

66213

66213

FEBRUARY 1980, VOLUME 49, NUMBER 2

JRS

Contents

- Crime Resistance** [1 **Neighborhood Involvement**
By Sgt. John G. Rye, Commander, Research & Development, Police Department, Birmingham, Ala.
- Management** [6 **Management Control Through Motivation**
By Donald C. Witham, Special Agent, Management Science Unit, FBI Academy, Quantico, Va.
- Personnel** [12 **The Assessment Center: Is It the Answer?**
By Carroll D. Buracker, Deputy Chief of Police, Fairfax County Police Department, Fairfax, Va.
- Police-Community Relations** 17 **Citizen Involvement in Criminal Justice—A Crumbling Cornerstone**
By Sheriff Walter C. Heinrich and Capt. Stephen W. Appel, Sr., Sheriff's Office, Hillsborough County, Fla.
- Forensic Science** [20 **Speaker Identification (Part 2)—Results of the National Academy of Sciences' Study**
By Bruce E. Koenig, Special Agent, Technical Services Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.
- The Legal Digest** [23 **The Role of Defense Counsel at Lineups**
By Larry E. Rissler, Special Agent, Legal Counsel Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.
- 28 **Wanted by the FBI**



THE COVER: Birmingham's Block Watch Program—a community's involvement in crime prevention. See story page 1.

Federal Bureau of Investigation
United States Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20535

William H. Webster, Director

The Attorney General has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of the Department of Justice. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget through December 28, 1983.

Published by the Public Affairs Office,
Homer A. Boynton, Jr.,
Executive Assistant Director
Editor—Thomas J. Deakin
Assistant Editor—Kathryn E. Sulewski
Art Director—Carl A. Gnam, Jr.
Writer/Editor—Karen McCarron
Production Manager—Jeffery L. Summers



ISSN 0014-5688

USPS 383-310

Personnel

THE ASSESSMENT CENTER:

Is it the Answer?

By CARROLL D. BURACKER
Deputy Chief of Police
Fairfax County Police Department
Fairfax, Va.

During the past two decades, law enforcement personnel have demonstrated an ever-increasing concern for equal promotional opportunities. Court decisions and employee dissatisfaction have caused police administrators to reassess traditional methods of promotion and to focus more attention on the need for upward mobility procedures. Today, police administrators across the Nation are finding that employees are more demanding in terms of opportunities for career enhancement. What was once accepted as the "system" is no longer satisfactory. Today, the ubiquitous question of "why?" is more prevalent than ever. Court challenges and personnel grievances present the administrator with vexing problems. On the one hand, the administrator needs to identify the most qualified candidates within the organization; on the other, he must be responsive to the employees' concepts of fairness, especially when decisions affecting careers are made.

For the most part, police promotions throughout the country have centered around three primary processes: Written examination, performance evaluation, and oral examination. Of course, processes employed by police agencies are often dictated by local civil service rules or State regulations. Therefore, before commenting on the assessment center employed by the Fairfax County Police Department, an overview of traditional exercises is necessary.

Written Examination

Written examinations have been the most frequently used method for testing police officers for promotion. In large police agencies, it is impractical to interview hundreds or thousands of employees; hence, the written examination is used to reduce the number of eligible candidates before further evaluation. The fundamental purpose of the written examination is to conduct an inventory of job knowledge. The written examination allows the police manager to get an idea of how knowledgeable a candidate is in a certain field—whether it is supervision, planning and organization, or criminal law.

The written examination has come a long way in the 1970's. A number of police departments moved ahead voluntarily in improving their test instruments. In other cases, changes were forced by court challenges. In any event, written examinations appear to have made quantum leaps forward in the past several years. It is believed by some that job-related issues are at the core of employee dissatisfaction with written examinations. If the examination is developed through job-analysis validation techniques and relates to specific functions to be performed at a given level, there is less possibility that the written examination will be challenged. In large organizations, a validated written examination is still necessary to reduce the number of candidates for subsequent participation in an assessment center. In small departments, where there are not more than 40 eligibles, for example, a written examination can be optional. Fairfax County did not use a written examination for the ranks of major and captain.

