

**The Bill Blackwood
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The Benefits of Implementing a Rotating Detective Position

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ABSTRACT

A rotating detective position is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it offers one possible solution to staffing issues faced by many small to mid-size law enforcement agencies. Police departments are forced to utilize their limited resources to meet the concerns of the community, which often leads to the perception of the more uniformed officers, the better. This perception can leave law enforcement agencies scrambling for personnel to fill the other divisions of the agency.

The purpose of this research is to explore the benefits of implementing a rotating position within the criminal investigation division to audition patrol personnel for future permanent detective positions, create a more well rounded patrol officer, and help combat the problem of burnout. The research will offer law enforcement agencies alternative methods for personnel distribution. Rotating positions will allow new career paths for officers within the agency. The method of inquiry used by the researcher included a review of articles, periodicals, journals, books, interviews, and a survey distributed to 46 participants.

The researcher discovered that there are several different ways to implement a rotating detective position, whether it is mandatory or performance based and the appropriate length of time for the temporary assignment. Each agency must evaluate their needs and select the method that best serves the department and its officers. The existing research suggested that job rotation has reduced burn-out, increased productivity, provided officers with new skills, and given agencies additional staffing options (Marvin, 1998; Wilbur, 1993). The administered survey overwhelmingly indicated that a rotating detective position would be beneficial.

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INTRODUCTION

Competition to recruit successful police officer candidates is fierce among law enforcement agencies, not to mention the allure of the higher paying jobs of the corporate world. Many law enforcement agencies are forced to operate below full staff on a regular basis. The common law enforcement image that most citizens identify with is the uniformed patrol officer in a marked patrol car; therefore, the trend in police funding is more cars and more uniformed officers. Law enforcement agencies must be creative and think outside the box when it comes to staffing other divisions within the department.

One possible solution to the staffing challenge is creating a rotating detective position to help with the staffing issues in the criminal investigation division (CID). The relevance of creating a rotating detective position to law enforcement is that it offers one possible solution to the current staffing crisis in policing. With continuously shrinking budgets, law enforcement agencies can benefit from research that explores staffing issues utilizing current employees. This researcher will examine a small to mid-size law enforcement agency with less specialized divisions.

Based on anecdotal evidence from the researcher's experience, the benefits of a rotating detective position were first realized in this researcher's agency when an injured patrol officer was temporarily assigned to CID and excelled as a detective. The purpose of this research is to determine if the implementation of a rotating detective position would serve to benefit law enforcement agencies. The primary research question to be explored is the benefits that will be realized by patrol and CID with the creation of a rotating detective position. The methods of inquiry this researcher intends

on using includes books, journals, internet sources, and a survey sent to a small to mid-size law enforcement agency that asked their opinion on implementing a rotational detective program.

The anticipated findings of the research will show the benefits to CID with the additional manpower and the opportunity to audition future permanent detectives. The benefits to the patrol division will be realized with the gained knowledge and career development options. The department as a whole will benefit with the cost efficient solution to staffing issues, avoiding the problem of burnout, and a better understanding between divisions within the agency.

This research will serve as a tool for influencing command staffs at small to mid-size agencies towards the benefits of moving forward with a rotating detective program. Staffing is an issue that has been problematic for law enforcement in the past, and it appears that it will continue to be a problem in the future. Agencies are forced to juggle their limited personnel to ensure that all divisions are adequately manned to provide the best possible service for the community. It is the hope that this research will demonstrate the benefits and the need for a rotating detective program.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The research into criminal investigations should begin with an understanding of how early investigators developed into the modern day detectives that are easily recognized today. The need for an organized police force was first recognized in Europe during the industrial revolution. As society modernized, scores of people moved from the countryside into the cities. With this massive influx of population, crime flourished, and the need for a police force was recognized. The early European police

forces relied on the command presence of the uniformed patrol officer to curb criminal activity. These forces did not employ detectives to follow-up investigations; essentially, the entire police investigation began and ended with the uniform patrol officer. The citizens of early 18th century London grew tired of the police force's inability to recover stolen property and arrest offenders. Many of the victims employed thief-catchers to assist the uniform patrol in the apprehension of criminals. Ironically, most of the thief-catchers were criminals. The most renowned thief-catcher, Jonathan Wild, was known for saying, "Set a thief to catch thief" (Ward, 2004, p. 14). Wild and the thief-catchers often came out of the London underworld and were well acquainted with the criminal element. While the tactics used by the thief-catchers would be frowned upon by today's investigators, they recognized tactics that began the origins of the modern criminal investigator. Undercover operations, surveillance, and paid informants are all tactics that developed from thief-catchers and have found their way into modern law enforcement.

