Tielsch & Whisenand, 1986).

The first modern day experiments with assessment centers were conducted by the Germans in World War I. Their objective was to select persons suited for intelligence assignments, which required a rare breed of individual. The U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) followed suit in World War II in similar attempts to identify those qualified for intelligence gathering missions (Slevin, 1972). In the early 1930's, prior to its use by the OSS, Henry Murray, professor at Harvard University, studied the application of situational research design to personnel selection (Driggs & Whisenand, 1972).

The process remained dormant for several years following World War II until 1956, when personnel researchers at AT&T required newly hired college graduates to attend a three-day assessment center. AT&T continued its research throughout the years, under the direction of Douglas Bray, a leading figure in its modern development. Based upon the findings of AT&T, the assessment center concept became more and more widely known until today many corporate giants - IBM, General Electric, Standard Oil, Sears, and J.C. Penny, to mention a few - are using the process to assess potential managers (Slevin, 1972). In turn, as described below, its acceptance is accelerating rapidly in the public sector.

The first to use an Assessment Center process at the federal level was the Internal Revenue Service in 1969. They wanted to be able to predict which skilled technicians could perform supervisory functions. To date, the IRS also utilizes the concept in selecting candidates for their annual executive development programs (Byman & Wettengel, 1974). Other federal agencies having used the process are the Civil Service Commission, Office of Management and the Budget, Federal Aviation Administration, Social Security Administration, Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Army,

U.S. Air Force and beginning in the 1970's, the Federal
Bureau of Investigation (Balk et al., 1978).

In the police field, several criminal justice
agencies have begun to actively pursue the use of
assessment centers in the selection of supervisory
personnel. The Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department
was one of the first police departments to make extensive
use of assessment centers, and the International
Association of Chiefs of Police was also an early pioneer
in the area. Since the early 1970s, police agencies have
increasingly utilized the assessment center method. Some
of these agencies include Eugene, Oregon; Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania; San Jose, California; New York, New York;
Dallas, Texas; Miami, Florida; Alexandria, Virginia;
Internal Revenue Service; and the Federal Bureau of
Investigation.

ASSESSMENT CENTER: VITAL ELEMENTS

In an attempt to insure integrity and ethics in
assessment centers, a task force for the Third
International Congress on the Assessment Center Method
presented a report, _Standards and Ethical Considerations
for Assessment Center Operations_, which assists in
defining how an assessment center should be developed.

Using the standards presented in this report, an assessment center begins with a job analysis of the position that will be tested for. If such a job analysis does not exist, one must be completed before anything else is done. A job analysis needs to identify, define and weigh those behavioral dimensions which are essential to the successful performance of the job.

Typically, a job analysis begins with a list of tasks compiled during a series of meetings with incumbent police officers, corporals and sergeants. An analysis includes incumbent job descriptions, and a variety of questionnaires sent out to incumbents. Once this task is completed, the incumbents rate the tasks as to their frequency and importance to the position. The examination must then be designed.

The Third International Congress on the Standards for Assessment Center Operations outlines specific characteristics and requirements which serve to define the true assessment center:

o   Multiple assessment techniques must be used.

o   Multiple assessors must be used.

o   Judgements resulting in a decision (i.e. recommendation for promotion, specific training, or development) must be based on pooling data from assessors and techniques.

o   *The assessors cannot simultaneously observe and evaluate behavior. First they must observe and only then are they ready to evaluate.*

o   *Simulation exercises are used.*

o   *The assessment center evaluates a candidate's personality dimensions, attributes, characteristics, or qualities against an existing job analysis which identifies required tasks and job behaviors.*

o   *The techniques used in the assessment center are designed to provide information about the candidate's responses to relevant items contained in the job analysis (Wilmes, 1993).*