Oral Examination

The subject of oral boards has produced more acrimony than any other issue relating to promotions within police agencies. The concept has friends and foes based, in part, on previous experience and rumors. The critics of oral boards point to the impossibility of evaluating a candidate for promotion with a 15-minute to an hour interview. Criticism of this process has some foundation. Often, police oral boards are assembled without specific training with respect to tasks, questions, or rating. In other processes, there are well-documented booklets on what to look for in conducting an oral

66213

examination, the issues to avoid, etc. I define oral board as a "duly constituted panel of expert examiners assembled to assess the relative potential of an employee." Of course, the central issue is "expert examiners." In many police agencies around the Nation, oral boards consist of internal and external staff officers or members of the community who have had little or no training on what to evaluate when interviewing an employee.

The questions in oral examinations are as important as those in the written examination. Again, the term "job-related" surfaces. The candidate should not be asked to identify the first man to walk on the moon. Rather, a more appropriate question to ask would be if he, as a police supervisor/manager, would establish a policy that would tolerate speeding violations.

Performance Evaluation

Most police officers want to be evaluated by their superiors, just as most supervisors want to evaluate their subordinates. Therefore, it has been difficult for police managers to establish a promotional process without this phase. In a small police department, evaluations may be more effective than in a large police agency which has decentralized operations. For example, individual commanders may have different standards for evaluating employees. The manager, then, is confronted with different reference points being applied to evaluations. The ideal is to have employees ranked from low performers to high performers, with the average in between. Evaluations, however, tend to be grouped in such a tight pattern that they become irrelevant in determining suitability for promotion. Police managers around the country have voiced this problem, and although some departments have tried training supervisors in order to establish a benchmark or reference point for evaluations, these training programs have marginal impact. However, work performance should be considered in the promotion process.

Emerging Examination Process

The Fairfax County Police Department has employed written and oral examinations and performance evaluations. To a large extent, it is felt that the promotion processes have been fair and sound. (See *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, May 1976.) For selection of investigators, the department introduced a mock crime scene as part of the process to measure ability. For supervisors, though, it is believed that the recent establishment of an assessment center to identify managerial po-

"... a candidate should be evaluated on administrative skills, decisionmaking, and personnel development."

tential is a far better approach than traditional practices. The assessment center concept, although relatively new in law enforcement, has existed in private industry for many years. The FBI has made considerable use of the assessment center for selecting supervisors and middle managers.

The Fairfax County assessment center experience began in January 1978, at the rank of major. A year later, the department expanded the concept to include the rank of captain. Employees tested in the assessment center were pleased with the process and did not indicate any displeasure with the result. Surely not all were happy with the outcome in terms of rank order, but they appeared satisfied that the approach taken by management seemed to be an improvement in identifying potential.

The term "assessment center" carries a variety of meanings. To some it means a very complex set of exercises to evaluate personnel; to others, a fairly simple process involving several techniques. In fact, it can mean both



