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SITUATIONAL TESTS IN METROPOLITAN POLICE RECRUIT SELECTION

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The emerging profession of law enforcement, as it is perceived in municipal police departments, has started to place greater emphasis upon careful selection of recruit material. Although the problem of attracting qualified candidates for law enforcement careers in sufficient numbers persists, the emphasis upon care in initial selection reflects recognition of the critical and complex demands placed upon the modern metropolitan police officer. The complexity of the challenge of competent law enforcement in our cities has, in turn, stimulated interest in the psychological procedures used to predict productive police performance.

A recent survey of assessment procedures used in 55 U.S. cities having populations greater than 150,000 revealed that all cities utilized some type of psychological test(s); in addition, 16% of the cities also added a psychiatric interview of some type (7). Of the police departments surveyed, 85% reported use of an objective test specifically intended to assess aptitude for police work. However, analysis of 12 typical "police aptitude" tests showed them to be little more than unstandardized intelligence tests. A typical finding was that 90% of the score variance in a policeman test was attributable to general intelligence (8). Only 12 cities reported use of any personality tests, and psychiatric interviews were often limited to a single interview, and then only with questionable candidates. Research was reported by only one city, according to the Narrol and Levitt survey.

Certainly the multiple responsibilities of the metropolitan police officer have made it increasingly difficult to define his field performance as a unitary function. But to limit selection procedures to measures of general intelligence, either in stand-

ardized form or disguised as "police aptitude" tests, may be an inadequate response to the assessment challenge. It seems likely that tests which include a general intelligence factor will continue to correlate with most measures of police performance, and will therefore continue to serve a useful function as a screening device. Their so-called "objectivity" and face validity recommend them to Civil Service Boards and similar hiring bodies.

However, the sole reliance upon paper-and-pencil intelligence-type tests leaves much to be desired. Critical motivational-emotional-personality dimensions are untapped. Whether these personality dimensions can be adequately sampled by the addition of standardized personality inventories to the test battery is questionable, despite the ingenuity of our test-makers. Since most personality tests were standardized on different populations from police recruits, a questionable extrapolation to the recruit group must be attempted. In addition, the police candidate seems even more guarded than the average job applicant, so that his test responses are hard to interpret, and hardly typical of his usual functioning. At best, objective personality inventories seem best suited for preliminary screening to pinpoint rather obvious pathology.

It would seem, therefore, that a technique (s) for assessment of non-intellectual functioning which has demonstrated relevance to police performance in the field is needed.

There is also reason to suspect that not every police candidate can translate his intelligence, as measured by paper-and-pencil tests, into equally intelligent decision-making in a field situation.

Under stress some men are known to become paralyzed by anxiety, while others may flee, and some indulge in ill-advised impetuous behavior. This quality of clear-headed intelligent action under pressure was termed "effective" intelligence by the evaluation staff of the O.S.S. in WWII (6).

Other personality variables assessed by the O.S.S. staff are worth noting because of their relevance to police field performance. They include *motivation for assignment, emotional stability, social relations, energy and initiative, leadership, observing and reporting, physical ability, propaganda skills, and maintaining security*. The O.S.S. staff used a wide variety of situational tasks to select personnel for military intelligence duties (6).

The unique advantages of situational-type tests were summarized by Cronbach (3):

"The greatest advantage of the test observation is that it makes possible the observation of characteristics which appear only infrequently in normal activities . . . characteristics such as bravery, reaction to frustration, and dishonesty. A single situational test may reveal more about such a trait than weeks of field observation. Second, the subject's desire to make a good impression does not invalidate the test. In fact, just because he is anxious to make a good impression, he reveals more about his personality than would normally appear . . . The third advantage of the situational test is that it comes closer than other techniques to a standardized measure of typical behavior. . . . Situational and projective tests may be the only truly valid testing approach to personality."

Chenoweth (2) has advocated the adoption of situational testing programs in police selection, and reported use of a test adapted from the O.S.S. in a police training program in Anchorage, Alaska. However, no other published reports of use of situational tests in police selection have appeared.