At the conclusion of the job analysis, the tasks derived are placed into categories, called **dimensions**. These dimensions are demonstrable traits or characteristics of candidates and are both observable and measurable during an assessment center. It is essential that police candidates have a thorough understanding and knowledge of all dimensions. Candidates must realize that no selection process can measure every aspect of performance by way of dimensions. Most assessment centers include the following dimensions:

o   *PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE: The ability to quickly analyze the key elements of a situation or problem;*

o   *INTEGRITY:* *The ability to demonstrate adherence to the values of honesty and trustworthiness;*

o   *PROBLEM CONFRONTATION:* *The ability to assert oneself and deal with a potentially unpleasant or dangerous situation;*

o   *STRESS TOLERANCE:* *The ability to remain composed and perform while under stress;*

o   *ABILITY TO LEARN:* *Assimilating and applying new information;*

o   *INITIATIVE:* *The ability to actively influence events rather than passively accepting them;*

o   *DECISIVENESS:* *The readiness to make decisions;*

o   *FLEXIBILITY:* *The ability to modify one's behavior to adjust to changing social values and to adapt to changing work responsibilities and methods;*

o   *FACT-FINDING SKILLS:* *The ability to identify, gather and recall relevant facts and details about an incident;*

o   *ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS:* *The ability to express and listen to ideas, feelings, questions and facts in individuals and group situations;*

o   *LISTENING SKILLS:* *The ability to pick out important information in oral communication;*

o   *SENSITIVITY: Perceiving and reacting sensitively to the needs*

      of others;

o   *WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS: The ability to express*

      ideas, feelings and facts in writing with good grammatical form;

o   *ADHERENCE TO AUTHORITY: The willingness to comply with*

      legal department rules, policies and orders;

o   *PERSONAL IMPACT: The ability to project a good first*

      impression, command attention and respect, and show an air of

      confidence (Wilmes, 1993).

Throughout an assessment center participants are involved in job-related exercises designed to bring out these dimensions. These dimensions are critical success factors and, quite simply, are the criteria against which a candidate will be evaluated and tested.

An assessment center evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of participants in all of the dimensions described and vis-a-vis the priorities the organization has identified as important to its success. It is not uncommon for candidates to be strong in one exercise and weak in another. The Police Executive Research Forum points out: "some people are dynamite in groups but can't handle a piece of paper, but it is important for a police chief to be able to do both" (Wilmes, 1993). At

the same time, a major concern of most police executive is whether the examination is fair, and the traits and skills being measured will stand up to a test of their validity.

VALIDITY AND LEGAL ISSUES

We live in a litigious society, and police executives are always concerned about potential legal battles. As a group, law enforcement personnel are perhaps the most active in the nation in regard to litigation filed against an agency with respect to selection procedures. So what is the best type of test to use for the selection and promotion of police personnel? The United States Supreme Court stated in **Washington v. Davis:** "It appears beyond doubt that there is no single method of appropriately validating employment tests for relationship to job performance" *(Wilmes, 1993).* Yet, in the 1980 court case **Craig v. County of Los Angeles,** the court outlined three steps concerning validity:

o   *The employer must first specify the particular trait or characteristic which the selection device is to measure.*

o   *The employer must then determine which particular trait or*

characteristic is important.

o   *The employer must demonstrate by professionally accepted methods*

         that the selection device is related to the position being tested for

Often, assessment centers fail to be fully valid because they are not run properly, or they use inappropriate simulation exercises. In order for an assessment center to pass the minimum standard of being both job-related and equal, fair and consistent, the following guidelines should apply:

o   *All dimensions should be appropriate for today's job.*

o   *All assessment center exercises must truly reflect the scope of the job.*

o   *Assessors must be fully trained. Assessor training is of ultimate importance.*

o   *All assessors must be qualified.*

o   *Candidates must understand the purpose of the assessment center and how the results will be used.*

o   *Candidates must receive feed back on their performance in the assessment center and be informed of any recommendations made.*

This list, while not inclusive, does indicate the reasonable standards needed to meet the legal test in assessment centers (Wilmes, 1993). Today, employers have successfully defended the use of assessment centers in a

number of district court challenges. In fact, assessment centers have been mandated as part of a number of consent decrees in order to overcome the effects of past discriminatory practices.

