Psychological Screening of Police Officers

Research conducted in 1967 by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice determined, "One incompetent officer can trigger a riot, permanently damage the reputation of a citizen, or alienate a community against a police department" (p. 125). The commission went on to recommend psychiatric and psychological screening of future police applicants and provided grants to support research and development of valid testing instruments such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). However, five years later Kent and Eisenberg, (1972) performed a critical analysis regarding the quality of research and methodology on the psychological screening of police officers and determined it bordered on "charlatanism." A research project with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, (Mills & Stratton, 1982) found no evidence to support the utility of the MMPI as a predictor of police performance. The MMPI may be an excellent indicator of pathological behavior, however it is not helpful in identifying the more characterological behavior patterns within the less pathological range that seem to impair police performance, (Inwald, Knatz, & Shusman, 1983). One of the critical factors in the use of psychological tests such as the MMPI in the selection process is the lack of clear linkage to job tasks, (Butcher, 1985).

Two other instruments that have been extensively utilized over the years in police applicant screening are the California Personality Inventory (CPI) and the Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI). The CPI was first published in the 1950s and became a screening instrument for the police community during the 1970s. The advantage of the CPI was the ability to assess and describe strengths in the candidate, whereas the MMPI identified weaknesses and deficiencies. The current version of the CPI is constructed with 20 scales designed to identify personality traits important for social interaction and for forecasting practical life outcomes, (Hogan, 1991). The CPI scales Communality, Good-Impression, Responsibility, Self-Control, Socialization, Tolerance and Sense of Well-Being show an association with police officers involved in serious employment problems such as drug use and unnecessary use of force, (Hargrave & Hiatt, 1989). This instrument was the initial concept for the police community of screening in candidates rather than screening them out. The CPI and MMPI subscales for schizophrenia and depression correlated well, however some of the socialization scales lack adequate research, (Nislow, 1988).

The IPI was constructed specifically for the police population. With 26 scales that measure stress reactions and deviant behavior patterns, including tardiness and job absences, substance abuse, antisocial behavior, interpersonal relating styles and suspicious, anxious or rigid tendencies the IPI essentially assesses past behavior, (Shusman & Inwald, 1991). They further related this behavior to successful job performance, i.e., absenteeism was identified 82 percent, and tardiness 77 percent (p. 174).

In the selection process, psychopathology may not be the only relevant personal information that need be considered for employment, (Costello, Schoenfeld, & Kobos, 1982). Officers who lack impulse control and tend to withdraw (Baehr, Furcon, & Froemel, 1968), are suspicious of others and disregards or bends the rules (Lawrence, 1984), or are perfectionists or rigid in their personal encounters (Reiser & Geiger, 1983) demonstrate on the job difficulties. In the selection process this strategy is referred to as screening-out candidates. The two major behavioral traits that departments try to screen-out are criminality and acts of violence.

The Rodney King incident brought the Los Angeles Police Department under the critical independent investigation of the Christopher Commission, (1991). The position the department presented was the officer's emotional and psychological problems may develop after selection, while the officer is employed and no amount of pre-employment testing can identify these officers. When one considers that acts of violence are rare, violent people do not act violently in all situations and only a minority of individuals with psychological problems are prone to violence and this usually occurs in periods of acute disturbance, attempting to establish a relationship between mental health and violence is going to be limited, (Monahan, 1992). According to a U.S. Department of Justice report (1998, p. 9), "A major city

police chief can expect, on average, to have 10 officers charged per year with abuse of police authority; 5 arrested for a felony; 7 for a misdemeanor; 3 officers arrested for theft; and, 4 arrested for domestic violence." With such a low validity in the selection process, any effort to try to predict violence or criminality becomes quite complicated.

The alternative to screening-out of unfit candidates is the screening-in of the best and brightest. A report to the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights (Margolis, 1970) identified false negatives in the screening-out process that adversely impacted the minorities and opened the door for litigation to correct the grievances.

Psychological Theory of Police Behavior
When studying personality characteristics of a police officer, most research has been concerned with whether officers are psychologically homogeneous or differ as a group from the general population, (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levison, & Sanford, 1950; Balch, 1972; Lefkowitz, 1974; Muir, 1977; Brown, 1981; Carpenter & Raza, 1987). They found police officers scored higher than the general population on such traits as need for achievement, heterosexuality and dominance, while scoring lower on affiliation and nurturance. Matarazzo, Allen, Saslow, & Wiens, (1964) found the average police officer to be more intelligent, straightforward, dependable, assertive and conscientious than the general population. Research (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993) determined that people vary on a testable dimension called conscientiousness, and the police officer selection procedure should improve the likelihood these individuals are identified and employed.

