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Police Management



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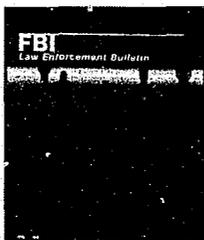
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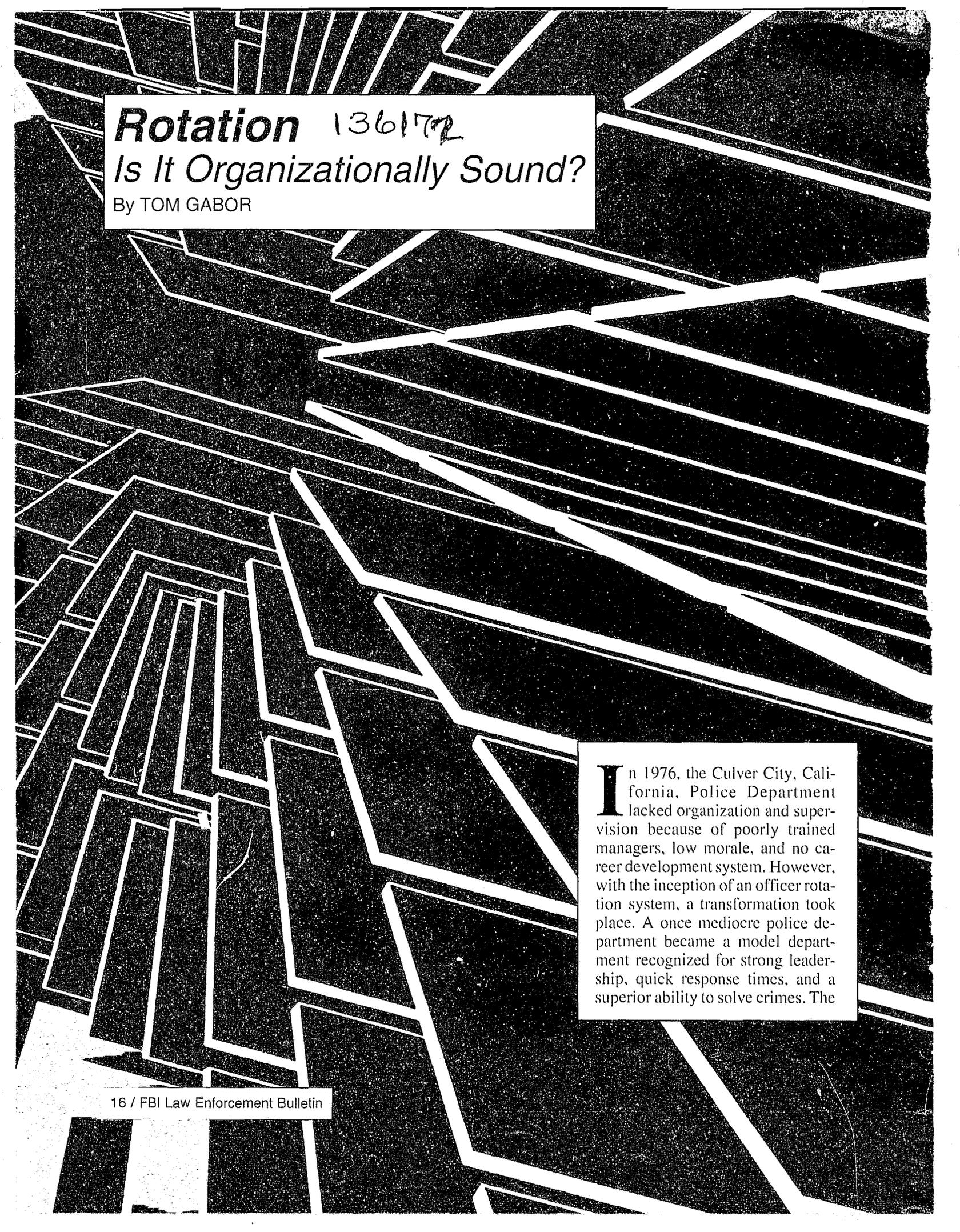
William S. Sessions, Director

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Rotation 136172
Is It Organizationally Sound?