ASSESSOR GUIDELINES

Assessors - those individuals who rate performance in an assessment center - are normally police or police management personnel who have three primary responsibilities:

o   *To observe and record the behavior and performance of their individual assigned candidates in each assessment exercise;*

o   *To independently evaluate candidate performance and determine the most appropriate rating for each dimension;*

o   *After all assessment centers have been conducted for candidates, to gather together to share observations and evaluations of each candidate's performance.*

Assessors use this time to share their general insights and observations and perceptions about each candidate. Depending on the exercise and the assessment center, one assessor may be observing a particular candidate, or all assessors may be observing the candidate. As the exercise unfolds, the assessor records the behavior that he or she observes and makes notes on

what the candidate says and does. Depending on the exercise, a candidate might either complete a written product or be interviewed by the assessors.

Once an exercise is completed, the assessor transfers the recorded behavior onto a rating form that lists and defines each dimension being assessed in that exercise. Each recorded behavior is reviewed an a determination is made whether it exemplifies one or more of those dimensions. Once all recorded behavior is transferred to the rating form or discarded as not relevant, the assessor reviews each dimension and rates the performance, by dimension, on a low-to-high scale. After all dimensions have been rated, the assessor summarizes the participant's role in the exercise, and gives other information relevant to the participant's overall performance in the exercise. This process is repeated for each exercise for each participant, and all of the rating by the individual assessors is done at a time separate from observing and recording behavior (Maher, 1985).

Assessor discussion begins after all assessor rating forms for all participants for all exercises have been completed. Each participant's performance is discussed completely in turn, by exercise and by dimension, and the assessors place their ratings on the dimension summary

form. If there is any difference in the ratings, the assessors discuss the reasons for the different ratings. An attempt is made to obtain consensus, and after consensus is reached or discussion is exhausted, the assessors move on to the next dimension. This process is followed in turn for each exercise, and after all dimensions in al exercises have been rated, each assessor review each dimension and gives an overall performance rating.

The "Standards and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations" requires that all assessors be properly and thoroughly trained in the assessment center method. The "Standards" devoted an entire section to outlining the training content, length of training and performance standards and certification for assessors.

One cannot overemphasize the importance of assessor training, which should be built around clearly stated training objectives. Some important considerations in this respect include:

o   *The assessors should possess a thorough knowledge of the organization and the job being assessed.*

o   *Assessors should have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the dimensions and behaviors on which the candidate is being tested.*

o   *Assessors should have a demonstrated ability to record and classify behavior in these dimensions.*

o   *Assessors should possess a thorough knowledge and understanding of assessment policies and practices of the organization.*

o   *Assessors should demonstrate an understanding of feedback procedures.*

o   *Assessors should have a demonstrated ability to give accurate oral and written feedback (Wilmes, 1993).*

This training is of paramount importance if assessors are to learn their critical skills of observing, recording, classifying and reading behavior. Assessor training is largely a skill building process, and much of the time is spent in practicing and reviewing the behaviors that have been observed, recorded, and evaluated. Such training can range from one hour to five days. Nonetheless, because of manpower and fiscal restrictions, most police departments limit the time devoted to assessor training. The average training for assessors can probably be estimated at one day.

There is no possible way to blank from an assessor's mind the personal prejudices he or she carries into an assessment center and not have those prejudices come into play when a candidate first enters the room. As in all interpersonal communications, subjectivity must

play some role. An assessment center is not perfect, but it is an exceptionally functional tool.

PARTICIPATING IN THE CENTER

During assessment center testing, the assessors are trying to answer three basic but vital questions about the candidates:

o   Can they do the job?

o   Are they willing to do the job?

o   Are they reasonably compatible with the existing management team?

The answers to these questions likely will be determined by qualities that cannot be developed on the job. The officer's work and value systems, energy levels, motivation, resistance to stress, and sensitivity to others are all examples. The candidate who can best communicate a "yes" answer to all three questions will be the person who is logically going to score the highest during the assessment center. Yet one must be able to demonstrate all of these traits during the testing.

