

**WHAT STRATEGIES WILL BE EMPLOYED TO RETAIN POLICE OFFICERS
ON SMALL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES BY THE YEAR 2004?**

Journal Article

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This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future, but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

Introduction

The object of this project was to identify strategies that will be employed to retain police officers on small law enforcement agencies by the year 2004.

Problems associated with excessive voluntary turnover affect all types of organizations, both public and private. On small law enforcement agencies, the most notable result of constant turnover can be an agency's inability to maintain a high level of service. This may result in the reduction or elimination of some traditional services or an increase in response time, thereby providing a lower level of service than expected by the community. Service may become rushed, incomplete, and frustrating for civilians and officers alike. Either way, a community may lose confidence in its police department's ability to deliver basic services. In some cases, departments spend hundreds of thousands of continually dwindling dollars to recruit, hire, and train police officers only to lose them within a few years to other, larger law enforcement agencies. Since excessive voluntary turnover can be seen as a symptom, it is necessary to identify factors contributing to the decision to voluntarily terminate employment that are common on small law enforcement agencies.

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

Defining a Small Law Enforcement Agency

For the purpose of this study, a "small" police department is defined as one employing between sixteen and fifty police officers. Additionally, factors such as job diversity and promotional opportunities were also considered. It is commonly known that medium to large law enforcement agencies are generally able to offer a greater variety of job assignments and, conversely, that very small agencies offer fewer job assignments than small law enforcement agencies. According to the 1990 Employment Data for California Law Enforcement by the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), using the parameters established for this study, there are ninety-four very small, 122 small, and 131 medium to large law enforcement agencies.

A salary comparison of law enforcement agencies in a five county area in Southern California was completed using the counties of Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside. There are ninety-seven law enforcement agencies in these counties. Each county also has a sheriff's department which was not included in this study. The assumption, valid or not, has been that the larger the agency, the better the wages, benefits, and job opportunities. Since it appears that most of the peace officers leaving small agencies go to larger ones, a comparison of starting and top step salaries was made between the small and medium to large agencies.

Illustration #1
Salary Comparison

The following table is a comparison of officers, population, entry level salary, and top step salary between small and larger law enforcement agencies.

	Small Departments	Large Departments	Small Departments compared to larger Departments
Number of Departments	29	65	36 less departments
Officers (total)	961	8,523	7,562 less officers
Offices (avg)	33	131	average 98 less officers per department
Total Population Served	594,000	5,783,000	5,189,000 less people served
Average Population Served	20,482	88,969	average 68,487 less people served per agency
Salary			
Bottom Step (LOW)	2,061	2,390	earn \$329.00 less at lowest starting salary
Bottom Step (HIGH)	3,014	3,383	earn \$369.00 less at highest starting salary
Bottom Step Average	2,537.50	2,886.50	earn an average of \$349.00 less at bottom step
Top Step (LOW)	2,633	3,012	earn \$379.00 less at lowest top step
Top Step (HIGH)	3,663	4,108	earn \$445.00 less at highest top step
Top Step Average	3,148	3,560	earn an average of \$412.00 less at top step

Police Officer Selection Procedures

Current selection practices for police officers used by most law enforcement agencies in California are "...very little different from the one first employed in London, England, in the year 1829, which was a character check, medical examination, (including some estimate of the applicant's intelligence), and a personal interview."¹ Gradual changes came about in the early 1960's with the use of physical agility tests, personality tests, psychiatric and psychological evaluations, and assessment centers.

"The traditional police personnel selection process is performed for one essential goal: to provide the highest level of police service to the local community through the selection of the most qualified applicants."² A survey of forty-nine state police departments and the departments in the fifty largest cities in the United States revealed that "...91.9 percent of the departments surveyed included tests of knowledge, skills, aptitudes (cognitive tests) as part of the selection process."³ The second most frequently used test was the personality-type test.