Deputy Chief Buracker

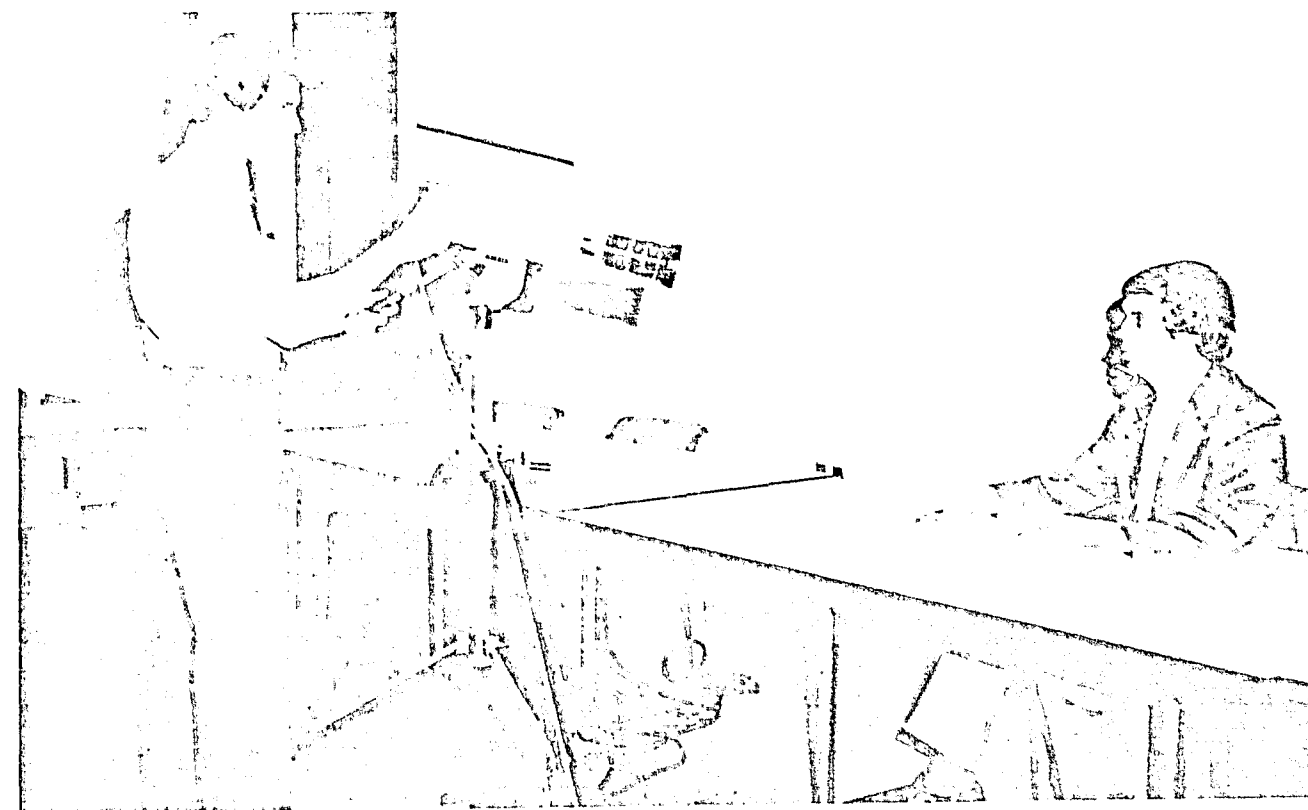


Richard King
Chief of Police

A candidate completes in-basket exercise.



A candidate is timed during a simulated press conference.



depending on the sophistication of techniques employed, the dimensions to be measured, the quality of personnel administering the process, and of course, the testing instruments. While the oral board can determine, to some degree, an employee's relative potential, the assessment center offers a multidimensional approach toward evaluating an employee. However, the written examination should not be abandoned solely for an assessment center. The written examination, if validated, offers a very good way to inventory job knowledge and reduce the number of candidates in large departments. At the command level, written examinations become less important because command-level assessment centers, if properly structured, can be used to inventory job knowledge.

Although there are variations in the application of assessment centers, the Fairfax County experience involved three main components: 1) Group oral, 2) in-basket exercise, and 3) oral presentations.

Group Oral

The group oral, also called leaderless group discussions or multicandidate orals, proved to be a good technique for evaluating personnel. In Fairfax County's assessment centers, candidates were given several written problems to discuss among themselves, and in the exercise, were told to take the position of a task force convened by the police chief to discuss an issue.

In the group oral, it was not necessarily the most vocal or the most reserved person who received the highest grade. Candidates who were able to articulate responses to a question in a concise, well-defined manner and who took the leadership role emerged as the top candidates.

Assessors were trained to look for the emergence of leaders who could demonstrate knowledge of the issues and identify possible solutions to the problems. The substance of their comments was the most important point.

While participating as an assessor in other agencies, I have observed candidates in group orals sit almost speechless throughout the entire process. Yet, these same candidates had a good written test score. Without the group oral, these candidates would have become supervisors.