THE CINCINNATI RECRUIT SELECTION PROGRAM

It was decided to include in the test battery, on an experimental basis, several situational tests for the police recruit selection program in Cincinnati. Such tests were an addition to objective and projective tests of personality, and a separate prior program of intelligence examination, physical examination, oral interview, polygraph, and character investigation, which has been described elsewhere (5). The situational tests, except for the Bull Session, did not enter into consideration of the overall final ratings of candidates.

Situational tests were administered in the course of an intensive 5-6 hour psychological evaluation session conducted in small groups of 8-10 candidates. The intent of the situational tests was to create a microcosm of a "natural" field problem an officer might encounter, and to observe closely the candidate's reaction and performance under stress¹.

In designing the behavior sample for the tests, the following criteria were relevant:

(a) The tasks should have a close relation to an activity in which an officer might commonly be engaged in the typical performance of his duties.

(b) The tasks should present a standard stimulus situation to each candidate. Conditions should not vary, if possible.

(c) Each situational task should have several alternate solutions.

(d) The accomplishment of the tasks should not require very specialized abilities, so that no candidate will be handicapped by lack of experience.

(e) The tests should be complex and difficult enough to engage the candidate, and stressful enough to produce a variety of emotional reactions. In short, the level of complexity and stress should differentiate between candidates. At the same time, care must be exercised not to harm or alienate candidates, since these young men are voluntarily presenting themselves as police candidates.

(f) If possible, some measure involving group activity should be included. While difficulties in measuring performance are greatly increased, the competition to achieve, the leadership qualities which emerge, and the capacity for teamwork make a group task extremely illuminating.

(g) Techniques should be devised for both quantitative and qualitative measurement, and for direct measures of performance from the candidate, as well as behavior ratings by a staff observer.

(h) A "de-briefing" session should be provided in order to establish an emotional climate of high morale, to encourage expression of anger or anxiety, and to help restore emotional equilibrium in a friendly atmosphere. This chance to "blow off steam" is quite valuable in providing clues to typical modes of relieving anxiety.

¹ The assistance of Col. Stanley R. Schrotel, Chief, Cincinnati Police Division; W. Donald Heisel, City Personnel Officer; and Lt. Col. Robert Klug, Asst. Chief & Personnel Director, is gratefully acknowledged for administrative support and facilities to carry out this program.

(i) Staff observers should have ample opportunity to confer after completion of a testing session. This gives the staff time to synthesize observations on behavior, reconcile differences, and arrive at final overall ratings of the candidates with a maximum of information on each man.

The initial trial of situational tests in the Cincinnati program included three tasks, which have been termed the Foot Patrol Observation Test, the Clues Test, and the Bull Session. They can be described as follows.

I. *Foot Patrol Observation Test.* Candidates were instructed to report, at staggered intervals, to a location in City Hall. A sheet of instructions was then given to the candidates which required them to proceed on foot, unaccompanied, to the Police Administration Building. They were advised to observe closely everything along the route, since questions might be asked about anything they may have observed along the way. The prescribed route was marked with chalked arrows on the sidewalk at each intersection, but this fact was omitted from the instruction sheet, since it was one of the points of inquiry after arrival (almost 50% of the candidates failed to note the arrows). The route proceeded for about 6 blocks through a busy, downtown, predominantly Negro business section. Upon arrival at the Police Administration Building, where the balance of the testing was carried out, the elapsed time of their "patrol" was noted, and a two-part questionnaire administered. The first part consisted of 25 multiple-choice questions of fact concerning number of intersections traversed, location of key stores, type of street lights, color of plugs, type of paving in street, and similar observations. Two typical questions were as follows:

24. The flag pole before Police Headquarters bears the inscription
 - a. "Commemorating those who have given their lives in the performance of their sacred duty"
 - b. "Cincinnati Police"
 - c. "Police Division Headquarters, City of Cincinnati"
 - d. the flag pole bears no inscription at all
12. The fire lane designated along Central Avenue is located
 - a. in the right hand curb lane
 - b. in the left hand curb lane
 - c. in the center lane
 - d. there is no fire lane on Central Avenue

Candidates were asked to complete these 25 questions, without guessing, and the number of correct answers became their score on the test.