An area that has not been tested is the likelihood that once hired, will the employee stay with that law enforcement agency and not look for new employment once the employee has been trained. Assessment centers for entry level police officers are used "...to reduce the cost and other problems

incurred due to newly hired personnel failing to complete the initial training or probationary process."⁴ Although a step in the right direction, the emphasis is on passing probation, not employee retention. In a survey conducted in 1990 regarding the peace officer selection process, the respondents recommended development of a "Valid procedures for predicting permanency of the candidate for employment, without adverse impact."⁵

Community Expectations

While protection from the criminal element has historically been the primary expectation of the public from its law enforcement agency, people today also expect "...professional police behavior, respectful treatment, maintenance of human dignity, responsiveness, and value added to life."⁶ Equally as important is that organizations operate with maximum effectiveness and efficiency.

"Today, government suffers a loss of respect and credibility, loss of financial support, and intolerance for error."⁷ While slow to respond, law enforcement has recognized that they must meet the expectations of the public. Quality of service, responsiveness to the needs of the public, and maintenance of human dignity are in high order.

The Employee

"Too often in the past, companies have tended to view their employees as a cost item..."⁸ Companies, whether they supply a product or service, generally pay little attention to their strongest and most important asset, their employees.

The ability for an organization to adapt is critical to its ability to respond to the needs of today and tomorrow. Companies that plan for, develop, and implement strategies to satisfy the changing needs of their employees are investing not only in the future of the employees, but that of the organization.

Employers who value their employees value their input and make "...a conscious effort to find out directly from employees at all levels exactly what sort of actions the company should take to make it easier for them to do their jobs well and take pride in what they are doing."⁹ Recognizing and meeting an employee's needs, both at and away from the organization, will have positive impacts on the employee's performance. Such investments may result in higher morale, improved employee retention, and higher productivity.

Human resources personnel have found that external factors often frustrated workers, adversely affecting productivity on the job. As a result, several innovative company-sponsored plans were implemented, providing specialized education and family programs to make it easier for single parents and others to accept constructive employment opportunities while fulfilling the needs for children and other dependents. Some of the incentives include a "cafeteria" benefits plan that has been in place for more than a decade, maternity leave and paternity leave, child and elder care referral programs, flexible hours and job-sharing, sick child care, and adoption assistance.¹⁰

Stress in the Workplace

Stress claims are found most frequently in the service industry, and law enforcement is a service industry. Stress in the workplace is believed to account for lost time, poor work performance, and increased medical costs. Examples of such stressors include; noise, harassment, rumors, job pressures, poor policies and procedures, reporting to more than one boss, lack of control of one's job in terms of pace and work methods, limited or inadequate support from supervisors and peers, and lifestyle or family problems in combination with any other stressors. "NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) studies indicate that the lack of employee control or "say" concerning workplace demands is a significant risk factor affecting psychological well-being."¹¹ And, "In California, mental stress claims experienced a 700 percent growth rate between 1979 and 1988 and are now the leading type of occupational disease claim."¹²

The work place is becoming more diversified and priorities are changing. "Money alone is no longer enough to satisfy employees. Social inflation is affecting expectations. These factors all contribute to stress in the workplace."¹³ Employers need to continually identify and address employee needs. It is suggested to "...randomly poll employees to assess managerial or "people" problems, and to review the management climate in terms of

management style and "people skills," and for its policies on hiring, promotion, and termination."¹⁴

Job Satisfaction and Employee Retention

The American Academy of Nursing conducted a survey in 1982 to find the best strategies for retaining and satisfying nurses. Certain magnet hospitals were identified because of their ability to attract and retain nurses, that were good places to work, and delivered quality nursing care. A comparison was made between magnet and non-magnet hospital nurses regarding the importance of and how satisfied they were with the existence of these aspects in their hospital:

1. organizational structure (staffing, salary, work schedules, fringe benefits, support services, environment, and staffing mix),
2. professional practice (relationships with doctors and other professionals, amount of job-related independence, nursing-care delivery system, opportunity for specialization, perception of importance, and significance of nursing),
3. management style (the way in which the organization and nursing department was run - style, climate, milieu, participative management, visibility, and accessibility of leaders),
4. quality of leadership (attributes and qualities of leader behavior such as administrative support, responsiveness and expectations of leaders, quality of nurse-managers, formal and informal interaction opportunities), and
5. professional development (orientation, staff development, and formal education opportunities for career development.¹⁵

Both groups agreed in the order of importance of the aspects. In all five categories, an average of sixteen percent more magnet than panel hospital nurses were somewhat to very satisfied that these aspects existed at their hospitals. Salaried status, self-managed work teams, empowerment, de-bureaucratization, visionary leadership, and a risk-taking environment create a concept of the staff nurse role as one of competence, power, pride, and worth.

With this view of themselves, nurses are happy and productive in their jobs and tend to remain in them.

Commuting

The results of a Los Angeles Police Department 1991 Ad Hoc Committee on Personnel revealed that their salary and benefits were becoming less competitive. And, because more employees are moving farther away from the Los Angeles, area due to the high cost of housing, there are more job opportunities available outside of the Los Angeles County area and therefore less reasons for employees to commute long distances.

In 1990, twenty-three percent of the peace officers on the Los Angeles Police Department did not live in Los Angeles County. Although not the only factor, the flight from Los Angeles County to find affordable housing is considered to be a major problem for employee recruitment and retention. "The problems

associated with long commutes will affect the recruitment and retention of sworn and non-sworn Department employees."¹⁶

"If you want to own a house in California today, you either have to have the cash or the time to commute. At least eighty percent of the new residents now commute more than one hour and fifteen minutes each way on the already clogged Antelope Valley Freeway to jobs in metropolitan Los Angeles."¹⁷ A house that costs \$85,000 in the high desert of Antelope Valley may sell for \$350,000 in some parts of Los Angeles County. The population in the community of Palmdale has more than doubled in between 1986 and 1990. In the same period of time, the population in Lancaster rose nearly forty-six percent.

Although the Ad Hoc Committee recognized that they were no longer as competitive in the area of salary and benefits, they knew that salary was no longer "...the most important factor in determining whether or not an employee stays at the job."¹⁸ And they still offered many more opportunities for career advancement and job diversity than smaller agencies.

To attract and retain employees, they incentives such as "...job-sharing and telecommuting were considered. Also, as more women enter the workforce, job shifts may be restructured to allow women (and men) to work shifts

matching their children's school schedule and/or their other child care schedules."¹⁹ Flex benefit plans were also considered to allow employees to choose which benefit or combination of benefit plans best suited his/her situation.

Changing Workforce

Another factor to consider in employee selection and retention in the changing workforce. "In the 1990's, two of every three new workers will be women. By the year 2000, experts project that eighty percent of women from twenty-five to fifty-four years old will be employed, comprising nearly half (forty-seven percent) of the paid labor force."²⁰ With this at hand, child care will be a critical issue in the next decade, and childcare is not an issue restricted to women. "The critical outcomes of recruitment, retention, and productivity are affected by understanding and accommodating employees' outside needs."²¹ "Today's entry-level employees are nothing like those who joined police forces in the 1960's."²² One example is that very few recruits today have military experience. They also may have limited work experience and fewer responsibilities. As each generation enters the workforce, they will be just a little different from those of the past. They will continue to bring with them a new set of values and ethics. "It is important to recognize new recruits as individuals and to realize that they do not share the same values, ethics, goals, or objectives of the recruits of the past."²³

Organizational Size and Tenure

A study of private sector employees showed a strong relationship between organizational size and tenure. Smaller organizations were losing employees at a higher rate than their larger counterparts. The most significant factors contributing to voluntary turnover was job diversity. The study suggested that "...turnover would be less in larger organizations due to this benefit because personnel would not have to look elsewhere for such opportunities."²⁴

The work environment has a major influence on one's intention to stay or leave.

