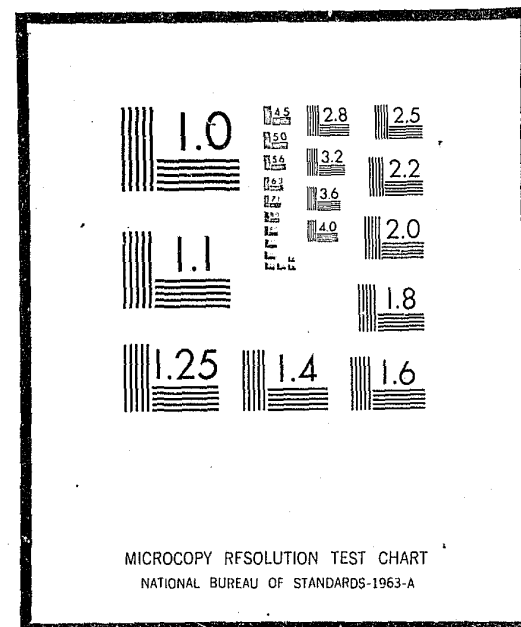


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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFERENCE SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20531

Date filmed,

4/5/76

TITLE: Fort Worth Police Department Assessment
Center: Selection Model Component

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FORT WORTH POLICE DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT
CENTER: SELECTION MODEL COMPONENT

Most assessment centers have been developed and implemented as instruments to identify and develop managerial potential. The Fort Worth Police Department Assessment Center, on the other hand, was developed for initial selection rather than for promotion purposes. The Center was instituted in an attempt to develop a selection procedure for entry level police officers. It is unique in that with the possible exception of Drug Enforcement Agents in the State of Mississippi, it is the only, operational assessment center in the country designed specifically for entry level police officers. To our knowledge this was the first successful effort in developing and implementing an Assessment Center procedure in this area. Other police departments have shown considerable interest in developing Assessment Centers for entry level police officers but have experienced little progress at this time.

Development of the Fort Worth Police Department Assessment Center was not intended to replace all previous methods of recruit selection. The Assessment Center was intended to supplement the selection procedures used in the successful recruitment of police personnel for the Department.

There was some concern on the part of the Civil Service Director that previous selection programs were not incorporating the latest selection methods utilized by business and industry. As a result of this concern, during the spring of 1973, the Cities of Fort Worth, Arlington and Wichita Falls, in conjunction with Dr. R. E. Smith and Dr. Don Ellis,¹ U.S. Civil

Service Commission, proposed to develop an assessment center based on very careful analysis of the job of an entry level police officer. Also, certain data relevant to performance criteria of all of the presently employed police officers of the Cities of Fort Worth, Arlington and Wichita Falls, was also considered to be important, and data was collected relevant to performance measures of all the incumbent police officers. Based on the job analysis and the data collection that had been done and the familiarity that was gained as a result of this work, it became apparent that not only an Assessment Center was needed for these cities but a comprehensive Selection Model was also needed. The purpose of the Selection Model was to provide preliminary screening so that only applicants who had a reasonable claim to minimum qualifications for the job of a police officer would be considered in the Assessment Center. The screening process which was considered included a review of the application, the development and validation of a written test, the development of a new strength and agility test, some recommendations related to the physical examination or medical examination, a review and consultation on the background investigation and the allied polygraph examination, a recommendation for a new Legal Review panel, and the prospects for utilizing a mental evaluation where it was appropriate. This screening process was expected to reduce the number of applicants to a manageable number so that the Assessment Center process could be employed in determining the best qualified applicants for the job. A new problem was identified in the development of the Assessment Center. It was determined that the job of an incumbent police officer was not really the kind of target that the department wanted to focus the Assessment Center on, because it was discovered that a police trainee could

¹ Currently employed with the Personnel Department, City of Fort Worth.

acquire certain knowledge, skill, or ability as a result of training in a rather extensive police academy, so therefore, an intermediate step in the research became necessary. It was necessary to go back and do a subsequent analysis of the job using a job element approach which would eliminate those elements of the job of entry level police officers that were most affected by experience and training. Therefore, the developmental work on the Assessment Center was focused on those elements of the job that were least affected by experience and training and which an applicant could reasonably be expected to bring to the job.

From the original job analysis it was determined that the written test actually should be used primarily to predict success in training. Therefore, the state standards provided by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education, were reviewed. The curriculum materials and student products in the police academy were also reviewed. Copies of student notebooks were Xeroxed and a content valid examination for reading comprehension and word knowledge on police training materials was developed, since basic reading and vocabulary was not taught in the police academies. This content valid reading comprehension and word knowledge test utilizing police training materials, entitled "Basic Occupational Language for Police Officers (BOLPO)", became the written screening test in the selection process.

