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## Law Enforcement Selection Practices in the U.S.A. and Canada

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### ***Summary***

Selection practices in law enforcement have been said to be one of the most complex facets of personnel management. In an effort to document the state of this complexity internationally, the study presented provides state of the art information about police personnel practices in the USA and Canada.

### ***Additional information***

This study was part of a larger research project conducted for the Alaska Department of Public Safety: Johnson, Knowlton W.; & Clark-Barry, Chloe. (1981). *Examination of Qualifying Criteria for Selection of Law Enforcement Personnel in Alaska: Final Report*. Report prepared for the Alaska Department of Public Safety. Anchorage, AK: Justice Center, University of Alaska Anchorage.

LAW ENFORCEMENT SELECTION PRACTICES  
IN THE USA AND CANADA

by

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Intelligent use of police authority depends ultimately on the qualifications of individuals who deal directly with the diverse populations of progressively urbanized societies and the array of events that comprises law enforcement work. The management tools for raising the quality of manpower are recruitment and training. This paper is concerned with selection practices in recruitment which increasingly have been recognized. Those practices have been insufficiently defined and recently have become controversial in the United States because of adverse impact on the recruitment of women and members of minority groups (Lock, 1979). The unresolved role of the police in contemporary democratic societies has contributed to the controversy (Radalet, 1980) as well as contributed to the international dimensions to be considered.

There are two controversial personnel selection issues that need to be addressed by international law enforcement. One issue is the general underlying philosophy of the selection practices and the other is the implementation practices of particular selection methods. In regard to police selection philosophy, it appears that the controversy centers on whether law enforcement agencies endorse a negative or positive selection approach (Territo, 1977; Stinchcomb, 1979). Negative selection emphasizes "weeding out" unqualified or undesirable applicants from the system. This screen-out approach may be viewed as indicative of the use of a multiple or successive hurdle scoring method (Cascio and Real, 1979). The multiple hurdle scoring usually means rejection from the process if the applicant fails a particular stage.

Positive selection implies screening into the system those individuals who possess the special qualifications to effectively perform the police role. This screen-in approach is associated with a composite scoring method. Scoring in this manner permits the applicant to complete each stage of stages, and all data about an applicant is considered in the total score for all stages of the selec-

tion process, then the use of a composite score method reflects a positive selection philosophy. If the composite score method is used only for those applicants who successfully exceed a designated cutoff in one or more stages, then the use of this method characterizes a modified negative selection philosophy.

Opponents of the negative approach contend that a screening out philosophy, while eliminating certain candidates, does not always eliminate those who are unqualified. This philosophy may also justify the use of methods that unnecessarily and unfairly eliminate those applicants who are or could become qualified through training (McCreedy, 1974). Adversaries of the positive selection usually argue that screening in is not practical with the large number of applicants that most departments have to process.

Application of selection methods has also been controversial. The written test has dominated this debate (Katz, 1978; Eisenberg and Murray, 1974). A written exam is used to determine an applicant's cognitive abilities while intelligence tests are used to assess the cognitive potential of applicants. The major criticisms have been that test scores do not correlate with job performance and that minorities score lower because of the cultural bias of written exams and intelligence tests. Questions have been raised about the job-relatedness of cognitive indicators and the validation of tests (Schacter, 1979; Rosenfeld and Thornton, 1976).

Methods for collecting psychological and behavioral data have also been in the spotlight. Particular attention has been given to the lack of predictability and cultural bias of personality tests like the MMPI (Gettinger, 1981). Additionally, there has been much discussion about the role that psychologists should play in police selection (Crosby, 1979; Sheahy and Roberts, 1980) and the

value of situational tests as a psychological screening device (Mills, 1976).

Testing physical agility is still another area that has been in contention in recent years (Evans, 1980). Questions about the use of physical agility as a selection criterion has come under fire primarily because of the increasing number of women who aspire to become law enforcement officers. More recently, controversy has been generated by selection devices used in conjunction with an assessment center approach (Dunnette and Motowidlo, 1975; Ross, 1980) and academy and field training (Angell and Gilson, 1972; Bosarge, 1981a). The major questions being raised concern cost and practicality.