The second part of the questionnaire was an open-ended essay designed to tap latent attitudes about law enforcement, minority groups, and motivation for a police career, as well as provide a written sample of grammar, spelling, and ability to express oneself. For example, candidates were asked to describe their impressions of the persons living in the neighborhood through which they had passed, and to describe their feelings about "keeping the peace" in this section. These replies were qualitatively evaluated by the staff, discussed informally with the candidates, and deviant replies marked for later comment during the Bull Session.

II. *Clues Test.* This situational test was adapted from the "Belongings" test described in *ASSESSMENT OF MEN* (6). A work area was roped off, consisting of a desk, chair, calendars, and miscellaneous office equipment. Within this area a carefully selected set of "clues" were planted which suggested certain hypotheses about the personality, habits, whereabouts, and possible flight of a hypothetical City employee who was supposed to have worked at the desk. Race-track sheets, Scotch bottles, tranquilizers and aspirins, "cold" checks, dunning letters from local jewelry stores, perfumed love letters, a pay voucher, a passport application, and a memo from the City Manager requiring audit of accounts were included.²

Candidates were instructed to investigate the mysterious disappearance of this hypothetical employee. They were given 10 minutes, and encouraged to take notes. A staff member, working quietly in another part of the room, observed the candidate's approach to the task, and encouraged inquiries and expressions of attitude about the test.

Each candidate then filled blank spaces in a questionnaire requiring information ranging from simple factual data which could be taken from notes, to hypotheses (more heavily weighted) on whereabouts, motives for leaving job, probable mental state, and possible basis for prosecution. Alternative inferences could be developed from false leads which were included. A final score from 0-60 points was derived from the Clues Test.

III. *Bull Session.* The so-called "Bull Session"

² The guidance of Lt. Stanley Carle, Crime Bureau, was utilized in assembling the "clues".

was a group diagnostic procedure adapted from a technique practiced by one of the authors (R. McD.) for several years in screening applicants for a religious missionary organization. The Bull Session borrows heavily from the principles of group psychotherapy. It is believed to possess unique advantages over the conventional one-to-one interview, in that it frees up inhibitions and defenses, spurs competitive participation with other group members while offering group support for greater self-revelation. The Bull Session also provided an opportunity for observing interaction of candidates with their peers, an important feature in police work. Lastly, it provided a "debriefing" effect, where candidates could ventilate their reactions to the arduous psychological testing session preceding, and restore their emotional equilibrium.

All candidates from each testing session, 8 to 10 in number, were assembled following a dinner break, and offered coffee and cigarettes during the two-hour Bull Session. Seats were offered randomly around a large table in a comfortably furnished conference room in Police Headquarters. The evaluation team, consisting of two group leaders and two observers, had been briefed previously on each candidate, with special attention to weaknesses spotted during testing. Observers were instructed not to be drawn into discussion, so that possible paranoid reactions to their presence could be elicited.

The group leaders initiated discussion by going around the table asking for introductions, present occupation, and reasons for choosing a police career. Generally, discussion proceeded spontaneously from that point, with the group leaders raising key issues of police work, calling upon silent candidates from time to time, and occasionally pointing out that participation by each candidate was necessary in order to understand his point of view. A typical session might include discussion of use of force, the handling of fear, alcoholism, use of narcotics, mental illness, prostitution, homosexuality, administration of justice through the courts, minority groups, and the use of authority. Questions were usually posed in terms of personal experiences or hypothetical situations of a practical, concrete nature sometimes faced by a patrolman.

On some occasions candidates expressed fear of self-incrimination which might be prejudicial to their future careers with the Police Division. At such times the evaluation teams' policy of con-

fidentiality was carefully emphasized. Information generated during psychological testing was used only to report an "acceptable" or "recommended for rejection" opinion to the Civil Service Commission, with no "feedback" to the police organization. This policy served to reassure the candidate during evaluation, and maintained the independence of our confidential predictions of future police performance made by the evaluation team. These predictions are being validated against future performance data, and will be reported later.

No separate set of ratings was derived from the Bull Session. However, immediately after each of these diagnostic sessions, the entire team met to make Overall Performance Prediction ratings (OPP) on each recruit. Group participation was evaluated, and synthesized with a summary of all previous testing procedures. Differences between evaluation staff members were discussed and resolved, and a final rating assigned. Occasional disagreements or personal predictions about some aspect of performance were separately recorded.

