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## USE OF DIAGNOSTIC SMALL GROUPS IN POLICE RECRUIT SELECTION AND TRAINING

ROBERT B. MILLS

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This paper will describe two innovations in selection and training procedures which have been used with the Police Division of Cincinnati, Ohio. Both innovations, as you will see, have been built into the graduate training program of the Community Psychology Institute at the University of Cincinnati, and both innovations involve use of small-group techniques to serve classical functions for the police: i.e., evaluation of recruit candidates and basic recruit training in the Police Academy.

### I. PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF RECRUIT CANDIDATES

This program has continued since its inception in 1961, when it was created with encouragement from former Chief Stanley R. Schrotel, one of the truly innovative municipal police administrators in the U.S. An evaluation team consisting of a psychiatrist (Robert J. McDevitt), several graduate psychology students, and the author carry out the selection program, acting as advisors to the Civil Service Commission of the City of Cincinnati. Our psychological evaluation is the final step in a screening procedure which includes an AGCT intelligence test, physical examination, individual interview, polygraph, and background investigation.

A dichotomous recommendation of "acceptable" or "high risk" is reported to the Civil Service Commission on each candidate. A recommendation of "high risk" has been made on 15-20% of candidates we have seen, and in almost every case the Civil Service Commission has acted to remove such candidates from the eligible list. To date our team has aided in selection of a majority of the present Cincinnati police force.

Our evaluation team processes candidates in small diagnostic groups of 8-12 men, a procedure which requires about five hours. Initially a combination of objective and projective-type personality tests

are administered, along with several situational tasks. Many of these procedures have been described previously (Mills, McDevitt & Tonkin, 1966). Our philosophy has been that a combination of approaches yields more information than a single approach, and that the careful diagnostic integration of several different types of information on each candidate by a team represents the most equitable and thorough evaluation possible.

For example, our experience has convinced us that the search for a single paper-and-pencil test yielding a score which could be used by Civil Service as an infallible guide to police selection is probably a myth. Likewise, reliance upon a single, usually brief, psychiatric interview is another approach with limited value. We believe that the team approach using a variety of testing situations under the guidance of police-specific specialists has provided the most insights.

The capstone of our psychological evaluation is the diagnostic group session we have termed "the Bull Session". This is the final two-hour wrap-up in which our team confronts 8-12 candidates who have completed all psychological tests. Members of the evaluation team have been briefed on the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate through analysis of tests previously administered. The evaluators are now ready to witness the leadership styles and personal qualities of the candidates in action.

Ordinarily two evaluators are designated as group leaders while the remaining two members of the team serve as participant-observers. Group leaders, having assembled the candidates around a conference table, inform them that their participation in the Bull Session is essential, and that their failure to make their views and attitudes known in the session could result in a poor recommendation. In other words, precautions are issued against attempting to "hide" within the group.

A number of exercises derived from sensitivity groups have been utilized during the first hour of the Bull Session as a warm-up. One of the most successful has been what is called "The Prisoner's Dilemma". For this exercise, the candidates are divided into two teams (4-6 men each) who meet in adjoining rooms. Group leaders explain that the object of the exercise is for each team to gain as many points as possible for themselves, regardless of what the other team may do. Each team then self-selects a "team leader" and "negotiator". The teams then play 10 rounds of 3 minutes each, in which Team 1 selects alternative A or B, while Team 2 selects alternative X or Y. A referee puts the two choices together at the end of each round, with four outcomes possible:

Each team wins 3 points for the round; each team loses 3 points; one team wins 6 points while the other team loses 6 points, or vice versa.

Under ordinary circumstances, it soon becomes apparent that the only strategy which consistently wins points is a collaborative one between teams, in which each team covertly or explicitly agrees on the choices which yield 3 points for each team, and ultimately a tied score. To choose the strategy which maximizes points for your own team at the expense of the other team is to invite retaliation, so that with *both* teams trying to maximize scores, the result is a loss of three points for *both* teams.

There are specified intervals when "negotiators" from each team can meet to argue strategy. The Prisoner's Dilemma exercise has been found to be rich in opportunities to observe leadership, personal persuasiveness, group participation, ability to function under pressure, and planfulness. All of these qualities, or their lack, emerge in a spontaneous fashion during the heat of the exercise.