By TOM GABOR

In 1976, the Culver City, California, Police Department lacked organization and supervision because of poorly trained managers, low morale, and no career development system. However, with the inception of an officer rotation system, a transformation took place. A once mediocre police department became a model department recognized for strong leadership, quick response times, and a superior ability to solve crimes. The

rotation system allows officers to rotate positions to strengthen their leadership skills and enhance their overall knowledge of the department through assignments in various bureaus and sections of the department.

This article discusses the rotation process implemented by the police department and how it improves organizational efficiency. It also explains how the system impacts on the ability of the Culver City Police Department to enforce laws and protect lives and property.

DEPARTMENTS WITHOUT ROTATION SYSTEMS

Departments without an organizationally sound rotation system may encounter two specific problems. One is that these departments traditionally perceive certain employees as indispensable. This view fosters the belief that if particular employees do not remain in their specialized fields, the overall operation of the agency will suffer. At the same time, another problem exists in that other employees may feel stagnated by remaining in the same position over a number of years.

Indispensable Employees

Most police officers hope to serve in specialized assignments, such as on detective squads or in personnel, training, or budget departments. However, while assignments to these specialized units allow the officers to gain valuable expertise, a strange organizational phenomenon seems to occur if they stay in the same position over a number of years. After a period of

time, supervisors begin to view these employees as indispensable employees—experts who always have the correct answer. And, when these employees ultimately depart, they leave a noticeable void that remains until the next “indispensable” person can be trained.

When the indispensable employee philosophy exists at the supervisory levels—sergeant, lieutenant, captain—an even greater potential for stagnation and elitism exists. Supervisors lack appreciation for how policies, personnel matters, and budgetary concerns of one bureau impact other bureaus of the department. Power struggles may develop among these supervisors, and unproductive posturing for limited resources often pits unit against unit. This may result in empire building, wherein the goals of

the department, as a whole, are often in conflict with individual agendas.

Stagnating Employees

While most employees develop useful expertise after working the same assignment for an extended period of time, they often also develop a variety of undesirable traits because they are locked into one assignment for many years. These undesirable traits include laziness, due to lack of interest or variety, or tunnel vision (believing that one detail is the most important).

Leaving employees in the same assignment for extended periods of time also promotes elitism or cliques within specialized groups, such as drug squads, homicide squads, or patrol squads. Many of these employees develop the attitude that fresh ideas are rarely as

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Lieutenant Gabor serves as personnel officer for the Culver City, California, Police Department.

good or valid as the old tried-and-true methods. However, rotating personnel on a regular basis gives employees a well-rounded view of the department's overall operation and limits the organizational problems caused by leaving employees in one position for long periods of time.

The administration of the Culver City Police Department does not adhere to the belief that any employee is indispensable, irreplaceable, or so valuable that the organization would have great difficulty functioning effectively without that person. Instead, management believes that rotating personnel eliminates stagnation, elitism, and undesirable cliques, all of which limit the effectiveness of the department, as well as the ability of the department to respond to change.

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THE ROTATION SYSTEM

Rotation of Managers

The rotation system is a simple process that administrators can implement with minimal interruption to the overall operation of the department. In the Culver City Police Department, captains rotate every 18 months to serve as the commander of one of four bureaus—administration, traffic,

detectives, and operations. This allows them to manage all four sections of the police department, giving them important insights into the problems experienced by the individual bureaus.

The department also requires that lieutenants and sergeants rotate assignments every 18 months. Approximately 1 month before the rotation takes effect, lieutenants may submit their top three choices of assignments. Although the chief and bureau commanders decide where the lieutenants will be assigned, every effort is made to accommodate particular requests. Eventually, however, all lieutenants work each assignment.