Like the European police forces before, the early American police forces did not utilize detectives to follow up criminal investigations. American law enforcement agencies soon realized the need for additional personnel to compliment the uniform officers. Many of the early American detectives did not come from within the ranks of uniform patrol but were hired from outside directly into the investigator position. Most modern police agencies select candidates for detective from within. The candidates for detective are chosen from the ranks of uniform officers, usually with several years of experience. Once selected to CID, the detective will be assigned a specific type of crime to investigate, such as crimes against persons, property crimes, or financial

crimes. Larger police departments tend to specialize even further and may assign a detective to investigate only homicides, burglaries, robberies, or any other number of criminal offenses. Traditionally, once an officer is assigned to the criminal investigation division, he or she will spend the rest of their career there. There have been numerous studies disputing the effectiveness of criminal investigation divisions within police departments. The 1975 Research And Development (RAND) Corporation Report on police detectives cast a negative light on the role of the investigator. The study, commissioned by the Department of Justice, stated that more than half of serious crime only receives limited attention from detectives. The majority of cases are cleared by routine procedures, and approximately half of an agency's investigative effort could be eliminated (as cited in Gibert, 1993). A 1983 study by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) painted a more positive picture of police investigators. The study found that follow-up work by detectives does play a significant role in solving crimes (as cited in Gibert, 1993).

To adequately propose change to the current system of criminal investigations, one must define what criminal investigations are and the responsibilities of investigators. Scholars researching law enforcement define criminal investigations as "the collection of information and evidence for identifying, apprehending, and convicting suspected offenders" (Ward, 2004, p. 5). Professor Ralph F. Turner of Michigan State University believes, "A criminal investigation is the reconstruction of the past" (as cited in Ward, 2004, p. 5). Both definitions provide an idea of the responsibilities of a criminal investigator. A broader definition of an investigator's duties includes investigating criminal offenses, the discovery all facts pertaining to the offense, gathering and

preserving evidence, interviewing suspects and witnesses, recovering stolen property, arresting suspects, and aiding in the prosecution of the offender.

The idea of rotating personnel in and out of the criminal investigation division is a relatively new idea. Lieutenant Robert Stachnik, of the Schaumburg, Illinois police department, examined the idea of mandatory rotation and performance-based rotation in his 2001 research paper. Mandatory rotation has a predetermined amount of time that officers will spend within the criminal investigation division. At the end of the amount, whether it is months or years, the detective is rotated back to the patrol division. The supporters of mandatory rotation argue that it is impartial and provides opportunity for personnel growth, as well as agency growth. Opponents of mandatory rotation point out the years of training and experience it takes to become a detective, the contacts detectives develop within the community, and the possible morale issues when rotating personnel in and out of positions that they may not be suited for. Performance-based rotation is more difficult to administer since the rotation of personnel is directly linked to their performance. Standards must be established, and supervisors must be able to accurately evaluate their employees. Performance rotation, when contrasted with mandatory rotation, will enhance customer service, increase employee empowerment, and provide greater efficiency and effectiveness for the department (Stachnik, 2001).

The implementation of a rotational position may meet some resistance, and some departments may be forced to overcome obstacles like collective bargaining agreements or policies in place forbidding a temporary assignment. The research has indicated that in order to make the program successful, law enforcement agencies

should rotate officers on a voluntary basis. Once a patrol officer is rotated into CID, they must receive the basic investigative training in order to be successful as a detective. Although the position is temporary, the officer should be treated like a detective, complete with identification, manner of dress, unmarked vehicle, and any other necessary tools for the job. The rotational program must be transparent to ensure that both officers and permanent detectives understand what it entails.