However, we have the overwhelming impression that police recruits play out this exercise in a strikingly different style from college students, clergymen, or others with whom this exercise has been attempted. Without exception the police recruit teams strike out aggressively to maximize their team's points. The outcome is a *lose-lose* situation where both teams continue to lose points throughout the exercise. What is so striking is that neither team seems able to budge from their tenacious losing posture, and ends up the exercise red-faced and frustrated. During the de-briefing following Prisoner's Dilemma, these typical comments have been heard:

"We might have changed our strategy, but we couldn't trust those other guys."

"What was the use of changing? They'd just sock it to us again!"

"Those other guys were really out to get us. We even wondered if the referee was helping the other team."

"We couldn't figure out what you headshrinkers wanted us to do."

The above comments reflect attitudes we have found to be fairly common among police candidates:

- a. Difficulty in recognizing and owning one's own aggressive emotions.
- b. Projection of one's own aggressiveness to others as self-justification.
- c. Low interpersonal trust level; high level of suspiciousness about the motives of others.
- d. Intolerance for ambiguity; a search for clear directives and instructions as a personal security operation.
- e. Sense of fair play; rules exist, and everyone benefits from their observance
- f. Good teamwork; security lies in working together

Following the Prisoner's Dilemma warm-up exercise, the two teams are usually re-assembled together around the conference table for a period of de-briefing which leads easily into the remaining 1-1½ hours of guided group discussion. Our evaluation team is testing the ability of these police candidates to think and express themselves effectively under pressure, and the group interview supplies this pressure. The diagnostic group interview technique also tests social defenses quite effectively, so that indices of pathology only dimly visible from written tests will often appear in the group situation in more readily identifiable form. Thus, the group interview is an extremely useful complement to more conventional test instruments, and increases the confidence of the examiners in their judgments of the candidates.

The content of the Bull Session always includes discussion of the personal motivation of candidates for a law-enforcement career, information which becomes quite meaningful when shared in the peer group of candidates. The need to be authentic before one's peers and would-be fellow-officers is a powerful motive, helping to reveal feelings and attitudes not always apparent in a one-to-one personnel interview. Often the group does much of the uncovering work for us, and pins down a candidate who comes through "phony". Crusaders against crime are always suspect; this type of alleged motivation is always challenged by some

policeman's son applying for the position. On the other hand, a quiet type of community service motivation is strongly seen in most candidates, and can sustain a successful law enforcement career. We also see a bit of the social worker in some of the best candidates, and a strong identification with community values.

The desire for security, pensions, and public recognition seems unusually strong in these groups of 21-29 year-olds; apparently their competitiveness and aggressiveness is strongly tempered by an inner need for security. Police candidates do not seem to be high risk-takers where their careers are concerned, and their strong achievement drives are apparently channeled along hierarchical lines within the police organization. Most of our brightest candidates want eventually to be the chief, they admit.

Perhaps the worst losers in the recruit selection process are what we have termed "the help-seekers". A low *K* score on the MMPI personality test is usually advance warning that we are about to interview a young man attempting to work out some psychological adjustment problems through putting on a police uniform. The help-seekers usually present themselves as pleasant, sweet, passive individuals who hide within the group, and often evoke the pity and protection of the more able candidates. Their mediocrity is their protection. Our group leaders often have difficulty in confronting such candidates, partially because it goes against our therapeutic training to have to do so. Our inside joke to each other is, "If we *all* like this recruit so well, then he can't be much good as a policeman!"

The help-seeking candidate, beset with inferiority feelings, passive-dependent traits, or neurotic adjustment problems, is our largest category of candidates recommended for rejection by Civil Service. Such men can rarely produce efficiently in a law-enforcement role, and at the worst can be a threat to the safety of other officers and themselves. We have reason to believe that such help-seekers are already far too common in most police departments, and sap the efficiency of the police organization through their ineptness. The help-seeker can often pass through conventional evaluation procedures, since his innocuous and pleasant ways are often ingratiating. When we encounter the help-seeking type of candidate, we attempt later to refer them for counseling or redirect them into more suitable career channels.