Rotating supervisors increases their knowledge of how the department functions overall and allows upper-level managers to gain

greater experience by commanding all areas of the department. This important experience prepares them to deal more effectively with any problems that may arise.

Rotation of Patrol Officers

While captains, lieutenants, and sergeants rotate automatically, patrol officers may also opt to rotate by submitting their requests for particular assignments to the appropri-

ate bureau commanders as positions become available. However, due to the nature of the assignments at the officer level, supervisors mete out rotations within a different timeframe. For example, officers rotate from multijurisdictional drug task forces after 24 months, from the crime impact team after 12 months, from the motor squads after 36 months, and from the canine squad after 36 months.

When patrol officers complete specialized assignments, they return to the patrol pool to fill the vacancies created by additional rotations. Rotating patrol officers in this manner allows the department to build continually a more mature and experienced patrol force that better understands the department's overall mission. This minimizes the number of errors that are made which, in turn, minimizes lawsuits in one of the most potentially volatile areas of law enforcement—patrol operations.

BENEFITS

The rotation system benefits both the department and its personnel. It adds vigor and vitality to the organization, and it promotes high morale and fresh ideas. Above all, it enhances the employees' understanding of the overall operation of the department. This, in turn, gives officers a greater sense of confidence and knowledge about law enforcement management and related issues when attending meetings or training classes with other police departments.

As an added benefit, the rotation system creates an environment

of give and take among department supervisors. With every rotation, incoming supervisors review section and bureau policies to ensure that applications to the law are correct.

And finally, the experience that supervisors gain through rotating positions contributes to individual growth and administrative insight. This better enables them to make knowledgeable decisions that benefit the department as a whole, rather than just a small part of it.

RESULTS

The Culver City Police Department measures its effectiveness in four major areas:

- Response times
- Case clearance rate
- Traffic index
- Employee morale

Since the inception of the rotation system, the department has experienced some interesting changes in these areas.

For example, the department now realizes one of the quickest response times in Los Angeles County and one of the highest case clearance rates in the State. In addition, from 1980 to 1990, violent crime dropped 44 percent and repressible crime dropped 37 percent. Interestingly, during this same period, surrounding jurisdictions experienced an increase in crime.

The traffic index—the number of citations written for every accident with injuries—also measures the effectiveness of police departments. The traffic index at the Culver City Department is nearly three

times higher than the State recommendation, and this helps reduce the number of traffic accidents with injuries by nearly one-half.

The final measure of effectiveness—morale—is difficult to measure. However, employees with high morale are usually productive employees. The department's success in reducing response times and the number of traffic accidents with injuries and in increasing the number of cases cleared, in large part, can be attributed to involved and productive employees who are satisfied with their jobs. The rotation system contributes significantly to job satisfaction, and therefore, promotes high morale among the officers.

CONCLUSION

Law enforcement officials should not underestimate the value of the rotation system. The experience gained by officers who rotate

positions prepares them to deal effectively with any problems that may arise, and it prepares them for a position of leadership, whether inside or outside the department. For example, six Culver City supervisors—out of a department of 117 sworn officers—have been selected for the position of chief of other departments. This allows room for greater upward mobility within the department, which helps to boost morale significantly.

Clearly, the rotation system as a management tool can change the complexion of police departments. High morale, a clear understanding of the common mission, efficiency, harmony between bureaus and sections, fresh ideas, and a stronger team are but a few of the benefits that departments can experience from the program. Police chiefs nationwide would do well to consider an organizationally sound rotation system. ■

One Officer's Rotation Path

- Patrol officer—2 years
- Training officer—2 years
- Promoted to sergeant
- Patrol sergeant—2 years
- Crime impact team supervisor—2 years
- Training officer (administration)—2 years
- Promoted to Lieutenant
- Watch commander—2 years
- Budget officer—2 years
- Personnel officer (current position)