The oral board and the background investigation interview appear to be the least controversial ways of collecting data on applicants' attitudes and past behavior, even though neither of these methods have been proven to yield data that predicts future job performance (Territo, et al, 1977; Wollack, 1977). However, the use of the polygraph as a background investigation device has raised some ethical concerns.

The controversy concerning the selection philosophy and selection practices of law enforcement agencies provides the impetus for the present study. The inquiry had international dimensions because departments of USA and Canada were surveyed. As comparative research, the study represents a useful preliminary examination of an insufficiently explored aspect of international law enforcement.

#### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The study was part of a larger research project which the Justice Center of the University of Alaska, Anchorage conducted for the Alaska Department of Public Safety (Johnson and Clark, 1981). A mailed questionnaire and a telephone interview were used to collect data about police personnel practices in the USA

and other countries with policing situations similar to Alaska.

The focus of the mail survey was two-fold: to identify those departments that had re-designed their selection process within the last 10 years to accommodate female and/or minority applicants; and to identify those departments that had participated in a personnel selection research study. The survey emphasized the following areas: written test; substitutes for the written test; oral interviews; selecting trainable candidates as opposed to qualified candidates; minorities and females; and selection systems for departments of public safety if different from police departments.

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used. The design for the mailed questionnaires sent to U.S.A. and Canada agencies entailed selecting a study group from three sources. In the U.S.A. we relied on the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) 60-agency membership, and the 49 state police agencies. In Canada, departments were selected if listed as members of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. In both countries, agency representatives and noted police selection experts were asked for any jurisdictions in their vicinity that were addressing any of the issues raised in the survey. The response rate of these target populations were 60 of 60 for the PERT membership; 36 of 49 for the state police and 35 of 73 Canadian departments.

Telephone contact was made with those departments that had made extensive changes in their selection system within the last ten years, or had participated in a police selection research study. The interview, which averaged 20-30 minutes in length, was constructed to elicit detailed information about selection practices, changes that had occurred and reasons for implementing changes.

Four trained interviewers conducted telephone interviews with representatives of 85 USA departments and 5 Canadian departments that had made signifi-



cant changes in the past 10 years.<sup>1</sup> In many instances, the person interviewed was the same person who responded to the mail questionnaire. In other cases, the interview was conducted with a department psychologist, recruiter, personnel officer or with civil service personnel.

The comparative results reported on police personnel practices in the USA and Canada pertained to data collected in 85 USA agencies that participated in the mail survey and telephone interview and 35 Canadian departments that returned the mail questionnaire. These results depict the type of selection philosophy underlying police selection in both countries. Further, there are comparisons in regard to the extent of use of particular selection methods within a traditional selection system. Nontraditional selection systems that were found in both countries are also discussed. Finally, descriptive information for the 85 USA departments is presented on changes in selection practices, challenges that have occurred and the initiation of validation studies. Comparative results on changes and challenges in the 35 Canadian departments are not discussed since only a few departments had reported in the mail survey that significant changes had taken place in police selection practices.

#### STATE OF THE ART IN POLICE SELECTION

Law enforcement in the United States is comprised of autonomous functioning agencies that operate at the federal, state, county and municipality levels of governments. In the USA there is no national police force to respond to the myriad of social problems. Therefore, general law enforcement functions are assumed by the states, countries and municipalities. Selection practices in these general law enforcement agencies were the focus of our study in the USA.

In Canada the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, a national body, provides general public safety services to small towns and rural areas for eight of the ten

provinces. Ontario and Quebec have their own provincial police forces, and most major cities and numerous small towns have separate municipal forces. The Canadian departments that responded to our survey included the Royal Mounted Police, provincial forces and many of the larger municipalities of each province.

#### Personnel Selection Philosophy

We examined the general selection philosophy by collecting data on methods of scoring applicants. The most common method of scoring applicants found was a multiple or successive hurdle method which means rejection from the process if the applicant fails a particular stage. We found that 78% of the USA departments and 53% of the Canadian departments do not allow applicants to fail any stage of the selection process and still be considered for employment. The remaining departments in both countries indicated being more flexible by allowing an applicant to fail at least one stage and still be considered for employment or to repeat a particular stage if he or she failed. Additionally, a few USA departments stated that after passing a qualifying state (e.g., a written exam) a composite scoring method is used. In these cases, applicants received points based on data from two to three selection stages, but usually only after the score for each stage exceeds a designated cutoff.