"In examining various aspects of the work environment, researchers have shown that general dissatisfaction (Hulin, 1966), dissatisfaction with supervisors (Ley, 1966; Skinner, 1969), and dissatisfaction with the size of the work unit (Mandell 1956; Potter & Lawler, 1965) all influence voluntary turnover."²⁵

It was thought that job knowledge would play a role in one's decision to leave.

Job knowledge may "...be defined as either the technical body of job-related facts..."²⁶ or the extent to which an employee knows what is to be done.

However, the results of a study on eighty MBA students in their first year of the AACSB accreditation program suggested that training does not influence satisfaction or intention to stay.

Job Performance and Absenteeism

Absenteeism can be used to avoid the stressors of work. In a study of communication equipment manufacturing employees, it was found that "...lower performers and higher absenteeism were predictive of turnover...In addition, perceived job stress, an internal health locus of control, competitiveness, lack of children, and intention to leave were predictors of turnover."²⁷ Absenteeism plays a significant role in turnover once the employee has made the decision to leave. The U.S. Department of Labor Statistics gives a conservative estimation of forty-six lost hours in the two week period between giving notice and actual separation.

Family Responsibilities

It has been found that among other factors leading to turnover, "...those who had limited family responsibilities for children..." were prime candidates to leave the job situation.²⁸ This is an interesting factor when directing efforts for recruitment.

Denmark Police Department

A case study on turnover was found comparing American law enforcement agencies of various sizes to Denmark's single Police Department. It was contended that "An excessive "dropout" rate among police officers - quitting prior to retirement age - wastes resources and may result in a low level of

experience."²⁹ These may include waste of investment in training, an excess of vacancies, and a resultant low level of experience among the working officers. This study revealed that Danish police officers faced low stress and high "need" fulfillment, factors that should lead to high job satisfaction and low "early" turnover. However, the conditions of employment on the Denmark Police Department cannot be compared to that in California because it does not have a single law enforcement agency.

When a Danish police officer transfers to another area, that officer is still employed by the Denmark Police Department. In contrast, in most California law enforcement agencies, such a transfers generally mean that the officer has resigned from one agency and is hired by a completely separate law enforcement agency. One possible solution to the excessive voluntary turnover may be establishing a single state law enforcement agency instead of having hundreds of separate law enforcement agencies as we have in California.

Turnover of Prison Guards

High turnover for correctional workers was studied 1987. The results of the study revealed that "...the most important dimension for distinguishing continuing officers from turnovers was their satisfaction with intrinsic working conditions (index of perceived variety, autonomy, authority, and learning opportunities)."³⁰

Conclusion

Much effort has been expended in an attempt to predict turnover in an effort to provide managers with a better understanding of the process by which employees leave and provide them with a direction for managerial action. More emphasis must be placed on better understanding the precursors of intention to quit so employers can make changes to affect this intention. It is obvious that once an employee has quit, there is little that can be done except incur the expense of recruitment and training. If an employer makes no effort to identify the reason employees are quitting, the cycle will most likely continue.

Forecasting the Future - Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

Trend and Event Identification

The NGT panel identified trends and events related to the issue and sub-issues being studied. The panel was familiarized with the S.T.E.E.P. (Social, Technological, Educational, Economic, and Political) process of trend and event categorization. Forty-four trends and thirty-three events relevant to the issue were identified and the ten most significant in each category were identified to be analyzed and forecasted.

Trends Selected for Forecasting

1. Ethnic diversity in California
Ethnic diversity in California has changed about nine percent over the last ten years reducing the white majority to fifty-eight percent. The increase in diversity is expected to additionally tax a small police

department's ability to provide service thereby making employment on such and agency less desirable.