Personality Conceptualization
Colquitt and Simmering (1998) determined when obstacles are encountered during the performance of a task, individuals scoring high in conscientiousness seek out and attain higher levels of performance due to their predisposition of being more persevering and disciplined than low scorers. Within every organization, managerial styles and dynamics can influence employee performance and is referred to as organizational politics. Mintzberg (1983) defined this dynamic as behaviors that tend to promote self-interests or benefits without any regard to or even to the detriment of the organization. These behaviors usually occur when employees do not recognize the organizational environment providing guidelines for appropriate behavior, or when priorities and values are unclear. Barrick and Mount (1993) found increased levels of autonomy were associated with greater levels of performance among high scores of conscientiousness. They also determined no relation existed between autonomy and performance with average or below-average levels of conscientiousness. By the very nature of their work, law enforcement officers have to operate in an environment of autonomy.

Another sub-facet trait of conscientiousness for consideration with law enforcement performance is deliberation. Low scoring individuals tend to be more prone to risk taking and rebellious behavior, (Costa & Widiger, 1994;Sarchione, Cuttler, Muchinsky & Nelson-Gray, 1998; Lounsbury, Tatum, Chambers, Owens, Gibson, 1999). Within this trait is self-control that measures freedom from impulsivity. One of the theoretical bases for the predictive power of Conscientiousness "pertains to individual manifestations of impulsive tendencies," (Sarchione, et al, p. 909). In an effort to forecast successful job performance these factors would assist in identifying counterproductive behaviors and disciplinary problems.

Type A or Type B Personality
Two studies (Hurrell, 1977; Davidson & Veno, 1980) in America and Australia found that up to 75% of police officers could be categorized as Type A personalities. A later Australian police study (Evans, Coman, & Stanley, 1992) sought to identify suspicious, aloof, cynical, and authoritarian behavior, typically associated with "Type A" personalities in police officers. The study of 271 officers revealed different behavior patterns over their periods of employment. For the first five years police officers

preferred a routine, organized environment, showed an attention for detail, and were generally detached from their peers and employment organization. Behaviors more typically associated with Type B personalities. Officers in the 6 to 11 years of service group reflected more interest in their career progression. They demonstrated more competency, organization and time-efficiency. At the end of this scale and coming into the 12 years of service, officers exhibited dominance and tough-mindedness, independence, and increasing suspicion of others, aloofness, cynicism, and hostility. If it does not already exist, type A personalities in police officers appear to develop during the employment period, (Balch, 1972 ; Kroes, 1985). This may be a consideration for most police officer's resignation occurring within the first five years of employment, (Terry, 1981). Skolnick (1976) determined the dangers associated with enforcing the law and the constant pressure to perform effectively as an authoritarian figure lead police officers to become increasingly vigilant to environmental cues of violence and more socially isolated.

The Five-Factor Model Concept

As early as 1932, McDougal identified five distinguishable and separate personality factors; intellect, character, temperament, disposition and temper. Fiske (1949) utilized Cattell's 21 bipolar scales and devised a five-factor solution to personality. Other personality variations to Cattell's research were Eysenck (1970) and Guilford (1975). Tupes and Christal (1961) working on an Air Force research project to identify and predict officer performance, reanalyzed Cattell's and Fiske's research and found five consistent factors: surgency, agreeableness, dependability, emotional stability and culture. Due to the fact of being an Air Force research project their documentation remained outside the purview of the psychological community for several years.

Other researchers (Borgatta, 1964; Smith, 1967; and Norman, 1967) consistently found five stable factors: assertiveness, likeability, emotionality, intelligence and responsibility. Wiggins, Blackburn and Hackman, (1969) identified responsibility as conscientiousness and noted remarkable predictive assumptions on educational achievement in graduate and undergraduate students.

The 1960s and 1970s brought a new social perspective to the field of psychology and the overwhelming influence of behaviorism. Situational variables were surpassing personality attributes in reference to individual actions. Goldberg (1981) brought about a resurrection of the "robustness" of the five-factor model and was the first to coin the phrase "Big Five," (p. 159). In 1985, Costa and McCrae developed an inventory, the NEO-Personality Inventory-Revised, to assess the five trait dimensions and to demonstrate the utility of this five-factor model. Further research over the years documented the presence of the five-factor model in the Eysenck Personality Inventory (McCrae & Costa, 1985a) and the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (McCrae & Costa, 1989). The CPI demonstrated a convergence with four of the five factors, excluding Agreeableness, with the NEO (McCrae & Costa, 1993). In attempting to correlate the NEO with the MMPI (McCrae, Costa, & Busch, 1986) determined four of the five factors were well represented. Conscientiousness, however, was not adequately identified by the research. A later study (Costa & McCrae, 1990) seeking to understand variations in the MMPI, MCMI-I and the MCMI-II assessment of personality disorders in relationship to the five-factor model seemingly clarified this anomaly by demonstrating the MMPI compulsive personality scale appears to emphasize neuroticism rather than conscientiousness. This study, along with Wiggins and Pincus (1989) established a relationship between the five-factor model and the DSM-III ® personality disorders. To add validity to the personality factor models, the 1980 DSM-III defined Axis II personality disorders in terms of personality traits, (p. 305). Several self-report assessment instruments were researched and constructed to differentiate among these categories of personality disorders, (Millon, 1983; Morey, Waugh, & Blashfield, 1985).