Preference points or bonus points were given in departments of both countries to applicants having desirable qualities, experiences or skills that are designated by the department (e.g., college degree) or are required by law (e.g., veteran points). Most USA departments in which preference points were awarded did so in the initial selection stage; in a few departments, an applicant was allowed to bypass certain stages if he or she had a college degree, prior police experience or had been through a departmental cadet program. In Canada, we found preference points awarded for such qualities as height, age,

education but, unlike USA departments, bonus points were part of an elaborate point system which had been implemented by the national and provincial level departments. This system constituted a composite scoring method, but it was only considered after applicants had passed an initial weeding out stage.

The most unique way of screening applicants was in connection with Washington D.C.'s recent move to a lottery system.<sup>2</sup> After a written exam is taken, which has been approved by the U.S. Supreme Court, applicants are randomly chosen from the pool of applicants that passed the written test. This method of making final selection decisions is being seriously questioned, partly because of the arbitrary cutoff passing score on the written test.

These results that describe ways in which applicants are scored suggest that negative selection is still the dominant philosophy underlying personnel selection in law enforcement in the USA and Canada. There is evidence in both countries that departments do use bonus points or composite scoring after an initial pass/fail stage, but in all departments surveyed some type of screening out selection practice was evident.

#### Police Selection Within A Traditional System

The personnel selection process in law enforcement is defined in the USA and Canada by a number of stages that begin after recruitment and pre-selection (i.e., evaluation of minimum requirements) activities have been completed. We found that the selection system configuration of 95% of the 85 USA and 35 Canadian departments was comprised of 5-8 stages. Six departments reported having only three stages and two departments indicated having 10 stages. Within each stage, one or more selection methods or devices are used to collect information about applicants. The five most common selection stages included the written test, oral interview, psychological screening, the physical agility test

and background investigation.

In the written testing stage of the typical law enforcement selection process, we found applicants being tested on cognitive abilities like vocabulary, math, reading comprehension, abstract reasoning and situational reasoning. Another testing approach relies on standardized intelligence tests that are designed to measure an applicant's cognitive potential. The written testing stage was found in most USA law enforcement departments (93%) and in a majority of Canadian departments (89%). It was commonly the first stage in USA departments (78%); however, in Canada, only 49% of the departments reported it as the first stage in the selection process.

Among the departments surveyed, the oral interview ranked second only to the written test in the USA as one of the most commonly used techniques (88%), and ranked first in Canada as the most frequently used selection method (100%). While Canada and the USA relied heavily on the oral interview, these countries sequenced this stage differently. Over one-half of the Canadian departments surveyed (57%) introduced applicants to the oral testing stage at either the first or second stage in the process. In the USA, 95 percent of the departments placed this stage at or near the end of the process. Another noticeable difference between the application of the oral interview in these two countries was that, in Canada, we found some departments using a one-person interview in the initial screening stage; whereas, in the USA, the oral interview was predominantly conducted by a board at the end of the process. In most USA and Canadian departments, there was only a single oral interviewing stage; however, in 14% of the USA and 17% of the Canadian departments surveyed, two or three oral interviews were conducted at different stages of the selection process.

The purpose of establishing a psychological screening stage has been to

identify those persons who are unfit for police work as well as identifying those who have a personality appropriate for the demands and rigors of a law enforcement career. Fifty-one percent of the USA and 57% of the Canadian departments surveyed confirmed use of some method of psychological screening. A breakdown of screening methods used to determine psychological fitness by their popularity among the USA departments surveyed is: 33% of the departments use only psychological tests; 5% of the departments require an interview by a psychologist; 8% of the departments combine psychological testing with an interview by a psychologist; 5% require state certification which involves psychological testing and an interview by a psychologist.

Although the majority of USA and Canadian departments with a psychological screening component use psychological tests which are a pencil and paper type, the tests themselves differ in make-up, purpose and method. Among the different types are: intelligence, interest and preference, personality and social maturity. As reflected in the literature and survey results, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality test (MMPI) continues to be the most popular standardized test, even though it is considered suspect by some psychologists. Conversely, a less widely used test, the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) has been referred to as the "sane man's MMPI" and some psychologists believe it may provide a more useful personality assessment device for use in research on police selection.