2. Violence against police officers

Contrary to the eight percent decrease in violence against police officers between 1988 and 1992, the panel felt that violence against police officers would increase by the year 2004 making a law enforcement career less desirable.

3. Organizational emphasis on employee retention

Because of the shrinking pool of applicants and higher expectations from the public from its police officers, administrators are expected to place a much higher emphasis on employee retention.

4. Privatization of police services

Because of the State and municipal budget crises and since private sector employers can provide some services cheaper than most public counterparts, they are expected to continue to take over services traditional handled by law enforcement agencies.

5. Number of career changes for police officers

The panel felt those entering the job market today are less likely to stay with a single career than their predecessors. And, as law enforcement career becomes less attractive and less rewarding, more officers will leave law enforcement.

6. Sophistication of job, equipment, and training

Shrinking budgets make small municipalities less able to compete for highly educated and qualified applicants.

7. Education requirements for entry level officers

Educational requirements should increase due to job complexity and having to understand and work with a more culturally diverse society. Again, dwindling funds will impact a small law enforcement agency's ability to attract applicants.

8. Litigation against cities/police departments

Although costly initially, suits might be discouraged if vigorously contested instead of being settled as a nuisance.

9. Scope of benefit package for police officers

The forecast showed a "roller coaster" ride for this trend due to the economy. Benefits were believed to have a large impact on job satisfaction.

10. Modified work schedules

This was considered a benefit and is believed to play a significant role in job satisfaction and is a key factor in job selection.

Events Selected for Forecasting

Included is the probability of the event occurring by 2004.

1. Law to give tax increase by simple majority vote (100% probability)

Because of the current budget crises, the panel strongly felt a simple majority vote enabling municipalities to raise taxes would be a reality by 1998. If this does not occur some municipalities may be forced to contract many services.

2. Police agency licensing requirements (50% probability)

This may be demanded by the public if there are more incidents like that which lead to the 1992 riots in Los Angeles. However, it would take years to implement such a plan.

3. Los Angeles County 9.0 earthquake (20% probability)

An earthquake of this magnitude would cause some people to chose to reside in areas (or states) that are not prone to earthquakes. Also, some municipalities may not be able to survive the economic impact of such an disaster.

4. Privatization of a small L. E. agency (50% probability)

The panel felt that because of the increasing demands on municipalities and shrinking budgets, a private sector supplier of law enforcement type services could successfully compete with a city police or county sheriff for contract safety services. The panel also felt that small police departments would be more vulnerable to privatization efforts.

5. Major southern California riot (100% probability)

Such an occurrence might make a law enforcement career less attractive since small agencies may be more vulnerable.

6. Unification of gangs against police (probability - 60%)

This event was felt to have a more negative impact than a civil disturbance since small agencies may be more vulnerable. Unification was compared to the SLA and Black Panthers of the sixties and seventies and the obvious target would be law enforcement officers, not profit from looting.

7. 100% effective non-lethal weapon (probability - 80%)
The technology was believed to be "just around the corner." However, the panel felt that there might be some negative impact to such a weapon from police officers since lethal weapons would still be used against the police.
8. City bankrupt - officer pays full liability judgment (probability - 70%)
In light of the current budget crises and bleak prospects for recovery in the near future, there is believed to be a strong possibility, especially in a small municipality.
9. Agency of all part-time officers (probability - 20%)
Reliance on reserve police officers is expected to increase with worsening budgets and the inability to increase revenue. This is more likely to occur on a small law enforcement agency and may negatively impact retention.
10. City manager hires civilian Police Chief (no law enforcement experience) (probability - 100%)
Dwindling budgets may cause such an event to occur. The panel felt it was more likely to occur on a small law enforcement agency. This may negatively impact retention due to decreasing career development.

Selected Strategy

The strategy selected is to increase job diversity by creating specialized assignments that are responsibilities in addition to normal patrol assignments and require nominal funding for equipment and supplies. It is intended to expand and adapt existing programs and create new programs to serve the maximum number of residents. Also, if necessary, such programs are easily collapsible and will most likely not require the elimination of positions or re-assignments.