The OPP ratings, which included intelligence examination, objective and projective personality tests, the Bull Session, and behavior notes, were classified on a five-point rating scale as follows:

Rating	Performance Prediction
4	Superior
3	Above Average
2	Average
1	Below Average
0	High Risk

Ratings 1, 2, 3, and 4 were recommended as acceptable to the Civil Service Commission; 0 rating as Rejection.

RESULTS

The situational tests, as part of a comprehensive screening program, were initially administered in 1964 to a group of 62 Cincinnati police candidates. Of this group, 42 eventually completed their recruit training in the Police Academy, and were termed the "success" group; 20 did not accomplish police training, and were termed the "failure" group.³ The Army General Classification Test, Civilian Edition, which is routinely administered to all candidates by the City Personnel Dept., was

³ 12 were recommended for rejection by our evaluation team; 6 were acceptable but not appointed as recruits; and 2 resigned before completing the Police Academy.

included as a reference measure, since it is a standardized test known to correlate with police performance. The Foot Patrol and Clues Tests were not included in OPP ratings in order to test their possible value as independent predictors.

Results are shown in Table 1. As can be seen, the successful candidates scored somewhat higher on all measures, as might be anticipated. However, differences between the groups failed to reach statistical significance, when a *t* ratio was computed to assess mean differences.

The completion of Police Academy training by the 42 "successful" candidates (Group A) afforded the first opportunity to test the predictive validity of the situational tests. AGCT scores were again included as a reference measure. Two performance measures were derived from Police Academy records: the first was the final rank of each candidate in his class, a weighted measure based upon weekly examinations and notebooks during the training period; the second was his rank based upon scores in the Cincinnati Combat Course (CCC), a pistol markmanship trial. The CCC can be visualized as a situational test in its own right, and is therefore of interest as a comparative measure with other situational tests. Scores on Foot Patrol, Clues, and AGCT were ranked for the 42 candidates, and Spearman rank-order correlations computed to determine possible relationships between these measures.

Results are shown in the correlation matrix of Table 2. It was demonstrated that AGCT scores, as a measure of general intelligence, correlated rather highly with final Police Academy standing, and this was significant at the .01 level of probability. The Clues Test also correlated positively with Police Academy standing, significant at the .05 level of probability. Neither Foot Patrol nor CCC correlated with final Academy grades, and none of the three situational measures correlated significantly with each other. Tests of situational

TABLE 1
TEST PERFORMANCE OF "SUCCESS" AND "FAILURE" CANDIDATES (GROUP A)

	"Success" Group Mean (N = 42)	"Failure" Group Mean (N = 20)	Mean Diff.	<i>t</i> ratio	Signif.
Foot Patrol	14.7	14.0	.7	.17	NS
Clues	31.2	26.2	5.0	.597	NS
AGCT score	125.5	122.5	3.0	.09	NS

TABLE 2
RANK-ORDER CORRELATIONS OF SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES ON SITUATIONAL, INTELLIGENCE, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES (GROUP A)

	Foot Patrol	Clues Test	AGCT	CCC	Pol. Acad. Standing
Foot Patrol	—				
Clues Test	.099	—			
AGCT	.211	.105	—		
CCC	-.153	-.063	-.052	—	
Pol. Acad. Standing	.137	.375*	.595**	.093	—

N = 42.

* Significant at .05 level.

** Significant at .01 level.

TABLE 3
TEST PERFORMANCE OF "SUCCESS" AND "FAILURE" CANDIDATES (GROUP B)

	"Success" Group Mean (N = 15)	"Failure" Group Mean (N = 10)	Mean Diff.	Signif.
Foot Patrol	15.1	14.8	.3	NS
Clues	30.7	30.7	—	NS
AGCT score	125.3	122.4	2.9	NS

measures against field performance are not yet available.

In order to cross-validate results of the initial trial, an identical test battery was administered to a second group of 25 candidates (Group B). 15 candidates completed Police Academy training, and 10 did not accomplish this goal⁴. As Table 3 indicates, mean differences on AGCT scores were almost identical with Group A, but the failure to replicate mean differences on the Clues Test was disappointing. No mean differences was of statistical significance.