The Bull Session is also a useful vehicle for

inquiries into the attitudes of candidates toward types of deviant behavior often encountered by police. We routinely inquire into attitudes toward prostitution, homosexuality, use of drugs and alcohol, and social protest behavior. Attitudes toward minority groups, migrants, and poor people are also probed. The presence of minority group members, either as candidates or as part of the evaluation team, is indispensable to this process of social attitude evaluation, and the reaction of candidates to minority group members is closely observed. Concrete and specific problems of law enforcement relating to minority groups and deviate behaviors are posed by the group leaders, drawing upon their police experience, and placed before the group for discussion. Abstract intellectualizations are avoided, since such statements are usually stereotyped and relatively unproductive.

Our purpose in raising such issues is to identify any candidate with private agendas of so virulent a nature that they might hamper his impartiality in the use of social authority. For example, a candidate reacting to an alcoholic and neglectful father might well possess a potential for mistreating drunks he might encounter in the performance of his duties. Or, a candidate preoccupied with defending himself against recognition of homosexual impulses might adopt sadistic attitudes toward sexual deviates. While we cannot be too unrealistically high in our standards of selection, any unusual attitudes evinced by candidates are explored, and considered as possible grounds for a recommendation of rejection as "high risk". To our knowledge, such evaluation of attitudes is unique in police selection.

At the conclusion of the Bull Session, the evaluation team, consisting of the two group leaders and two participant-observers, meets in conference to decide on recommendations. Previous test results, as well as participation in the Bull Session, are summarized and reviewed by the team, and a recommendation is established on the basis of consensus of the four team members. We feel that we have created an evaluation system with several unique features, which gives both depth and balance to the complex task of selecting police candidates.

## II. BASIC TRAINING OF RECRUITS IN THE POLICE ACADEMY

A second use of small-group technique has been developed in the Police Academy during basic training of recruits. The author has conducted a

program to inform recruits about various aspects of mental health relevant to law enforcement. Topics include suicide attempts, sexual deviations, alcoholism, mental illness, and appropriate use of community resources by police officers. In other words, the relation of law enforcement to the network of community agencies, which includes practical information on when and how to make referrals, and the responsibility of the police on mental health issues. It has become clear that the neophyte officer appreciates concrete information about such matters, and that he later demonstrates he can put the information to use; for example, in initiating referrals to the Psychiatric Clinic of the Cincinnati Municipal Court.

Nevertheless, some frustration has been encountered in confronting subtle anti-therapeutic attitudes which persist, despite a rather rigorous formal training program. A strategy was devised which would present an alternative to the usual lecture-examination format used in the Police Academy. A series of "fact-sheets" were prepared and distributed in advance which summarized the basic mental health information to be presented; it was announced that the fact-sheets would be the basis for examination. This maneuver prepared the ground for the discussions to follow.

A series of two-hour discussions were then initiated, each based upon a broad topic covered in the fact-sheets, such as understanding and handling of suicide attempts, or management of mentally ill citizens. To open the discussions, a 20-minute open-ended lecture was used in which the main issues were raised which would be discussed. In the case of the suicide discussion, an excellent police training film (*Cry for Help*) was used as a curtain-raiser. Recruits were then divided into small discussion groups of 6-8 men each, each group being headed by an advanced graduate student in psychology. The author served as moderator and floating consultant to the total group.

The mutual impact of the graduate students and

police recruits upon each other has been salutary. Recruits have been much more free than previously to describe their feelings within the small groups; the recruits seem to find it easier to relate more openly to the graduate students than to a "senior authority figure". Since the students are almost peers of the recruits, the experience of relating to another young professional person in training has great significance to the recruits, and seems to communicate more readily and realistically the desired mental health attitudes and information. The graduate students, under supervision by the author, also report that the Police Academy discussions have been a noteworthy training experience.

The response of the police recruits to the small discussion group format has been enthusiastic, and recruits have been rating the experience highly in their overall appraisal of their training program. The discussion group format seems to be a distinct improvement over lectures in engaging the interest of recruits, and presumably in improving their attitudes toward mental health problems they will be encountering later in the community. Recruits begin to see themselves as a part of the overlapping systems of care which keep the community functioning on a viable basis. The contact with neophyte professionals in psychology also helps to undercut the tendency toward professional isolation which all too often characterizes the municipal police officer.

Two innovations with a municipal police department have been described in which mental health professionals have been able to make a significant contribution to police selection and training. It is hoped that the described programs can be a model for increased collaborative efforts between the police and the helping professions.

#### REFERENCE

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