The final two traditional stages that were examined in this study were physical agility testing (P.A.T.) and the background investigation (B.I.) stages of the selection process. With respect to the P.A.T., its basic purpose has been to weed out those candidates who, due to physiological impediments or lack of coordination, etc., will not be able to withstand the physical stress of police work. Typical events of the physical agility test include exercises in speed,

endurance, agility and strength. Seventy-eight percent of the USA departments interviewed indicated that this stage was incorporated into the selection process, while 51% of the Canadian departments surveyed reported that the P.A.T. was being used. Several additional Canadian departments indicated that an agility test was being considered.

The background investigation, which 95% of all USA and 100% of the Canadian departments report using, also serves to weed out undesirables. The common areas in which the investigator focuses are: work history; employment record; military record; educational background; criminal record; family/marital history; financial stability/credit; medical history; and the use of narcotics/alcohol. The most noticeable difference between USA and Canada selection practice concerned the use of the polygraph in the background investigation. We found this investigative device being used by 41% of the 85 USA departments surveyed but only 8% of the 35 Canadian departments. Two USA departments and one Canadian department indicated only using the polygraph in unusual circumstances where further determination of a candidate's credentials was necessary (i.e., used only to check the accuracy of information obtained by other selection methods.)

#### Selection Practices Within Alternative Systems

We uncovered three unique selection system configurations that were atypical in USA or Canada, but conceivably are viable considerations for planning for change. These were selection systems that included an assessment center approach, observation in the academy and in a field training program, and a demonstration school.

The assessment center approach has been said to be one of the more innovative selection practices that has been introduced in law enforcement in the last

10 years. Assessment centers have been most widely used in the private sector, and only within the last 15 years have they been incorporated into the law enforcement field, most noticeably in regard to promotion. Its use for selecting entry level officers has been gaining popularity in the last few years, but the expense of implementing the method has deterred widespread use.

The approach emphasizes a multiple assessment technique in which multiple evaluators assess a group of individuals at the same time using a variety of situational tests and simulated exercises. Attention is placed on behavior in connection with crime prevention, report writing, dispute resolution, interaction with the community, and team policing, among others. The true assessment center can replace the written exam, psychological screening and oral interview stages of the selection process.

In our survey, we found 8 USA and 2 Canadian departments using the assessment center approach as a separate stage of the selection process, usually as a final stage prior to the academy. Unfortunately, the high cost of administering the assessment center has resulted in its being dropped by some departments, for example, Ft. Collins, Colorado, one of the earliest departments to use the method. One effort to minimize cost has been to set up regional assessment centers where a number of departments can send final applicants for testing prior to selection in the academy. This is being done in British Columbia, Canada<sup>3</sup> as well as Florida,<sup>4</sup> reportedly with good results.

Another emerging feature in personnel selection for law enforcement is to use academy training and/or field training programs as an observatory which constitutes the final stages of the selection process. In these final stages, the applicant's behavior (i.e., job performance) is observed and evaluated in the academy training and on-the-job training settings. If a candidate success-

fully completes these stages, he or she becomes a commissioned law enforcement officer.

During the early 1970s, the Dayton Police Department considered academy training as one of the most critical stages of the selection process. Additionally, the San Jose Police Department has considered field training and further, has validated the field training. Recently, Florida has incorporated the "systematic approach" for hiring, by integrating all phases of hiring, training and retention of officers into a six-part process, including: recruitment; recruit selection; psychological testing; classroom academy training; field training officer program; and, probation.

A third unique selection system configuration included a "demonstration school."<sup>5</sup> When this school is added to the selection process, applicants who have successfully completed all selection stages (prior to the academy) spend one week attending a school designed to present a realistic view of police work. Candidates are given an opportunity to raise questions about law enforcement careers, discuss the benefits and pitfalls of a law enforcement career and interact with sworn officers. Additionally, candidates must complete physical tests and other coursework. By the end of the week, the candidate and department both have a better opportunity to assess the candidate's suitability for the job. Candidates who successfully complete the school then go into academy training.