It is clear, therefore, that in order to succeed in a police assessment center process, candidates must be aware of the organization's environment. In other words,

the candidate must develop and display a properly perceived attitude. The candidate should become aware of the prevailing philosophies and expectations and past practices of the current administration. Candidates must develop a mental attitude of acceptance in the organization - - an attitude that says, "To get along, you have to go along."

Research suggests that one cannot be successful in assessment centers simply by studying about them. The candidate's preparation for the center is the key to success, and should involve every phase, from appropriate dress to investigation of the organization's norms, to complete knowledge of relevant dimensions and exercises. The candidate must make a commitment to do whatever it takes within the parameters of competition to reach a goal of promotion. Preparation begins with a positive mental attitude and approach to the testing process. Attitude plays the most important role in a candidate's successful completion of an assessment center. While it may be difficult for the average candidate to psyche himself/herself mentally for an examination process, there are numerous improvements one can make to assist in undergoing the assessment center process.

The most important preparation strategy is to project yourself into the role of a supervisor or

manager. Throughout your preparation, you should visualize yourself as a supervisor or manager while remaining focused on you goal. Quite simply, if you don't see yourself successful as a supervisor or manager, you will not succeed in the assessment center.

Some general guidelines apply to all assessment centers and all exercises at a given assessment center. They include:

o   *Most importantly, do not play a role. Some candidates feel it's best to try to guess what the assessors want and then try to act that way. This ploy is doomed to failure and is likely to lower your rating.*

o   *The candidate should participate fully. Many times, candidates do not involve themselves in the exercises, especially in group discussions that require them to compete with others for time to demonstrate their abilities. The lack of participation is equivalent to lack of ability.*

o   *The candidate should budget time. Generally, a few minutes spent organizing at the beginning of the exercises and establishing an outline or a plan of action will conserve time and return an investment to you during the exercise.*

o   *The candidate should follow complete instructions.*

o   *The candidate must possess good communication skills. It does a candidate not good to know what to do or how to do it if that knowledge cannot be expressed or demonstrated.*

o   *The candidate must possess problem-solving abilities. Such abilities, minimally involving the dimensions of problem analysis and judgment, are as critical as communication skills.*

o   *The candidate must be willing to delegate during the assessment center. Delegation is sometimes a dimension in itself, but more often, it is a function of other dimensions and is critical to your success in an assessment center (Wilmes, 1993).*

ASSESSMENT CENTER EXERCISES

Prior to examining the individual exercises, there should be no misconception on the candidate's part. The assessment center method is the most important aspect of the promotional process. It is here that those who are making the employment/promotion decisions form concrete impressions or confirm prior ones as to who should be hired or promoted and who should not. The impressions you make with the assessors in the few minutes are critical. These first few minutes provide you with an opportunity to sell yourself. You are the commodity and

it is your responsibility to sell it. There is pressure in every testing process. Show the assessors you can handle it. Develop you answers to the questions quickly yet decisively, so they concentrate on your desirable skills, knowledge and abilities. Use any and all justifications to concisely support your point of view.

Don't read hidden meanings into any exercises. Don't upset yourself and break the positive rhythm you have established by preparing to compete in the assessment center. Simply, remember to read each exercise carefully a few times, accept it for what it says, and prepare yourself to compete. It should be obvious that in order for a candidate to succeed in this process, one must possess intelligence, charisma, motivation and practical knowledge.

