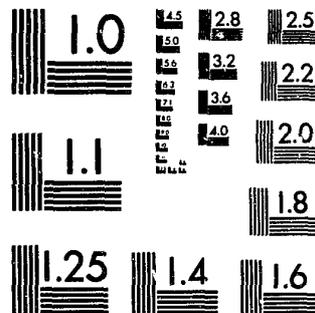


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**A TASK ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIAL AGENT JOB IN THE
GEORGIA BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

by
JOHN FAY*

BACKGROUND

In 1975, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GIB) was beginning to stabilize after a turbulent period of reorganization and redefinition of purpose. What for many years had been a subordinate element of the Department of Public Safety suddenly became, in 1973, a separate state agency with new responsibilities and a new management structure. As is frequently the case with new born and reborn organizations, GBI's start was characterized by rapid growth, high levels of activity, and an entrepreneurial leadership style.

The leveling off phase began in 1975, after a new director was appointed. The organization began to rationalize internally, concerning itself with the question "where are we now, where are we going and how do we get there?"

Among the issues to be faced was the need to more precisely identify the work actually performed by special agents. This was not an easy thing to do. Georgia is the largest State east of the Mississippi, with a sheriff for each of its 159 counties; there are more than 500 other local law enforcement agencies, with more than 80 percent of them small departments without in-house investigative capabilities. Meaning? That the work of an agent is performed at widely scattered locations, and for a large number of different agencies with each agency having a unique set of investigative needs. The highly decentralized character of work at the operating level made it difficult, if not impossible, to apportion work sensibly and to hold agents accountable. Moreover, managers and supervisors were rarely in perfect agreement as to what the typical agent did in the field, or for that matter, what he was supposed to be doing.

An identification of job tasks would do at least two things for GBI: (1) it would help in the design/implementation of basic and inservice training programs for investigators. (2) it would help identify knowledge, skills, and abilities that a job applicant must have to function as a productive, contributing agent at the entry-level.

With a modest grant from the Georgia State Crime Commission, a job task analysis project got underway in March 1977.

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1. Reports prepared by agents.
Daily and monthly activity reports.
Investigative summaries and statements.
Lead requests and replies.
Disposition reports.
2. Forms filled out by agents.
Evidence receipts.
Chain of custody forms
Vehicle usage forms.
Travel vouchers.
Confidential funds vouchers.
3. Job descriptions.
4. Performance goals and objectives.
5. Policy manual.
6. Procedures manual.
7. Prescriptive memorandums.
8. Training materials.

A written product, in draft form, emerged from each interview. These products were the working materials for the next step.

PREPARATION OF A PRELIMINARY LIST OF JOB TASKS

Using the materials developed in concert with the five supervisors, the writer created a preliminary list of job tasks. Considerable winnowing, editing and elimination of duplications, was necessary. This inventory of tasks was then sent, under cover letter, to 22 first-line supervisors.

REVIEWING AND REVISING THE INVENTORY

Some advance preparation had been made for this step. At the two preceding quarterly supervisors meetings, the Director of Investigations announced the project, broadly described it, endorsed it, and enjoined the supervisors to cooperate. The letter and the attached list therefore came as no surprise to the 22 supervisors. Each was asked, in the letter, to thoroughly study the list, edit it to eliminate tasks not performed, reword task statements as needed, and, most importantly, add statements for tasks not identified. The revised task lists were returned to the project officer within an established deadline date.

CONSTRUCTING A QUESTIONNAIRE BOOKLET

Guidance for the design of a booklet to capture respondents' responses was influenced by three considerations (a) the purposes of the project, (b) the job holder from whom data are collected, and (c) the procedure for transfer of data from the booklet to the computer for processing.

Purposes of the project. Each task statement in the booklet needed to be written in the context of the uses to be made of the information collected. The project was seeking to answer these questions:

- Is a task performed?
- How often is it performed?
- How much time is spent performing a task?
- What are the consequences of inadequate performance?
- Must the task be performable at time of job entry?
- How important is performance of a task to the overall job?

The emphasis of the project was upon performance. The booklet focused mainly upon tasks performed at the journeyman skill level. Supervisory task statements were held to a minimum.

The job holder. In considering the job holder, the questionnaire booklet was prepared with these guidelines in mind. A task statement

- should be written in simple language.
- should be short.
- should be free of ambiguity.
- should be written in terminology familiar to the job holder.
- should be worded so that rating scales make sense when applied to it.
- should begin with an action verb that describes a visible human behavior or the product of behavior. Verbs such as "assure," "coordinate," "assist," "appreciate" or "understand" describe actions that do not lend themselves to visible (and therefore measurable) performance.

- should describe a specific job action or behavior. The action specified should
 - have a clear beginning and end.
 - be of relatively short duration.
 - be independent of other tasks or actions.
- Booklet instructions should be simple and precise. Examples should be used for clarification as needed.

Procedure for data transfer. The booklet format was designed with data transfer in mind. The procedure was determined in advance to be key punching. The format incorporated the best features of a checklist, with separate blocks for the respondent to write in single digit numbers that correspond to rating scales.