The performance of the second recruit group (Group B) in the Police Academy substantially confirmed findings on the first group regarding predictive efficiency of tests: the AGCT score

⁴ 3 were recommended for rejection by our evaluation staff; 6 were acceptable but not appointed as recruits; and 1 withdrew before completing Academy training.

TABLE 4

RANK-ORDER CORRELATIONS OF SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES ON SITUATIONAL, INTELLIGENCE, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES (GROUP B)

	Foot Patrol	Clues Test	AGCT	Police Acad. Standing
Foot Patrol	—			
Clues Test	.522*	—		
AGCT	.025	.340	—	
Police Acad. Standing	.159	.425 [#]	.708**	—

N = 15.

* Significant at .05 level.

** Significant at .01 level.

[#] Significant at .10 level; just misses .05 level.

correlated .708 with final standing in the Police Academy, which is significant at the .01 level of probability; the Clues Test correlated .425 with final standing, which just missed the .05 level of significance; the Foot Patrol Test again failed to show any relationship with Police Academy performance. These results are seen in Table 4. On the second trial, Foot Patrol and Clues correlated .522 with each other, which is significant at the .05 level of probability, a finding which did not appear on the first trial.

BULL SESSION RESULTS

Evaluation of the Bull Sessions must be indirect, since no separate measurement resulted from these sessions. However, staff members agreed that the Bull Session was the single most valuable technique used in recruit selection, and weighted it heavily in the Overall Performance Prediction ratings (OPP) made by the team. Therefore, the correlation between our predictions and the recruit's actual performance in the Police Academy might be used as an estimate of the efficiency of the Bull Session as a predictor. For this purpose, the Kendall rank-order correlation (τ) was used owing to the restricted ranks on the five-place OPP ratings. Results were converted to z scores, and significance read from the normal probability tables (9).

For the initial recruit group a rank-order correlation of .359 was obtained between OPP ratings and final standing in Police Academy, which has a

probability beyond the .0005 level. For the second group a correlation of .473 was obtained, which is significant beyond the .007 level of probability. It was concluded that the evaluation team's overall ratings were highly efficient at predicting Police Academy performance. By implication, the Bull Session accounted for a rather large proportion of the accuracy of prediction.

Unsuspected character traits and attitudes which had not been noted during previous tests and one-to-one interviewing sometimes emerged during the Bull Session. For example, a group leader proposed a hypothetical situation in which a patrolman, working alone in a "rough" neighborhood, encountered several men fighting in a cafe. The question was asked, "If you were that patrolman, what would you do?" As general discussion developed around this theme, a consensus was quickly reached that the lone officer should summon aid before committing himself to stopping the fight, even though it might mean walking away from the scene to summon assistance.

One candidate vociferously disagreed with this solution, insisting that "You'd never be able to show your face again on that beat if you walked away." When he was challenged by several candidates with previous Military Police experience, he became red in the face and sat glowering with clenched fists. Another group member finally offered the comment, "I'd never want to be on patrol with you, buddy, that would be a good way to get myself killed." At this point, the isolated candidate exploded, "I think all of you guys are a bunch of yellow-backs!" This explosive outburst was a valuable clue in establishing the poor judgment and emotional instability of this candidate under stress; the stubborn pseudomascularity he displayed within the group was almost a promise of inappropriate behavior in police service.

On another occasion a candidate displayed very rigid and dogmatic attitudes on every issue and as the group began to warm up, he commenced to orate in an almost evangelical manner. This man, quietly referred to as "the preacher" by another group member, began to set everyone's teeth on edge, and they attempted to stop him by sarcasm and talking over him. However, this candidate, apparently insensitive to the reactions of the men around him, continued to rant about his pet religious beliefs, and to moralize about the duty of the policeman to correct moral injustices in the community. This candidate's reaction formation against his own unrecognized hostile impulses

toward his fellow-citizens would have made him an unreliable and sadistic officer, and the other candidates quickly sensed how difficult it would be to work alongside this fellow.