When establishing the rotating detective position, certain questions should be answered. One question deals with how many rotating positions should be allotted. This is a question that will vary depending on the size of the agency (McDevitt, 2005). The agency may also take into consideration the types of crime, number of cases assigned for follow-up, and overall workload of the investigators. Another question deals with how long the rotation should be. Again, this should be tailored to the agency starting the program. Agencies may need to experiment with different time frames to see what works best for them. Too short of a rotation is problematic in that by the time the new investigator learns how to do the job, it is time to rotate back to patrol. Too long of a rotation may lead to loss of patrol experience and will limit the amount of officers coming through the investigative unit. The final question examines the consequences of a patrol officer not excelling in the position of detective. Ultimately, that is the beauty of this program; it serves as an audition for both the officer and the supervisor over CID. The officer has the opportunity to try another side of law enforcement without making a more permanent commitment. The CID supervisor has the opportunity to see candidates for future permanent detective positions (McDevitt, 2005).

An important factor for law enforcement leaders of today to consider is the future of their department. Law enforcement agencies must give their employees the tools to be the leaders of tomorrow. When supervisors only have experience in one aspect of law enforcement, it will be difficult to understand the needs of other divisions. Law enforcement agencies should not deprive officers of knowledge that can be acquired through assignments to different divisions within the agency. In order to ensure effective leaders, departments must provide diversified experiences. Creating a rotating CID position is one way for officers to gain experience that will enhance their leadership abilities. An officer who rotates through CID and returns to the streets will bring a new set of investigative tools that will better serve the agency and the community. The officer could handle many of the initial investigative duties, such as taking witness statements, photographing crimes scenes, fingerprinting scenes, and collecting evidence. This would be especially beneficial to smaller agencies with fewer resources (Marvin, 1998).

One of the major problems facing law enforcement agencies today is burnout or boredom. This is especially true with the new, younger generation of officers, who often start their career enthusiastically only to become bored when opportunities for new challenges are not provided. This is no less true for the older officers who are often referred to by other officers as “retired on duty.” Law enforcement agencies must examine these problems and find solutions if they are to remain viable in the 21st century. As suggested by the research, one possible solution is a rotating CID position. This would provide new challenges for the younger officers and offer divergences for the more senior officer. Officers participating in a rotating detective program would

further enhance their current position by gaining valuable skills that would better serve the department and the community. The department would be creating officers with experience in all aspects of the agency's operation, and, therefore, be better prepared to lead when the opportunity arises (Marvin, 1998).

During the course of researching the benefits of implementing a rotating detective position, several different methods for administering the program were discovered. The mandatory rotation program focused on a predetermined amount of time in which the detective serves in CID before being rotated back to patrol. There have been successful mandatory rotational programs at various police agencies throughout the United States, including the Maumee, Ohio police department, which indicated that rotation compensates for the lack of promotional opportunities in smaller agencies. Failures with the mandatory rotation programs were also evident at police agencies in the United States: most notably this occurred in Baltimore, Maryland, where morale and clearance rates plummeted when the program was introduced.

Performance-based rotational programs determine the detective's time frame in CID based on their performance. The performance based method serves to increase customer service and empowers employees to choose their own destiny (Stachnik, 2001). Temporary Assignment Duty (TAD) has been a successful program within The Round Rock Police Department. TAD was established to offer different assignment opportunities for their officers in several divisions within The Round Rock Police Department, including CID (J. Davis, personal communication, February 27, 2008).

While the concept of job rotation is relatively new to law enforcement, it has been a successful program within the civilian market for some time (Wilbur, 1993). As is

often the case, private industry introduces innovative management techniques, which law enforcement is slow to adopt. Leadership conferences, mentoring programs, and customer service training are all programs from the private sector that have been successful in law enforcement. On the job rotation in civilian jobs has resulted in numerous benefits for business. New tasks and assignments tend to create an energized work force. New responsibilities often lead to greater innovation and creativity. By learning all aspects of the business, the employee has a greater sense of empowerment and their value to the company increases. Managers who have tried the rotational program have reported positive feedback from employees. Private companies have goals that are different from law enforcement agencies; however, both share similar employee problems. The paramilitary structure of law enforcement is often slow to recognize the importance of employee satisfaction with the organization. The private industry has presented another tool in job rotation that law enforcement could benefit from (Wilbur, 1993).