#### Controversy and Change in USA Police Selection Practices

During the past 10 years, we found that there has been continuing controversy and change occurring in USA police selection practices. Conversely, Canadian police selection methods were reported being challenged on rare occasions.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in the Canadian departments surveyed we discovered that



extensive changes had been made in preselection criteria, e.g., height and gender requirements; but with the exception of the Royal Mounted Police, the provincial departments and several municipal forces, minimal changes have been made in selection practices. As such, only the extent and nature of the controversy and changes in USA selection practices are discussed below.

#### Written Test

One of the most serious complaints from applicants, administrators and the courts is that the written test does not measure an applicant's potential for performance in the law enforcement field (i.e., lack of predictive validity). Moreso, the traditionally used tests have been found to be culturally biased against minority group members and lacking in job-relatedness. Our survey highlighted this pattern of concern in that, of the 47 USA departments (55%) whose selection process had been challenged, 26 were because of complaints against the written test.

Efforts to rectify past deficiencies have resulted in a variety of changes being made in the written test by police and civil service departments in the last 10 years. Eighty-nine percent of the USA departments surveyed noted having made at least one change in the written test stage of the selection process, the following being most often mentioned: modification of current test content; modification of scoring method; development or substitution of new test; and deletion of test or substitution of alternative method. Notably, 58% of the departments that indicated having made changes in the written testing stage did so because of being challenged or the potential for being challenged.

The kind of changes being made in the written testing stage has been to make the tests more job-related, usually through an expensive validation process. We found that 58% of the USA departments reported having the written test vali-

dated, which was often conducted by an outside consulting firm or University.<sup>7</sup>

Efforts have also been made to develop written tests in the USA that can be transported and administered in multiple jurisdictions. For example, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), in conjunction with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), and International Personnel Management Association (IPMA) have developed a multijurisdictional examination for entry-level police officers (Rosenfeld and Thornton, 1976). Although the USA survey results did not discover any particular test being widely used among departments in different jurisdictions, we did note that within certain states (e.g., Texas and California) the same examination is administered to different department's applicants for entry-level police work.

A few USA departments (7 of the 85 surveyed) either have gone so far as to eliminate the traditional, cognitive-based written test or have found options to this selection device. The particular options noted are: use of a written test based upon life experience and self analysis; use of a background history questionnaire filled out with application form; waiver of the written test for applicants with a college degree or prior police experience; and use of the oral interview, psychological tests and assessment center approach in place of the written test.

#### Oral Interview

There has also been a considerable amount of change noted in the oral interviewing stage of the USA departments during the last 10 years. Forty-four percent of the departments indicated having made changes in the content of the interview and 70% noted changes in interview procedures and structure of the board. In regard to interview content, change was reported in the type of questions asked and the atmosphere in which they were being asked. We found in

the survey that USA departments are asking more structured questions that are job-related and quantifiable, and are creating an atmosphere that allows the applicant an opportunity to provide full explanations. There was also evidence that some departments were beginning to introduce situational testing (i.e., simulated exercises) at the oral interviewing stage. This new feature provides oral board members with behavior data on applicants.

We also found that departments were beginning to emphasize a relaxed atmosphere for applicants during the interview as opposed to a stressful situation. Techniques being used that might achieve this purpose include: bilingual oral exams, altering the seating arrangement of board members; use of minority/female board members especially when interviewing minority/female applicants; and pre-oral orientation before going into the interview.

As indicated above, 60 (70%) of the USA departments surveyed have made recent changes in the structure and/or procedure of the oral interview. The survey reflected that the composition of the oral boards is becoming more diverse. In addition to using civil service and departmental personnel on selection boards, departments are including community representatives, minority and female officers, and psychologists. Preparation for board members has also increased. Fifty of the USA departments reported having some type of preparation (i.e. oral, written, and/or workshops) for the oral board members. Those departments that emphasized some type of preparation for board members also stressed consistency in scoring applicants. Of particular interest is that in several departments, validation studies have emphasized inter-scorer reliability among board members.

While there have been changes made in the oral interviewing stage of most USA departments surveyed, only eight departments reported challenges in this

stage of the selection process. All of these challenges were settled out of court. In regard to validation studies, the survey indicated that only 14% of the departments had validated their oral interview; all did so in connection with validation of the entire selection process.