In the group oral segment in Fairfax County, the assessors were to evaluate the following dimensions on a scale of 0 to 5. (Each dimension had been clearly defined.)

- 1) Command presence,
- 2) Commitment to service,
- 3) Oral communication,
- 4) Factfinding,
- 5) Flexibility,
- 6) Interpersonal sensitivity,
- 7) Problem analysis, and
- 8) Work perspective.

Exercises for the group oral were stated clearly and briefly. Moreover, the issues were job-related and embraced the spectrum of responsibilities for the rank the candidates were seek-

ing. The questions did not center exclusively on administrative or operational activities. Ideally, a candidate should be evaluated on administrative skills, decisionmaking, and personnel development. In selecting personnel for staff-level positions, it is important to keep in focus the fact that an operational lieutenant today may be an administrative lieutenant tomorrow. An example of an exercise for a group oral at the command level is how a candidate would determine where a \$400,000 grant would be spent in the municipality if the candidate were a city council member.

In the group oral, each assessor was given two or three candidates to evaluate, depending on the size of the group and the number of assessors. If there were three assessors and six candidates, each assessor would have two candidates. Those candidates evaluated by one assessor in the group oral were not evaluated by that same assessor in the next two phases of the process.

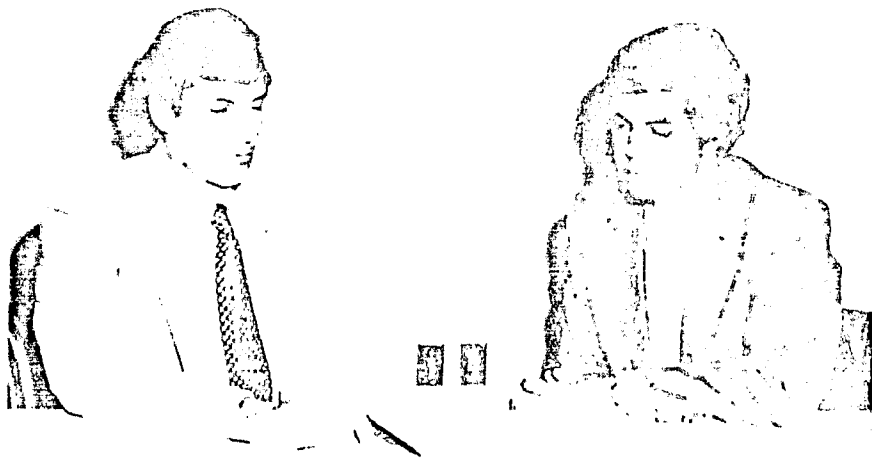
In-Basket Exercise

The second phase of the assessment center administered in Fairfax County was an in-basket exercise. This process was developed after a job analysis was conducted at the different ranks. Once the range of duties and responsibilities was defined for a given rank, questions were developed to identify the specific skills necessary to accomplish these duties and responsibilities. Again, it was important that the questions be job-related.

Police managers could take problems encountered by them daily and use these as a basis for developing an in-basket exercise by changing names and dates. Of course, such a routine would be for command-level positions comparable to those performed by police managers. The same process, though, can be used to develop the exercises for other supervisory levels.

In our in-basket exercise, candidates were given 10 assignments. Each candidate was asked to assume the role of a certain police supervisor in a given police department. They were given additional facts, such as how long they had been on the police force, who they were replacing, what the next month's schedule was to be, the possibility of leaving town on emergency leave, and other essential facts about the job. The candidates then had to respond to a series of 10 exercises, some of which were several pages in length, and provide responses to those exercises within 1 hour and 15 minutes. The assessor had previously covered the questions with the moderator, and a list of reasonable responses had been identified for each of the 10 exercises. This process achieved consistency in rating by the assessors and was essential in maintaining a fair process.