The research has indicated that in order to compete in today's job market, law enforcement agencies must break the traditional model and continue to think outside the box. Today's work force has taken alternative paths when it comes to career planning. A rotating CID position is one possible solution to meet the current demands.

METHODOLOGY

Law enforcement agencies must begin to examine the current trends in policing and the private market in order to remain competitive in the recruitment of quality police officers. The purpose of this research paper is to examine possible staffing alternatives within the criminal investigations division. The research question to be considered is

whether or not the creation of a rotating detective position will be beneficial to the agency and its personnel.

This researcher believes the implementation of a rotating detective program will benefit CID with the additional manpower and the opportunity to audition patrol officers for future permanent positions. The benefits to the patrol division will be realized with the gained knowledge and career development options. The agency as a whole will benefit with the cost efficient solution to staffing issues, avoiding the problem of burnout, and fostering a better understanding between divisions. The community will benefit by gaining a more well rounded police force at a cost-efficient rate.

The method of inquiry this researcher will use includes books, a review of articles, journals, personal interviews, and a survey distributed to 46 participants. The primary instrument that will be used to measure this researcher's findings regarding the subject of a rotating detective position will be a survey. The survey will consist of nine questions, with the tenth question giving the respondents an opportunity to write their own ideas on the subject. Questions one through five will be answered by all the survey participants. Questions six and seven are answered only if the respondent has been a detective at one point in their career. Questions eight and nine will be answered if the participant is currently a detective. Eight of the nine questions will give the respondents three choices; yes, no, and don't know. Questions number three will give the respondent three specific time periods from which to select.

The survey was distributed to 46 survey participants, of which 42 were returned for a 91% response rate. The surveys will examine a small to mid-size agency's thoughts and ideas on the implementation of a rotating detective position. The

information obtained from the data will be analyzed to determine if the implementation of a rotating CID position will be accepted and beneficial to this size an agency.

FINDINGS

This researcher focused on a rotational plan that would be the best fit for a small to mid-size agency in Texas. A survey was administered to the 46 sworn officers at a single agency, and 42 were returned. The survey indicated that the agency would benefit from a rotating CID position.

Question one of the survey asked if a rotating detective position would be beneficial. As indicated by Figure 1, an overwhelming 35 out of 42 total responses stated the agency will benefit from the program.

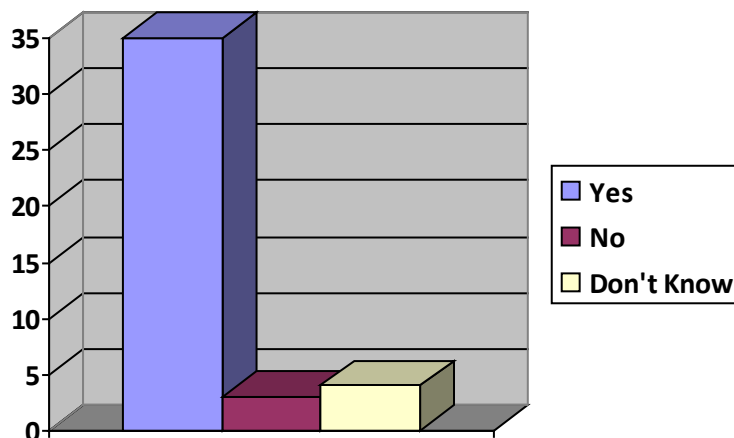


Figure 1. Respondents' answers regarding whether a rotating detective position would be beneficial.

Question two asked how long the rotation should be and gave three choices. The responses to question two were relatively even, with 18 choosing the current patrol shift selection and 16 choosing a period of one year. Four chose a period longer than a year and two advised any would be acceptable. One respondent wrote in the period of six months, while another did not answer that question. Question three asked if the

respondent would apply for the rotating position if it were available. Of the 42 sworn officers who responded, 25 indicated they would apply for the rotating detective, while 15 advised they would not. Of the 15 advising that they would not apply, two indicated it was because their current rank was higher than a detective. Two respondents did not know if they would apply or not. (See Figure 2).