The cover of the booklet contained space for collection of background information concerning the job holder. Information items included.

- Full name.
- Rank.
- Position title.
- Investigative specialty, if any.
- Place of assignment.
- Investigative experience (in months).*
- Highest education level.*
- Training courses attended.*

(The items identified by asterisk (*) were obtained from personnel records.)

TESTING AND REVISING THE BOOKLET

The next step in the project was to administer the booklet on a test basis. Three persons completed the booklets. The booklet was found to need certain minor administrative revisions related chiefly to wording of instructions and typographical errors. No substantive problems were noted.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE REVISED BOOKLET

A three person team consisting of the writer and two principal assistants administered the booklets on location. The project was too important to permit administration by mail. Although supervisors were generally willing to administer the booklets, there could be no assurance that administration would be uniform through the organization. Further, the presence of a special team from the headquarters lent strong psychological support to the project.

An on location administration occurred as follows:

- According to pre-arrangements with the responsible supervisor(s), all agents scheduled to complete booklets were assembled and seated at the designated time and place. Because the testing step revealed administration to require between 3 and 5 hours, meetings began at mid-morning to permit the lunch hour to act also as a convenient break period.
- The project's goals and methods were explained by the team leader. Booklets and pencils with good erasers were distributed. The respondents were directed to read their booklet instructions. The team leader then answered questions posed by the respondents. (The questions asked were recorded. In subsequent briefings the points addressed previously by questions were thoroughly covered.)
- After all questions were answered, the team leader gave the signal to begin.
- Team members circulated among the respondents to deal with confusion as it arose. Close monitorship was required to insure understanding.
- As each respondent finished, a team member went over the booklet to see that responses had been properly entered. All completed booklets were taken back to headquarters, pending turnover to the key punching operation.

KEY PUNCHING OF DATA AND ANALYSIS BY COMPUTER

For efficient key punching, there can be no requirement for the key puncher to edit nor interpret the data to be punched. Accurate directions were prepared for key punchers. The booklets were disassembled, coded in certain ways, and pages organized in groupings that facilitated the key puncher's work.

As of this writing, key punching has not been completed. In any case, the focus of this paper is upon the description of a process, rather than its results.

Few projects rarely run smoothly, particularly when they involve respondent activities not previously attempted. As this project comes to a close, it is possible to identify areas to be watchful for when similar projects are attempted. They are:

- Prepare for human resistance.
- Use precise, simple wording in booklet instructions.
- Be precise in wording of tasks.
- Be realistic in deciding what factors are important.
- Use a separate booklet for each factor to be rated.
- Use rating scales that lend themselves to analysis.
- Design the booklet with data transfer in mind.

PREPARE FOR HUMAN RESISTANCE

The natural urge of people to resist change was present throughout the project. Support from supervisors was actively sought and generally obtained. Although it cannot be said that every supervisor was wildly enthusiastic about job analysis, there was no outright refusal to cooperate. Resistance, for the most part, came from the special agents who provided the data. Resistance could be seen in the utterance of remarks like:

*This is taking me away from important work.
I get a headache from filling out this form.
This is just so much unneeded paperwork.*

USE PRECISE, SIMPLE WORDING IN THE BOOKLET INSTRUCTIONS

The number of questions and the repetition of certain questions pointed to the need for extraordinary care in preparing written instructions.

BE PRECISE IN THE WORDING OF TASKS

Instead of stating

"Collect the following types of evidence:

1. glass fragments.
2. bloodstains.
3. fingerprints."

It is better to state

"Collect glass fragments.
Collect bloodstains
Collect fingerprints."

Avoid task statements that are too trivial for example. *Apply fingerprint powder* is a supporting part of a task. It is better expressed as *Collect fingerprints*.

Avoid task statements that are too broad. *Collect evidence* is made more precise by writing a separate task statement for each type of evidence to be collected.

Avoid using more than one action verb in a task statement. For example, *Collect and mark stolen property* should be broken out in two separate task statements.

Avoid overlapping task statements. *Prepare evidence receipts* might overlap with *Maintain chain of custody forms*.

Avoid redundant or qualifying phrases such as *when needed*, or *in accordance with standard operating procedures*.

BE REALISTIC IN SELECTING FACTORS

The GBI project involved rating of tasks with six factors:

Frequency	How often is the task performed?
Duration	How much time is spent in the performance of the task?
Consequences	If an error is made in the performance of the task, how damaging will the consequences be?
Difficulty	How difficult is the task to learn?
Performance Level	Must the task be learned prior to entry at the beginner level?
Overall Performance	Is the overall job dependent upon upon performance of this task?

Of the six selected, only three were genuinely important. The frequency, consequences, and performance level factors provided all of the really essential data. The other factors, for our purposes, merely give "nice-to-know" information. Much unnecessary work went into the collection of marginally valuable data.

USE A SEPARATE BOOKLET FOR EACH FACTOR

Task statements in the booklet had this appearance:

	NP	A	B	C	D	E	F
3-1 Collect glass fragments.							
3-2 Collect bloodstains.							