As early as 1965, (Guion & Gottier) personality traits were being identified as useful predictors of behaviors in the workplace. From the voluminous testing manuals, research and journal articles that attempt to establish the reliability of personality assessments and job performance, most meta-analysts

seem to accept the Big-Five factor of personality, (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991; Viswesvaran, Ones, & Schmidt, 1996; and Viswasvaran & Ones, 2000). Salgado (1997) determined after conducting meta-analysis of 36 European job performance studies, personality factors operate the same in the United States, Canada and Europe. Conscientiousness is the most predictive trait for job performance with extraversion and openness as specific predictors for law enforcement officers. Conscientiousness is valid for supervisory ratings, training success and employment history as identified in personnel files and promotional records.

References

Adorno, T.W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E, Levinson, D.J., & Sanford, R.N., (1950). *The Authoritarian Personality.* New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Barrick, M.R., & Mount, M.K., (1991). The big five personality dimensions and job performance. *Personnel Psychology, Vol. 44,* p. 1-26.

Borgatta, E.F., (1964). The structure of personality characteristics. *Behavioral Science, Vol. 12*, p. 8-17.

Butcher, J.N., (1985). Personality assessment in industry: Theoretical issues and illustrations. In *Personality Assessment in Organizations, p.* 275-427. New York: Praeger Publisher

Eysenck, H.J., (1970). *The Structure of Human Personality.* London: Methuen (3rd Edition).

Guion, R.M., & Gottier, R.F., (1965). Validity of personality measures in personnel selection. *Personnel Psychology, Vol. 18,* p. 135-164.

Goldberg, L.R., (1981). Language and individual differences: The search for universals in personality lexicons. In L. Wheeler (Ed.), *Review of Personality and Social Psychology: Volume 2,* p. 141-165. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publication.

Inwald, R., Knatz, H., & Shusman, E., (1983). *Inwald personality inventory manual.* New York: Hilson Research.

Kent, D.A., & Eisenberg, T., (1972). The selection and promotion of police officers: A selected review of recent literature. *Police chiefs, Vol. 39,* p. 20-29.

McCrae, R.R., & Costa, P.T., Jr., (1989). Reinterpreting the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator from the perspective of the five-factor model of personality. *Journal of Personality, Vol. 57,* p. 17-40.

McCrae, R.R., Costa, P.T., Jr., & Busch, C.M., (1986). Evaluating comprehensiveness in personality systems: The California Q-Set and the five-factor model. *Journal of Personality, Vol.54,* p. 430-446.

McCrae, R.R., & Oliver, J. P., (1992). An introduction to the five-factor model and its applications. *Journal of Personality, Vol. 60, No. 2,* p. 175-215.

McCrae, R.R., & Costa, P.T., Jr., (1993). Folk concepts, natural language, and psychological constructs: The California Psychological Inventory and the five-factor model. *Journal of Personality, Vol. 61,* p. 1-26.

Millon, T., (1983). *Millon Clinical Mulitaxial Inventory.* Minneapolis, MN: NCS, Inc.

Morey, L.C., Waugh, M.H., & Blashfield, R.K., (1985). MMPI scales for DSM-III personality disorders: Their derivation and correlates. *Journal of Personality Assessments, Vol. 49,* p. 245-251.

Salgado, J.F., (1997). The five factor model of personality and job performance in the European Community. *Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 2, No. 1,* p. 30-43.

Tett, R.P., Jackson, D.N., & Rothstein, M., (1991). Personality measures as predictors of job performance: A meta-analytic review. *Personnel Psychology, Vol. 75,* p. 703-742.

Viswesvaran, C., Ones, D.S., & Schmidt, F.L., (1996). Comparative analysis of the reliability of performance ratings. *Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 81,* p. 557-574.

Viswesvaran, C., & Ones, D.S., (2000). Measurement error in big five factors personality assessment: Reliability generalization across studies and measures. *Educational and Psychological Measurements, Vol. 60, No. 2,* p. 224-236.

Wiggins, J.S., & Pincus, A.L., (1992). Personality: Structure and assessment. *Annual Review of Psychology, Vol. 43,* p. 473-504.

This research material is from Dr. Krawczyn's doctoral dissertation "A Correlated Study of Police Officer Job Performance and the NEO-PI-R Conscientiousness Factor. Of the seven null hypothesis proposed, six were rejected. Three were at the .01 level of significance, two were at the .05 and .01 level of significance and one was at the .05 level of significance.