In some cases a candidate was encountered who appeared to be unable to organize his thoughts in any coherent fashion during the group sessions. Some of these men had previously performed adequately on paper-and-pencil tests, but in the Bull Session became disorganized, rambling, and circumstantial. They were unable to react in a realistic and appropriate fashion to the other group members, and displayed completely inadequate social judgment in their responses to questions about practical matters. The evaluation team suspected that these candidates were making a borderline psychotic social adjustment, and sought a police career to give themselves a firmer self-identity and to move toward a more assertive role in life.

These examples have been given to illustrate the usefulness of the Bull Session in confirming psychological test signs whose meaning may have been somewhat tenuous, and in ferreting out behavior not revealed by conventional methods.

DISCUSSION

It appears promising that a simple situational task (Clues) could be constructed on an *a priori* basis, and on its initial trials manage to correlate with a performance measure (Police Academy standing). The correlations (.595 and .708) of an intelligence test with Police Academy performance are not unexpected, since the AGCT and similar instruments are widely used for police selection, and have regularly proven their usefulness. However, the failure of the Clues Test and AGCT to correlate with each other (.105 and .340) significantly, despite their demonstrated relationship to Police Academy success, raises some interesting speculations. It seems reasonable to infer that situational tests of the Clues type may be sampling behavioral dimensions not represented in paper-and-pencil intelligence tests.

It may be premature to speculate further on just what behavioral constructs are sampled by situational measures. It is characteristic of situational tasks to require a broad spectrum of skills for their solution. In fact, their life-like quality comes from this breadth. If situational tests can be devised within a setting of continuous research and crosschecks with eventual perform-

ance, they can be an interesting supplement to more conventional techniques.

The failure of the Foot Patrol Test to correlate with other measures may represent the narrow range of scores obtained or other inadequacies of test construction, and illustrates the pitfalls of attempting untried tests without reliability or validity checks. The selection process occurred with a highly homogeneous, pre-selected group from an original pool of more than 600 applicants, which places a severe task upon any unverified test instrument.

The limitations of using final grades in a Police Academy training program must also be recognized. It is not necessary to document here the disappointing patrol performance of some men who showed promise during the training period. And later, even the most painstaking rating system in the field is subject to multiple biases. For example, it is common practice to start "rookie" patrolmen with rather low ratings of efficiency, so that adequate differentiation between field performance of starting patrolmen becomes quite difficult. A weighted measure of activity level based upon systematic reports of arrests, citations, etc. is under study by the authors, and this activity field measure may ultimately vindicate the situational test approach to selection.

It may be important to note that, despite the rigor of the selection process, no candidate has yet withdrawn or failed to complete the psychological evaluation phase of selection. Candidates have reported that they enjoyed the life-like quality of the situational tests, thought this type of test "made sense" to them, and apparently preferred the action-centered tests to the conventional paper-and-pencil approach. Some candidates have expressed the feeling that the careful evaluation reflected the importance of the position they were seeking, and that finalists must be a hand-picked "elite" group, which is true. The group spirit generated during the Bull Session, with its overtones of competition and camaraderie, tended to counteract any anger or anxiety caused by the protracted testing session. The teasing and joking with examiners was an emotional catharsis which seemed to be helpful in restoring emotional equilibrium.

SUMMARY

Three situational tests, analogous to tests used to select O.S.S. personnel in WWII, were devised

as part of an overall psychological evaluation program for Cincinnati police candidates. Tests were termed Foot Patrol Observation Test, Clues Test, and Bull Session. These tests were administered to two groups of candidates, and correlated with final rank in class after completion of Police Academy training. The Clues Test was significantly correlated with Police Academy performance, but not with an intelligence measure (AGCT), which suggested that non-intellectual traits important to police performance may be tapped with situational tests. The Bull Session, indirectly measured by its close tie with successful predictions by the evaluation team of Police Academy performance, was also judged to be an important measure of emotional-motivational traits predictive of superior police performance in the field. The third situational task, Foot Patrol Observation Test, did not appear to be predictive of later success in training.

Further validation of the situational test technique is necessary to establish its value in police candidate assessment, and a weighted activity rating of field performance of patrolmen is under study for later report. However, situational testing shows promise as a supplement to conventional

paper-and-pencil procedures for police selection, if adequate reliability and validity studies can establish its usefulness.

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