To assure the validity of an assessment process and to meet equity requirements, assessment center exercises must demonstrably test for qualities that can be shown to be necessary to the job level in question. Typical assessment center exercises include:

> o **ORAL RESUME** - *The ability for a supervisor or manager to present ideas verbally is critical. Supervisors and managers are constantly required to express themselves in settings that vary from briefings, department meetings, community meetings, and*

presentations to the department's governing body. Stand-up oral presentations may be the best opportunity for you to sell yourself during the assessment center. Typically you will begin with this exercise. You will be given from 10 to 30 minutes to prepare for this exercise, in which you will give a 5 to 10 minute presentation describing your background and qualifications for this position. Be sure to include past accomplishments and future goals. This exercise provides assessors with your background and allows them to get to know you. Assessors are grading you on your delivery. You must provide a good professional presentation, use effective visual aids, good eye contact, and proper gestures and movements. This exercise is designed to measure the candidate's ability to make and appropriate preparation for a presentation, and the ability to present information in a logical manner. The dimensions usually measured are: leadership, work perspective, interpersonal skills, oral communication, and planning and organization. Do not loose sight of the importance of creativity. Creativity allows for the assessors to remember you through the entire testing process. Be human and personable , as well as assertive.

o   *IN-BASKET EXERCISE - The in-basket exercise give candidates the opportunity to experience the worst day in the life of a*

supervisor or manager. You are required to assume the position being tested for and are given 20 to 40 pieces of information needing to be evaluated, with decisions to be made on each item left in the in-basket. This exercise requires you to prepare written memos, and to justify all of your decisions. It allows the assessors to judge your ability to handle multiple priorities while testing your ability to set priorities and delegate work.

The dimensions usually measured in this exercise are: leadership, problem analysis, written communication, flexibility, decision-making, planning and organization, and follow-through or evaluation. The best way to prepare for an in-basket exercise is to know exactly what problems typically confront the individuals who are in the position you are pursuing. Finally, it is important for the candidate to remember that each item in the assessment center in-basket exercise has a purpose. You need to determine which items need immediate attention, and which can be dealt with at a later time. Remember to move fast and watch your time. You are provided with enough time during an in-basket exercise. Therefore you should do the work instead of just stating what the problem is. Check the whole exercise, quickly looking for conflicts. Don't be afraid to delegate work to others, and make decisions.

o   *GROUP DISCUSSIONS - Police assessment centers are conducted to measure a candidates potential for leadership within an organization. When candidates participate in a group discussion, it enables the assessors to observe the degree to which a candidate demonstrates the behaviors associated with the exercise. The leaderless group exercise allows candidates to interact with each other without any one person being designated as a leader. This exercise measures assertiveness and creativity; it also allows the assessors to observe the candidates operating within their peer group. Assessors evaluate interpersonal skills and observe the candidates' problem solving abilities. Thus, group dynamics become important to candidates in this exercise. The group phase is essential to an organization because it measures the traits considered most valuable to the potential candidate. The dimensions commonly measured in this exercise are: leadership, problem analysis, work perspective, interpersonal ability, oral communication, decision-making, and follow-through or evaluation. The most important responsibility for the candidate during this exercise is simply to say something. The candidate should become a negotiator and a moderator. You must interact with the group, and focus the group on the problem. Sensitivity to others is a*

strong behavior often rated in this exercise. If one person seems to be dominating the conversation, be willing to direct the conversation to other members of the group. Don't be overly aggressive and argue a point, but rather bring in new ideas and encourage others because their position may be better than yours. Finally, provide a conclusion and remember that the evaluators are most impressed with a candidate who keeps a group together and strives to solve the problem within time guidelines.

o   **ROLE PLAYS** - *Role plays can include a press conference, council presentation, unpopular briefing, problem employee, or an angry citizen. The purpose of a role play is simply to assess your ability to deal with problems, and your creativity and comprehensiveness in solving those problems. The role player is usually trained to elicit certain responses form the candidate, and to test the candidate's ability to handle personal problems. Most role-play exercises will be designed to deal with an employee with a problem. Remember that this is a situation exercise, and even though you have only a short period of time in which to isolate the problem, the role player will come up with the answers if you are persistent and ask the right questions. Common dimensions measured in this exercise are: leadership, problem analysis, work -*

perspective, interpersonal ability, oral communication, flexibility, and the ability to follow through and evaluate a problem. Candidates can be more effective in this exercise by making sure they are dealing with the problem and not just the symptom. The candidate must be aware that every work and gesture during this simulation exercise may in some way affect the perception of the role player and the perception of the assessors. The candidate should submerge into the problem while being sensitive, yet providing clear direction as to what it is you want the role player to do. The goal is to find a workable solution to the problem and improve work performance. To that end, don't forget follow-up and feedback. Complete this exercise by obtaining a verbal contract with either the employee or the citizen. Remember that you control the flow of the exercise. If you break off the exercise before the allotted time, you will suffer the penalty of a lower score. Make sure that you address and resolve the original problem described at the beginning of the exercise.