Assessment Center Dimensions and Exercises

The Assessment Center dimensions which were determined to be appropriate for determining the qualification and selection of entry level police officers, were as follows:

1. Sensitivity to people
2. Oral communications
3. Tolerance for stress
4. Decisiveness
5. Leadership
6. Judgment
7. Perception
8. Following directions
9. Ability to work independently
10. Writing skills

Dr. Tom Lyons was given the assignment of developing some Assessment Center exercises that would permit an applicant to demonstrate these knowledges, skills, abilities or characteristics in a setting that would be as representative of that in which an entry level police officer might find himself. The evaluation of an applicant's performance to these Assessment Center dimensions would be made by a panel of trained assessors. They would not evaluate an applicant's performance based on his knowledge of police work, or prescribed procedures, but would evaluate an applicant's performance based on his good judgment and natural ability. The assessment center exercises which Dr. Lyons authored consisted of a work simulation exercise (including a written part), a group exercise and a structured interview. The work simulation exercise uses an audio tape in combination with a variety of routine tasks to simulate conditions in which the applicant could demonstrate his abilities along the prescribed dimensions of an entry level police officer's job. The audio portion of the work simulation exercise is followed by a written exercise which requires the applicant to produce a brief written report on experiences encountered during the audio portion of this exercise. The written report would be reviewed by a trained assessor as well as having the applicant's behavior observed and recorded while performing the work simulation exercise. Next,

the applicant is scheduled into a group exercise. In the group exercise three video tape vignettes are given as stimuli to the applicants. The applicant must make some decision as to a possible course of action in each of the three situations presented in the video tape vignettes. Then a group of six applicants under the observance of three trained assessors are assigned the responsibility of coming up with a single solution or single recommended disposition of one of the video tape problems. In the group exercise the applicant gets an opportunity to demonstrate his interpersonal skills, leadership, and other abilities necessary for relating to and dealing with people.

Finally, the last Assessment Center exercise is a one-on-one interview. At this time the applicant is given a set of nine structured questions, and the assessor records the applicant's response to these questions. Following the applicant's response to the nine structured questions, the assessor is also given an opportunity to review all written material produced by the applicant in the Assessment Center process. Upon conclusion of the Assessment Center, the three assessors re-convene and arrive at the appropriate evaluation of each applicant's performance. A careful rating procedure has been provided which permits a considerable degree of objectivity in the evaluation received by each of the applicants in the process. In the most recent application of the Assessment Center for entry level police officers in Fort Worth, approximately 150 applicants were screened through the selection process. Of these, 55 were evaluated in the Center, 25 applicants were selected for the police academy class. Some observations of police executives who have been connected with the

assessment center have been made; and, it seems that Chief T. S. Walls, Deputy Chief H. F. Hopkins, Captain B. M. Kennedy, who is in charge of Training, and the co-authors of this article, are all of the opinion that the Assessment Center has served the City very well by identifying an outstanding group of best qualified applicants for entry level police officer jobs.

Assessors

The assessors are expected to be job knowledge experts on police work or qualified in the area of personnel selection. Special training for the assessors lasts for about one week. Each of the assessors has been assessed as an applicant in the training. Each assessor has worked as an assessor in the training -- they have experience as assessors on all of the exercises and have been tested themselves on all of the exercises. The last two days after they become thoroughly familiar with all of the exercises, they can discuss the details of the exercises. Then they are instructed on the rating procedures.

Equal Employment Opportunity Testing

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines on personnel selection require that a test for employment establish predictive validity wherever feasible; but, the determination of that feasibility has not been established at this point. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines, therefore, state that Content, Construct or any other professionally recognized standard of validity may be used.

Creators of the Assessment Center also developed written tests which were based on a content validation approach. In addition, a predictive validity study on the written test of reading comprehensive and work knowledge test was carried out. Tests were developed that would be predictive of success in the police training academy since success in training is the first task a prospective police officer must successfully complete. It was determined that the predictive validity for the reading comprehension and word knowledge test on police training materials was .66, highly predictive of success in a police training academy.

As far as test fairness, without a predictive validity study, the traditional statistical measures of test fairness are not possible; but, neither are they necessary because the Assessment Center is not testing in the abstract in any way. The Center is not testing to something that may be culturally biased. Only job requirements are tested.