### Psychological Screening

The most significant change reported in psychological screening was that departments reported relying more on psychologists and situation testing (applicable to individuals and groups). The psychologist has become more involved in the selection process in recent years, possibly because of the more widespread acceptance of the psychologists in law enforcement. Among the survey departments in the USA, we found that 40% employed psychologists and 77% indicated that they do utilize outside psychologists on occasion. One state (Texas) indicated requiring certification of the psychological fitness of law enforcement candidates.

The situational testing method, which is based on simulated exercises, produces job-related behavioral data, particularly behavioral information in regard to interpersonal skills. In several instances, we found among the departments surveyed, that situational testing was associated with the oral interviewing stage and in several other cases, the method was introduced as part of an established psychological screening stage. Even though the tests seem to be more closely aligned to actual job performance, the expense seems to deter widespread use.

In terms of litigation and validation studies in connection with psychological screening methods, there has been little activity during the past 10 years in either of these areas. Of the USA survey departments, only six reported that their psychological screening methods and procedures had been challenged.

Similarly, we were only able to find four departments which had validated the psychological screening devices. Usually these methods were validated as a part of a larger validation of the entire selection process.

#### Physical Agility and the Background Investigation

Among USA departments, 65% indicated that changes had been made in Physical Agility Tests (PAT) during the last 10 years. A noticeable trend has been toward restructuring these tests to be more job-related by having candidates perform functions normally associated with police work. Less emphasis is being placed on the traditional push-up, pull-up and broad jump exercises. Much of this change has been stimulated by the high litigation potential stemming from the fact that, in 14 of the 47 departments reporting challenges in the selection process, all have been in connection with the P.A.T. As such, departments have begun to take steps not only to modify the test structure, but to help prepare applicants for the test. Some departments noted that preparation for the test is given through the use of booklets describing the test and related exercises or through physical conditioning programs to prepare applicants for the test. Also, 19 of the 85 USA departments indicated that a validation study had been conducted, mostly because of litigation or the litigation potential of this method.

In regard to change, in the background investigation practices in the USA, 53% of the departments surveyed indicated having made at least one change in the structure or content of the background investigation during the past 10 years (e.g., using better trained investigators or a more in-depth investigation format). The major reason given for making changes in content was that changing social norms were responsible for deleting out-dated questions, or relaxing past standards (e.g., an applicant's experimentation with marijuana is not necessarily an automatic reason for rejection.) Question content has also been

an oral interview in the initial stages in the selection process, whereas most USA departments favor the written exam as the initial screening stage. In addition, few departments in Canada use the polygraph while almost half of the USA departments use this device.

Both countries have piloted alternative selection systems which incorporate the assessment center approach. The concept of regionalized centers is growing. In the USA there is a push to use observation at the academy and field training stage as a regular selection method and to formalize training as stages of the selection system. Another unique stage that has been piloted in the USA is a demonstration school where final candidates and sworn officers mingle in a relaxed atmosphere.

The results showed that there has been continued controversy surrounding police selection practices in the USA. Also, USA departments have engaged in extensive changes in an effort to bring the selection criteria more closely in focus with actual job responsibilities; however, much of the impetus has come from outside departmental walls and has centered on re-assessment and modification of current selection methods.

More controversy and hence, research, has been conducted with respect to the written test than any other method. In the USA it has consistently come under fire for lack of validity (in testing what it is supposed to), but remains in use by nearly all departments (supplemented by validation studies to prove its job-relatedness). The oral interview remains a method cemented into the process, and changes in the oral board make-up and interview content reflect efforts to make the interview a more accurate method of measuring a person's interpersonal skills. In the area of psychological screening, comparatively little has changed in that most departments administer a standardized test.

changed in part due to increased privacy laws and guidelines which prohibit certain types of questions.

The B.I. stage of USA departments has seldom been challenged - only six of the 47 challenged departments in the USA survey. When contested, this stage has come under fire from applicants and the courts for being discriminatory in its content, or for having an adverse impact on members of minority groups. Validation action was found to be limited to only 5 (6%) of the 85 USA departments. This may be due to the difficulty associated with the assessment of this facet of the process.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Selection practices in law enforcement have been said to be one of the most complex facets of personnel management. In an effort to document the state of this complexity internationally, the study presented provides state of the art information about police personnel practices in the USA and Canada.