o   *WRITTEN PROBLEM-SOLVING - A fundamental skill for every supervisor or manager today is the ability to write with clarity, precision and meaning. In an assessment center, the written problem exercise tests the candidate's ability to write with clarity,*

precision and meaning. In an assessment center, the written problem exercise tests the candidate's ability to perceive a problem, gather sufficient data to document the problem, and communicate the solution in writing. The assessors will be reading the written responses, therefore the candidate should be constantly aware that the best judge of any report is the reader. The candidate should make certain that the report follows the basic concepts, philosophies and goals of the police organization. Common dimensions measured during this exercise are: problem analysis, work perspective, written communication, flexibility, decision-making, planning and organization, and the ability to follow through and evaluate the problem. Remember that assessors do not have much time. If you want to hold their attention, your writing must cut through to the heart of the matter. Candidates should take a portion of the allotted time and outline what they believe is going to be the response to the question. In this way candidates can organize their thoughts and check their answers against the question for possible omissions. Candidates should be comprehensive and current in their approach to the problem. It is critical to identify the problem, analyze the problem and possible solutions, make a recommendation as to solving the problem, and

develop a feedback or evaluation plan. Candidates must be aware that at the conclusion of this exercise, their writing should be simple and easy to understand. Be aware of penmanship, spelling and punctuation. Nothing lowers a candidate's score more quickly during this exercise than poor spelling and poor punctuation (Wilmes, 1993).

COMMITMENT TO SUCCESS

The selection and promotion of law enforcement officers is, in all probability, the most critical internal function of any agency. O'Leary (1979) indicates that in spite of its importance, the traditional promotional process is basically the same in most major departments in that seniority, a written examination, and a promotional list are still the primary promotion criterion. A study done by Robinett (1989) of small, medium, and large police agencies in Texas, confirms these three dimensions are still the predominate promotional factor in our state.

One possible interpretation of the Texas system of police supervisory promotions is alligned with Bopp's 1974 analysis of law enforcement supervisory promotions. In Bopp's analysis he states that administrator

prerogative is severely curtailed because the promotional system has been focused on equity (the need for equal opportunity) with less concern for excellence (the need to promote the best people regardless of race or gender considerations).

This interpretation is congruent with Robinett's study (1989) which indicates that selection methods of solely a judgmental nature such as "supervisory recommendations", "performance evaluations", and "assessment centers" are used minimally in Texas.

The effectiveness of the assessment center testing process in measuring a candidate has not been established conclusively, but research does suggest that the assessment center method has more validity and acceptability to law enforcement than existing testing methods, and is a considerable improvement over traditional paper-and-pencil test, oral interviews, or examinations be a promotional review team (Wilmes, 1993).

Current literature on promotion criteria suggests that the assessment center process should be the primary method utilized for identifying job-related qualities in the individual. The qualities and behaviors that have been determined through a job analysis to be crucial to job success, are at the core of the exercises that make up an assessment center. This focus on job-related

behaviors is important both professionally and legally (Stone & DeLuca, 1985).

Admittedly, assessment centers have not proven themselves as infallible instruments, although one can report that thus far the research and court cases have confirmed that the assessment center technique is more accurate and valid than other available methods (Stone & DeLuca, 1985). Available studies demonstrate the usefulness of assessment centers for predicting managerial success regardless of educational level (Huck, 1973), prior assessment center experience (Struth, Frank, & Amato, 1980), race (Huck & Bray, 1976; Moses, 1973), or gender (Moses, 1973; Moses & Boehm, 1975). These studies support the usefulness of assessment centers in predicting managerial success fairly regardless of membership in subgroups.