Assessment Center Costs and Benefits

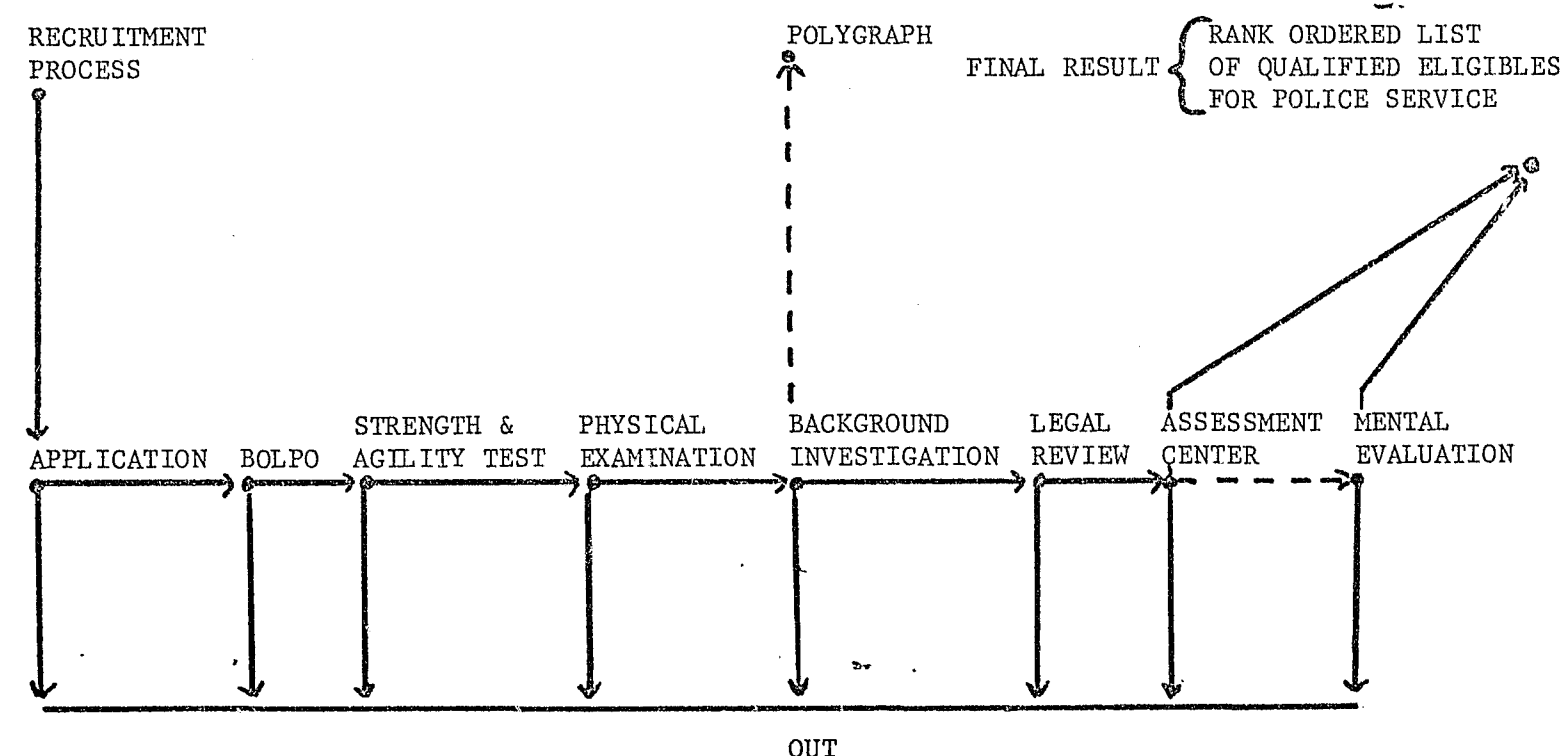
The cost to the City of Fort Worth is fairly significant because it requires about a man day of time for each applicant that goes through the Assessment Center. Currently the Center is averaging a little over two applicants per vacancy filled. In addition, one professional man day of time is required for administration of the Assessment Center.

Benefits derived from this type of investment would be largely determined by how much the City of Fort Worth values having the best qualified applicant actually filling each vacancy in the Police Department. Typically,

assessment centers are used to select managers because the kinds of decisions they make can result in tremendous loss or gain; and, the philosophy here is that since police officers' critical skills are things like interpersonal skills, decision making skills, tolerance for stress skills, the consequence of error can result in severe human cost.

Summary

The Fort Worth Police Department Assessment Center was not created to replace previous recruitment standards. It was created to become an integral part of an overall Selection Model for police officers. The diagram below illustrates this very significant point:



Final selection of all candidates is to be based upon the ranking of eligibles which is representative of an individual applicant's demonstrated abilities as measured along valid, job-related dimensions of an entry level police officer's job.

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Management Analyst

Juan Araiza is a Management Analyst with the Research and Planning Division of the Fort Worth Police Department. His current responsibilities include development and preparation of the Criminal Justice Plan for the City of Fort Worth Police Department and is involved in short-range planning. He was previously a Manpower Planning Analyst with the Office of Manpower Planning, North Central Texas Council of Governments. He has a B.B.A. from University of Texas at Arlington and is working toward a M.B.A. at Texas Christian University.

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