The results have shown that similarities and differences do exist in the selection practices of these two countries. In regard to police personnel philosophy, the departments surveyed in USA and Canada reflect a strong negative selection orientation with all departments reporting to some degree using a pass/fail scoring method. Canada, more so than the USA, adheres to positive selection by incorporating a composite scoring method after an initial pass/fail stage.

The USA and Canada are similar regarding the employment of the traditional selection system consisting of a written exam, psychological screening methods, oral interview, background investigation and physical agility testing. However, these two countries are dissimilar in the sequencing of the selection stages and in the use of the polygraph. That is, many Canadian departments rely heavily on

However, there appears to be a trend toward more use of psychologists in the selection process. In both the oral interview and psychological screening stages, some departments are incorporating use of situational tests and simulation exercises to observe an applicant's behavior in real life situations.

The physical agility tests are being redesigned to shift focus from exercises of strength to physical exercises more representative of actual police duties. Candidates are also given better preparation to successfully complete this test. Much of the change noted with respect to the background interview has been to streamline the interview to exclude discriminatory or irrelevant questions and to focus more in-depth on the applicant's background characteristics such as criminal record, etc.

What new directions can be offered for the 1980's which pertain to personnel selection in international law enforcement? These study results suggest, at least in the USA, that there has been extensive change pertaining to police personnel practices; however, the parameters of these changes are set by a negative selection philosophy which all departments surveyed in the USA and Canada endorse to some degree. We can decide to reconceptualize police selection as a process by which applicants would be "screened in" entirely on the basis of positive attributes and/or their potential ability to be trained to perform law enforcement tasks.<sup>8</sup>

The idea would be to view the process as beginning with no candidates available for (x) number of unfilled positions for which (y) acceptable candidates have to be found. This is in contrast to the traditional view which sees the process beginning with a large pool of applicants, most of which have to be screened out. Additionally, a screen-in approach directs the use of selection devices to search for positive information about applicants' trainability rather than negative information assumed to affect applicants' ability to perform law



enforcement tasks. Also, a truly positive selection system creates reinforcements at each stage of the process to ensure that applicants have the opportunity to demonstrate their maximum potential. Conversely, a screen out system creates hurdles which are designed to identify weakness. Finally, a positive selection system has composite scoring procedures in which applicants accumulate points for positive strengths, and unlike the screen out system, does not screen out applicants for weaknesses not known to negatively affect job performance.

If selection criteria relates primarily to positive qualities and the trainability of applicants, this alternative selection philosophy would produce an array of changes in selection practice. The appropriateness of some methods like written exams, intelligence tests, and personality tests, would continue to be seriously questioned. Other methods like the background investigation and oral interview could be revised to produce data about applicants' positive qualities and trainability. Also, a positive approach to selection would legitimize the assessment center approach and observation at the academy and field training stages. Finally, emphasizing positive qualities and the trainability of applicants may spark new approaches to selecting candidates for the law enforcement profession. In total, a selection philosophy as described has the potential for producing not only changes in police selection devices but also changes in other areas of personnel management, training, and ultimately, the quality of international law enforcement.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Instrument construction entailed numerous work sessions with the interviewers who participated in question construction and role playing exercises. Additionally, pre-tests were conducted using three Alaskan departments. These were the Anchorage Police Department, the Kenai Police Department, and the Soldotna Police Department.

<sup>2</sup> See Bosarge (1981b) for a discussion of this new initiative in police selection.

<sup>3</sup> Twelve municipal departments in British Columbia send final candidates to the Justice Institute of British Columbia in Vancouver for one day assessment center exercises in six areas.

<sup>4</sup> The Miami-Dade County Assessment Center is located at Miami-Dade County Community College in Miami, Florida.

<sup>5</sup> See McCutcheon (1977) for a discussion of this method.

<sup>6</sup> We found, through the five telephone interviews with Canadian departments, that it was unusual for litigation to be brought against selection methods being used in law enforcement.

<sup>7</sup> These validation studies focused on content, construct, and concurrent validity checks. Of the validation studies we were able to retrieve, none addresses the issue of predictive validity. It is worth noting that while test validation activity was not uncommon, there was no report of a systematic follow-up evaluation of changes being made in the written testing stage.

<sup>8</sup> Credit should be given posthumously to Walt Lawson, former Director of Administrative Services, Alaska Department of Public Safety for introducing the concept of trainability as a potential police selection criterion in Alaska.

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