An assessor provides feedback on the candidate's performance



The Fairfax County in-basket exercise involved the following items:

- 1) Enforcement policy,
- 2) A complex internal investigation problem,
- 3) A personnel problem with an officer,
- 4) A civic association meeting involving a sensitive issue,
- 5) A recruit field training form,
- 6) A request for criminal statistics from the chief suggesting only good information is desired,
- 7) An issue involving poor police reports,
- 8) A police officers' association meeting dealing with a sensitive issue that conflicts with another meeting,
- 9) An awards board suggestion, and
- 10) A proposed physical fitness test.

These exercises involved conflicting dates and schedules. It was important for the candidate to establish priorities for the activities, recognize the central issues in each case, articulate in writing why the issues were handled in a particular fashion, and what specific action was to be taken on each item. Each candidate had been given a manila envelope containing all of the exercises along with an instructional sheet, paper and pencil, and an outline form to list tasks and priorities.

The second phase of the Fairfax County in-basket exercise involved an assessor interviewing each candidate on a one-on-one basis with respect to the candidate's responses and exhibits from the in-basket exercise. The fundamental purpose of the one-on-one method was to ensure that the assessor could read the candidate's writing and understand specifically what the candidate had said about each point. During these discussions, the candidate was not allowed to change anything he had written.

After each candidate was interviewed, the assessor graded the responses to the in-basket exercise. As noted previously, the assessor did not evaluate anyone he had graded previously.

The dimensions evaluated in the in-basket exercise were:

- 1) Commitment to service,
- 2) Written communications,
- 3) Oral communication,
- 4) Decisionmaking,
- 5) Delegating,
- 6) Followup,
- 7) Judgment,
- 8) Planning and organization, and
- 9) Work perspective.

Oral Presentation

The third phase of Fairfax County's assessment center was the oral presentation. In this process, candidates were assembled as a group and briefed on the specifics of this phase. The candidates were given a set of instructions consisting of two parts. In Part A, the candidates reviewed the facts of a police incident and then presented a press conference in the form of an oral presentation. At the end of the press conference, the assessors asked questions which required the candidate's prompt reaction to sensitive community/police issues. In Part B, candidates prepared an oral presentation describing their qualifications for the rank being sought and their view of the job. The candidates were selected in random order to provide these presentations. The following dimensions were evaluated:

- 1) Career development,
- 2) Command presence,
- 3) Oral communication,
- 4) Emotional maturity,
- 5) Judgment,
- 6) Planning and organization,
- 7) Work perspective,
- 8) Followthrough,
- 9) Interpersonal sensitivity, and
- 10) Factfinding.

Again, assessors were assigned to evaluate candidates they did not grade during the first two sessions.

To conduct these three phases of the assessment center required approximately 8 hours. The candidates were then assembled and debriefed.

They were allowed an opportunity to comment on the process or ask any questions about the exercises. There were no negative comments about the process. Most of the comments centered around the value of the exercise as a learning experience and requests for feedback on the individual's strengths and weaknesses. All candidates believed the process to be much better than the traditional way of evaluating personnel. The Fairfax County chief of police was pleased with the result of the assessment center and used the list as an exclusive eligibility ranking for promotion. The department is planning to use an assessment center for lieutenant and sergeant promotions in the future.

The assessment center is not necessarily suited for every police agency. In promotional exercises, the basic questions for the police manager are: What promotional process seems best to rank eligibles for my department? and what promotional process will be viewed as fair by employees and is unlikely to be challenged? Cost, candidate population, timing, internal dynamics of the organization, and success of past promotional processes are facts to consider before exploring the application of an assessment center. Obviously, there is no need to buy a tank when a revolver will do the job.

In the Fairfax County experience, three major phases were used. A possible fourth phase would involve a one-on-one discussion with a candidate as to his background in law enforcement.

The assessment center offers the police administrator an effective promotional process. The keys to the success of such a program are the quality and training of the assessors, the quality of the examination materials and evaluation instruments, and feedback to the participants relative to their strengths and weaknesses as determined by the assessors in the process.

Having participated as an oral examiner and assessor in the selection of police chiefs and officials in 10 States, I am firmly convinced that the assessment center concept is one which will be viewed by both police managers and employees as a better way of evaluating supervisory potential. FBI

END