Each respondent placed a check mark in the "NP" column only if he had never performed the task. If he had performed the task, he would enter the numerical value he had selected from the rating scale for factor "A," which happened to be the frequency factor. Each respondent would continue down the factor "A" column, entering the frequency values for each separate task. When all tasks had been rated for frequency, he would move to column "B" and repeat the procedure for the next factor, and so on until all factors were covered.

This procedure produced three problems (a) respondents tended to become confused as to what column they were supposed to be working in, (b) they had to keep riffling back through pages to refresh their recollection of the rating scale, and (c) when a respondent noticed that the values appearing in the columns already filled out were very high or very low, he wanted to give a correspondingly high or low rating. Obviously, values for tasks would vary among factors, e.g., a task might be rated high on frequency because it is done often, but low on duration because it can be done quickly. From a natural inclination to want rating scores to appear consistent, some respondents were probably influenced by scores they could see in the columns to the left.

These problems could be reduced by using a separate booklet for each rating factor, or at least by not using more than two factors per booklet.

USE RATING SCALES THAT ASSIST ANALYSIS

Rating scales generally come in two varieties: the continuous and the categorical. The continuous scale looks like this:

1. Extremely Low
2. Very Low
3. Low
4. Below Average
5. Average

6. Above Average
7. High
8. Very High
9. Extremely High

The categorical scale is different in that it requires the respondent to select a category among several offered. The scale has "gaps" between categories, for example:

1. Before hiring.
2. After hiring, but before basic training.
3. After basic training.
4. Within the first six months of employment.
5. Within the first year of employment.

Of the six factors selected, three used continuous and three used categorical. As long as the differences are known to the person interpreting the data, there is no damage. However, when it is not necessary to mix apples and oranges, why do it? Also, each scale did not use the same number of points. Many scales use 7 or 9 points. The largest scale used in this analysis had 5 points. It was felt that any increase in precision and reliability afforded by 7 or 9 point scales was not great enough to justify their use.

DESIGN THE BOOKLET WITH DATA TRANSFER IN MIND

The format of the booklet used in this project was designed mainly with economy in mind: economy in terms of paper and of time spent by the respondents entering their responses. Instead of formatting to facilitate a final step, the booklet was designed to meet the more immediate considerations of typing, proofing, printing, and collecting each respondent's responses in a single sit-down. As noted, earlier, having six adjacent columns made it confusing to the respondents. For the same reason, the key punch operator operators had problems in key punching the data. In retrospect, it would have been better to use not more than two columns per booklet, even if it meant creating more booklets.

It would also have helped if the respondent simply circled or blackened a number instead of writing in the number. Responses would have been entered with greater speed, and they would have been less susceptible to misreading by the key punch operator. An answer sheet could also have been used.

It was known at the beginning of this project that key punching would be the method for transferring data. Other agencies, however, may have an optical scanning capability by which data are electronically read and transferred to tape or some other storage device for further computer

processing. Through format design and the use of radio-graphic pencils or similar marking devices, considerable time can be saved in transferring data. It is unlikely, however, that optical scanning would replace key punching for the transfer of background information.

SUMMARY

This project was a modest attempt by a relatively small state agency to do something it had never done before. The project is fulfilling its intended purposes, but even more than that it is producing new ideas and attitudes within management concerning work actually performed by line personnel. Decision makers are discovering that tasks change as law, procedures, and technology evolve. If nothing else, this project has reminded GBI managers and supervisors that yesterday's answers are not always adequate in addressing today's problems, or those anticipated tomorrow.

PART ONE
RATING OF TASKS

APPENDIX A

PART One; Rating Scales

Factor A. FREQUENCY - How often is this task regularly performed?

1. Once or twice a year
2. Once every three to four months
3. Once or twice a month
4. Weekly
5. Daily

Factor B. DURATION - How much time on the average is spent in the performance of this task?

1. One hour or less
2. One to two hours
3. Three to four hours
4. More than four hours

Factor C. CRITICALITY - If under regular work circumstances an error is made in the performance of this task, how damaging will the consequences be?

1. Virtually no damage
2. Very little damage
3. Moderate damage
4. Considerable damage
5. Extreme damage

Factor D. DIFFICULTY - How difficult is this task in the successful performance of Special Agent duties.

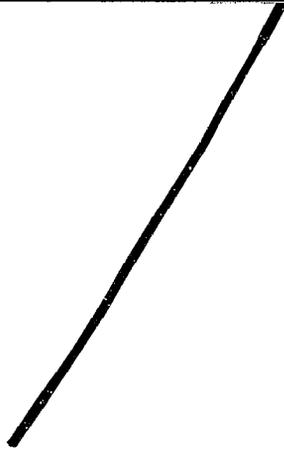
1. Not difficult
2. Some difficulty
3. Difficult
4. Very difficult

Factor E. ENTRY LEVEL PERFORMANCE - to what extent is it necessary that this task be adequately performed by brand new Special Agents?

1. Not necessary
2. Not necessary but desirable
3. Necessary, adequate performance is required upon entry

Factor F. OVERALL PERFORMANCE - How dependent is the performance of this individual task to the satisfactory overall performance of Special Agent duties?

1. Little or none
2. Minor
3. Moderate
4. Major



END