Assessment centers have been used in a wide variety of organizational settings. This selection tool has been effectively utilized in manufacturing companies (Turnage & Muchinsky, 1982), government (Struth et al, 1980), utility companies (Schmitt, 1977), oil companies (Norton, 1977), educational institutions (Schmitt, Noe, Meerritt, & Fitzgerald, 1984), and by the FBI (Neidig, Martin, & Yates, 1979).

Assessment centers have proven to be useful for a

variety of purposes beyond promotion and selection
(Cascio & Silbey, 1979). They are useful in training and
development (Lorenzo, 1984), for career planning
(Faugler, Rosenthal, Thorton, & Bentson, 1985), and in
improving important managerial skills in assessors
(Lorenzo, 1984).

The studies reviewed above establish that the
assessment center is a useful tool for predicting
managerial success, across organizations and types of
employees and for a number of purposes. Assessment
Center pioneer, William C Byham, sums it up for us by
writing, "Granted that it is not perfect; however, it
seems using an assessment center for identifying
management potential is a sounder and fairer method than
those traditionally used by management."

When selecting a testing alternative, one must
continually consider its purpose. The end result should
be the selection of someone with the requisite skills to
become an asset to the organization. In the next decade,
police executives will constantly look for alternative
uses of resources due to reduced budgets and manpower
reductions. As such, they will want the most qualified
individuals to assume the roles of supervisors and
managers within the organization. The assessment center
process is clearly a tool to assist in making improved
police personnel decisions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alonso, D. & Cutchin, D. Solving Personnel Problems
    Through the Assessment Center. I.J. Matzer (Ed.).
    Creative Personnel Practices: New Ideas for Local
    Government, pp. 80-81. Washington, D.C.:
    International City Management Association, 1984.

Atchinson, T.J., & Hill, W.W. Management Today, New
    York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

Balk, W.L., Hyde, A.C., Rosenbloom, D.H., & Shafritz,
    J.M. Personnel Management in Government: Politics
    and Process. New York: Marcel Dekker, Inc., 1978.

Boone, L.E. & Kurtze, D.L. Principles of Management,
    (2nd ed.). New York: Random House Business Division,
    1984.

Bopp, W.J. Police Personnel Administration: The
    Management of Human Resources, Boston: Holbrook
    Press, 1974.

Bopp, W.J. & Whisenand, P.M. Police Personnel
    Administration. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1980.

Boynton, K. & Rockhill, T. Designing Assessment
    Simulations: A Hands on Approach. Paper presented at
    the International Conference on Assessment Centers for
    Law Enforcement, Orlando, Fl., (1988, July).

Brown, G.E. What You Always Wanted to Know About
    Assessment Centers, But Were Afraid to Ask. Police
    Chief, June, 1978.

Byhan, W.C. Assessment Centers for Spotting Future
    Managers. Harvard Business Review, May, 1970.

Byham, W.C. & Wettengel, C. Assessment Centers for
    Supervisors and Managers, Public Personnel
    Management, Septembr, 1974.

Coleman, J.L. Police Assessment Testing: An Assessment
    Center Handbook for Law Enforcement Personnel,
    Springfield, Il: Thomas, 1987.

Coleman, T.L. Surviving the Assessment Center. The
    Forum, Winter, 1989-1990.

Driggs, D. & Whisenand, P. Assessment Centers:
    Situational Evaluation. California Law Enforcement,
    April, 1976.

Earle, J.H. Law Enforcement Administration: Yesterday-
  Today-Tomorrow, <u>FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin</u>, April,
  1988.

Garmire, B.L. (ed.) <u>Local Government Police Management</u>,
  Washington, D.C.: International City Management
  Association, 1977.

Holden, R.N. <u>Modern Police Management</u>, Englewood Cliffs,
  New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1986.