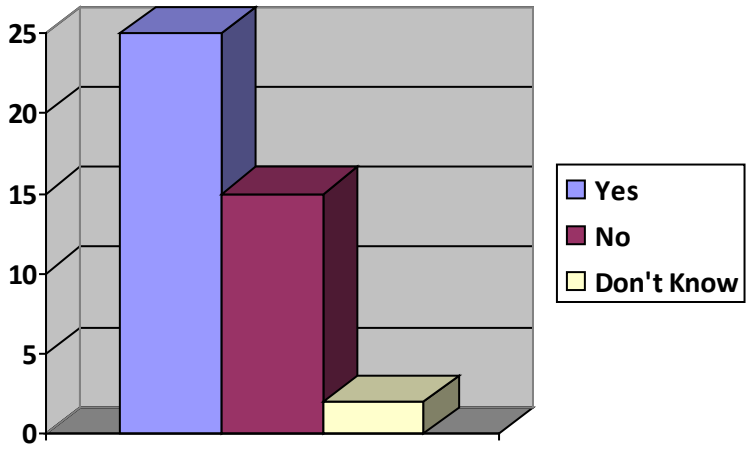


Figure 2. Respondent answers for whether they would apply for a rotating position.

Question four asked if this program would serve as a “Morale Booster” for the department. As seen in Figure 3, the spread was closer than the previous questions. Twenty-one of the respondents answered yes, eight stated rotating a detective would not boost morale, and 13 were unsure.

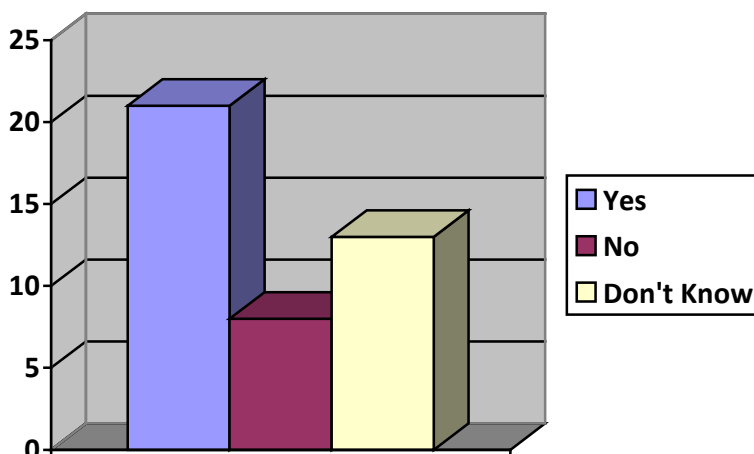


Figure 3. Respondents answered whether they thought the program would boost morale.

Question five was the final question that all of the survey participants were asked to answer. The question asked if a rotating CID position would help control burnout. The results were overwhelmingly positive, with 33 respondents indicating that a rotational program would reduce burnout. Six stated it would not help burn-out, two did not know, and one wrote in maybe. (See Figure 4).

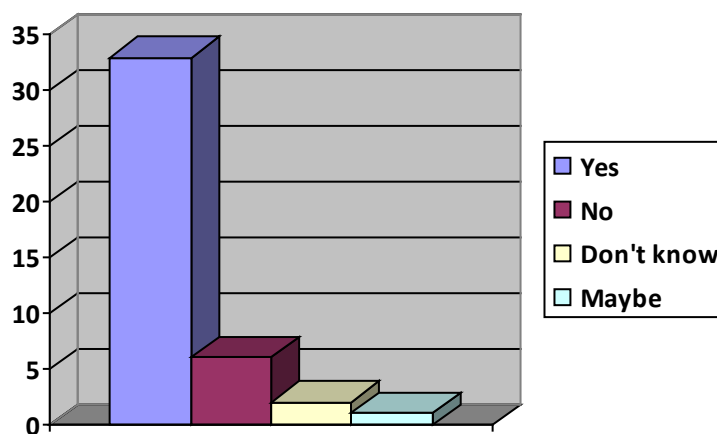


Figure 4. Respondents answers for whether a rotating CID position would control burnout.