It was also recommended that grants be explored to help reduce expenditures and provide full-time personnel for such programs. The use of full-time personnel will enable the participants of the program to reach a larger portion of the target population. It is also understood that by accepting grants, the Department (in most cases) will be required to agree to make an effort to continue the program once the funding has ceased. This strategy was selected because:

- * It will most likely have a wide range of support from stakeholders.
- * It will have no or minimal financial impact on the city.
- * The vast majority of the sworn personnel (most likely everyone at and below the rank of sergeant) will be able to participate.
- * Programs can be an ongoing, updated, or repeated as demand and opportunity are identified.
- * A larger portion of the community will receive the benefits of the programs.

Conclusion

The results of the literature review and NGT went in two distinct and separate directions. The overwhelming emphasis of the literature review stressed factors contributing to job satisfaction which was believed to increase employee retention and productivity while the NGT panel predicted severe budget crises, an inability to pay for services, and law enforcement careers becoming less attractive and less rewarding. There was also a prediction that employee benefits would have to be reduced due to impending financial crises.

The most severe crunch is expected to occur within the next five years. |

Since it is believed that peace officers on small law enforcement agencies who voluntarily terminate employment go to larger agencies, a review of law enforcement agencies and their salary in a selected geographic area of Southern California was completed. Nearly seventy percent of the law enforcement agencies in this area were medium to large in size. It also showed that, on an average, peace officers working on small law enforcement agencies earn about \$412 less monthly than officers working for larger agencies. A general comparison of fringe benefits was done, but without specific cost figures, the true differences could not be determined. The NGT did not mention salaries, but predicted a "roller coaster" ride for benefits. One NGT panel member, a city council person, did not agree with the up-swing for benefits by the year 2004. Instead, he felt that dwindling funds would continue beyond 1999 and the only recourse was to reduce the cost of employee benefits. This posture supports the belief that some employers view employees as a liability, not an asset.

During the selection process, little attention is paid to employee retention. The primary goal of the process is to select the most qualified candidate who can provide a high level of service to the community. Community expectations have changed, however. While still important, protection is no longer the only concern. City government is expected to be effective and efficient and they demand professionalism, maintenance of human dignity, and responsiveness

from their law enforcement agency. Although not specifically related to recruitment and retention, the NGT panel felt that, due to the impact of limited financial resources, small law enforcement agencies would become less attractive than their larger counterparts, and a law enforcement career would be less rewarding than in past years. If this is the correct, it may result in high turnover and communities may receive a lower level of service because those who supply the services will have less experience.

Both internal and external stressors impact job satisfaction and productivity. Since money is no longer the primary motivator, it is recommended that employers identify and address employee needs. This is especially important in light of the changing values, ethics, and goals of those entering the workforce today. Small law enforcement agencies are inherently unable to offer a wide variety of job assignments, as such, larger agencies have a natural appeal for those desiring diversity. Because of dwindling budgets, to attract and retain employees, small law enforcement agencies need to identify non-cost benefits that appeal to new and more the tenured employees.

Even the selected strategy has some built-in flaws. It is based on "duties in addition to normal responsibilities" and the possible procurement of "grants" to aid with the funding special assignments. If small law enforcement agencies are not competitive in the area of wages and benefits, it might not be feasible

to expect personnel to "do more." And, since grants are only a temporary method of funding special programs, municipalities may not be able to incur the costs of such programs once funding has ceased, thereby causing the elimination of such programs.

Small law enforcement agencies who are not able to become competitive with their larger counterparts in those areas contributing to job satisfaction may be relegated to becoming a training ground for larger law enforcement agencies. This will result in the inability to compete for and retain qualified applicants which may result in a lower level of service to the community. In the end, communities must be willing (and able) to pay for the services they desire from their law enforcement agency.

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