Intrnational City Management Association. <u>Municipal
  Personnel Administration</u>, Chicago, Il.

Joiner, D. What is an Assessment Center? <u>California
  Peace Officer</u>, September, 1986.

Klimoski, R. & Bricknew, M. Why do Assessment Centers
  Work? The Puzzle of Assessment Center Validity.
  <u>Personnel Psychology</u>, 1987.

Maher, P.T. <u>Assessor Training Manual for Public Sector
  Assessment Centers</u>. La Palma, Ca.: Personnel and
  Orgainzation Development Consultants, Inc., 1984.

O'Leary, L.R. <u>The Selection and Promotion of the
  Successful Police Officer</u>, Springfield: Thomas, 1979.

Robinette, H.M. & Schofield, D.L., Dealing With Problem
  Employees. <u>The Police Chief</u>, March 1987.

Robinett, W.M. (Ed.) <u>Selection and Training of
  Municipal Police Supervisors in the State of Texas</u>.
  Paper presented at Texas A & M University, 1989.

Selvin, D. the Assessment Center: Breakthrough in
  Management Appraisal and Development. <u>Personnel
  Journal</u>, April, 1972.

Spaniers, D. Identifying Managerial Potential and
  Development of Managers. In K.T. Byers (ed.),
  <u>Employee Training and Development in the Public
  Service</u>. Chicago: Public Prsonnel Association, 1970.

Stone, A.R. & DeLuca, S.M. <u>Police Administration: An
  Introduction</u>. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1985.

Third International Congress on the Assessmnet Center
Method. <u>Standards and Ethical Considerations for
  Assessment Center Operations</u>. Quebec, Canada, 1975.

Tielsch, G.P. & Whisenand, P.M. <u>*The Assessment Center Approach in the Selection of Police Personnel*</u>. *Santa Barbara, Ca.: Davis Publishing Co., Inc, 1977.*

Whisenand, P.M. <u>*Police Supervision: Theory and Practice,*</u> *(2nd ed.), Englewoods Cliffs, Nj.: Prentice-Hall, 1976.*

Wilmes, K.W. Overcoming An Assessment Center <u>*Law Enforcement News*</u>*, April, 1993.*

else, and he or she is promoted as a reward for staying with the Department. And last, the "good police officer-good supervisor" system favors the individual who makes a highly publicized, spectacular arrest or who consistently makes the largest volume of criminal and/or traffic arrests. This system is perpetuated by an administrator who believes the system "was good enough for us when we were coming up the ranks" (Bopp, 1974; Stone & DeLuca, 1985).

It should be apparent, even from this brief history of personnel management practices, that little has changed over the last one hundred years in the selection and promotion of candidates in the law enforcement field. The current road to promotion in the police service is usually rigid, for it has become overly concerned with equity, seemingly to the exclusion of excellence. Just as the traits of leadership vary from level to level, so too should the means and instruments used to measure the qualities believed to be important. A progressive promotional program is the primary method by which those making promotion decisions can identify talents that have predictive value and can ignore those that do not (Bopp, 1974). Clearly, there is a need for a new selection process that meets the demands of the critics of our

present methods. **The assessment center approach offers great hope for the future of public personnel administration.**

ASSESSMENT CENTERS: DEFINED

An assessment center is not merely a physical setting; it is a highly dynamic process, a process whereby a standardized evaluation of a person's capabilities and behavior habits is complied, based on an experience involving multiple inputs (Third International Congress on the Assessment Center Method, 1975). Typically, individuals eligible for promotion are brought together to spend two or three days working on individual and group assignments similar to the ones they will be handling if they are promoted. Each applicant is rated, by several trained evaluators, on his or her ability to perform the tasks expected of police managers.

Simulation is the key ingredient that enables observers to measure interpersonal behavior which often evades the traditional means of testing. Common job simulations include in-basket exercises, written exercises, group discussions, role-playing simulations and oral-presentation exercises. The exercises are selected to bring out behavior related to the dimensions