Questions six and seven were answered by officers that have spent time as a detective and returned back to patrol. Question six asked if time in CID had enhanced the officer's current position, and question seven asked if the officer felt more confident in the initial investigation, having spent time as a detective. Eighteen survey participants answered these questions, of which 17 indicated yes and one indicated no.

Questions eight and nine were answered by current detectives. Question eight asked if a temporary detective would help or hurt the division. All seven current detectives believed a rotating position would help CID. Question nine asked if the detectives would be interested in rotating back to patrol on a temporary basis. Five detective advised they would not want to rotate back to patrol, one indicated yes, and one did not know.

Question ten gave respondents the opportunity to give their opinions on a rotating detective position. Comments indicated that the program would enhance the entire department, improve the investigative process, and would offer career options. The one negative response indicated that the program was ridiculous and would be detrimental to the agency.

The research indicated that there is no perfect rotational CID position for every agency. Each agency must determine what type will work best for their department. The agency surveyed clearly indicated that it would be open to the rotating detective position. This researcher intends on using the acquired data to propose the implementation of this program.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The issue examined by the researcher was the current problems with the successful recruitment of quality police officers and the staffing challenges this creates for law enforcement agencies. The researcher considered whether a rotating position within CID would help with the staffing issues. The purpose of this research was to examine the benefits of creating a rotating detective position and find alternatives for staffing problems faced by police agencies. With the current economic conditions, law enforcement agencies will be forced to think outside the box to make the most of their personnel. As police funding shrinks, a rotating position will serve to assist with staffing issues. The research question that was examined focused on what benefits would be realized by patrol, CID, and the department as a whole with the creation of a rotating detective position.

The researcher hypothesized that the creation of a rotating detective's position would benefit CID with the additional manpower and the opportunity to audition future permanent detectives. The benefits to the patrol division will be realized with the gained knowledge and the challenging career development options. The department would benefit with an economically friendly solution to staffing. They would also be able to avoid the problem of burnout and encourage better understanding between divisions within the department. The community would receive a better trained police force without having to shoulder the financial burden.

The researcher concluded that a rotating detective position can be a solution to staffing issues, burnout problems, and in helping create new challenges for officers. It can create a more prepared patrol officer while elevating manpower shortages in CID.

The rotational program can also create animosity within the department. It can cause clearance rates and morale to drop. The researcher concluded that each law enforcement agency has their own identity; therefore, the administration, along with their officers, must determine what is best for them. The researcher would recommend experimenting with the different types of rotational programs in deciding what works best for the individual agency.

The findings of the research supported the researcher's hypothesis in that numerous law enforcement agencies are successfully implementing rotating detective programs. However, there are as many agencies that were not successful with the rotation program. The researcher focused on a small to mid-size police agency in Texas that is open to introducing a rotating CID position. The researcher realizes that more research is needed in this area and would encourage law enforcement agencies to experiment with different types of rotational programs in order to find the best fit for their department.

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APPENDIX

SURVEY

Rotating Detective Position
(Please Circle Answer)

1. Would a rotating detective position be beneficial for a police department?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Don't know
2. How should the rotation be implemented?
 - A. Officer chooses the detective position as part of the current patrol shift selection.
 - B. Officer is rotated into CID for a period of one year.
 - C. Officer is rotated into CID for a period longer than a year.
3. Would you apply for the rotating position if it were available?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Don't Know
4. Would a rotating CID position be a "Morale Booster"?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Don't Know
5. Do you think a rotating CID position would help to control "Burn-out"?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Don't Know

Answer Questions 6 & 7 if you have ever spent any time as a detective.

6. Did your time in CID enhance your current position?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Don't Know
7. Are you more confident in the initial investigation, having spent time as a detective?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Don't Know

Answer Questions 8 & 9 if you are a current detective

8. Would a temporary detective help or hurt the investigative process?
 - A. Help
 - B. Hurt
 - C. Don't know
9. As a detective would you be interested in rotating back to patrol on a temporary basis?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Don't Know
10. Please write any questions, concerns, and ideas below.