

Police – Community College Partnerships: *increasing the number of suitable police candidates*

Discussion Paper – Part 2

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I. Executive Summary

Police services are facing unprecedented recruiting challenges. Community college law enforcement programs have enormous numbers of students. Colleges are a potential source of candidates but there is no organized or structured developmental path that links them directly to police recruiting by legislation or policy.

The goal of this three part discussion paper series is to share insights, generate meaningful discussion about recognizing colleges as one source of increasing suitable applicants, and explore ways to connect community college law enforcement programs with police recruiting through structured partnerships.

Part 1 was the starting point – a general explanation of the Niagara Regional Police – Niagara College Ride-along partnership. This Ride-along program has been acknowledged as a ‘model’ for police- community college partnerships. The general benefits were listed in Part 1 to form the ‘core discussion’ component.

The Ride-along program is a work-in-progress and is evolving into the formative stages of a ‘mentoring program’ pilot project. The Ride-along/mentoring protocol is premised on both formal empirical research and anecdotal research. The goal is to increase the number of suitable applicants. For the purpose of the mentoring program, ‘candidates’ and ‘applicants’ are viewed as two separate concepts. An ‘applicant’ refers to a person who has met pre-application requirements (eg: minimum legislative standards and provincial requirements such as the Ontario Chief of Police Certificate) and has formally applied for a constable or cadet position. A candidate is a person working toward becoming an ‘applicant.’

Part 2 explains empirical and anecdotal research that will form the basis of the developmental strategies for the Ride-along/mentoring partnership.

II. Literature Review¹

¹ Bibliography for this review is available from a partial PhD dissertation with the citation:
Arcaro, Gino (2007). *Police Interrogation: Personality Traits and Expertise Development*. Jordan Publications, Welland., Ontario, Canada

The literature review is divided into 2 parts. Part A discusses literature dealing with the concept of development of a person (recruit) and Part B deals with the concept of an ideal police applicant.

Part A: Concept of ‘development’

The combined effect of Bloom (1985), Swap & Leonard (2005), and Ericsson et al (2006), strongly supports the premise that no one is born to do a job - people are developed.² Although some genetic traits may predispose certain people to specific careers, research shows strong evidence that all professions require a developmental pathway. Professionals are made, not born.

*Bloom (1985)*³: The extent of professional development depends on “quality of experiences” provided during the coaching/mentoring process. “Quality of experience” is connected to “exceptional conditions” characterized as follows:

- talent development is a continuous learning process that begins in childhood, moving seamlessly into adulthood.
- motivation variables include **family support, the best teachers and role models, considerable time, and singleness of purpose and dedication that is relatively rare in contemporary society.**

Bloom’s research showed that exceptional levels of talent development require a supportive socialization process characterized by the combined effect of **“special” experiences, superb teaching and corresponding motivational encouragement at every stage of development.**

Regardless of predispositional traits, individuals in wide ranging jobs and activities flourished only when “remarkable” teachers and coaches designed and encouraged “considerable” training and practice, that formed “intense and rewarding” experiences. This structured socialization breeds a learner’s personality that is conducive with mastery development: learning “rapidly and well.” Becoming an exceptional learner through early socialization is vital for long-term peak performance.

Bloom identified three general personality traits necessary for optimal development:

- i) strong interest and emotional commitment to a particular talent field;
- ii) intense desire to reach a high level of performance in that talent field;
- iii) willingness to invest and devote “great amounts of time and effort” needed to reach extraordinary high achievement levels.

Bloom concluded that “human potential for talent development is very great” but the “enormous human potential available in each society” is never fully actualized. Only “very small amounts of human potential is ever fully developed” but every society and every culture has the available means to significantly increase talent development.

*Leonard and Swap (2005)*⁴: A unique form of expertise called “deep smarts” may be developed by professionals and transferred to others by quality mentoring. This process

² Ibid.

³ Bloom, Benjamin(1985). *Developing Talent in Young People*. Ballantyne Books, New York

of cultivating and transferring specialized expertise may be a solution to the “experience deficit”⁵ currently experienced by a number of Canadian police services.

Empirical evidence suggests that “at least ten years of concentrated study and practice” are needed to become an expert at any task and those experts can transfer “deep smarts” to novices through structured mentoring. In other words, structured *mentoring/coaching* is needed to develop the deepest extent of mastery and expertise in others. The actual coaching process of transferring expertise is challenging for two reasons:

- i) the nature of expertise, a complex type of “deep smarts” that includes:
 - a. pattern recognition
 - b. tacit knowledge
 - c. efficient abstract thinking
 - d. extrapolation from the known to the unknown, and

- ii) the way expertise develops – the 10-year rule. Expertise cannot be reached under 10 years. This imposes a severe organizational limitation in the development of organization expertise. “Coaching” can facilitate, but not replace or substitute for the decade of structured practice. What is needed is a private individualized mastery learning program where a mentor-protégé interaction involves: (i) *learning by doing*, (ii) *guided experience*, and (iii) *joint problem-solving*.

*Ericsson et al (2006)*⁶: Experts are not born – they are made. Expertise is a product of two elements:

- i) an intense desire to excel combined with
- ii) “deliberate practice.”

Mastery and expertise are developed through the interaction of “fair but not extraordinary” natural ability, high quality instruction, and a “mountain of work.” The key points of the study are:

- Ordinary practice is not enough to reach full potential to master a task.
- Instead, a pattern of performance called “deliberate practice” is needed to acquire expertise.
- Deliberate practice refers to the performance of countless repetitions, designed and supervised by superb mentors, and accompanied with immediate feedback.
- Deliberate practice stimulates incremental growth through the repeated achievement of learning goals that gradually increase in complexity. Strategic goal-setting and constant self-evaluation are crucial to develop the traits of an ideal performer.
- Repetition of the same, routine or mundane baseline tasks does not constitute deliberate practice.

⁴ Leonard, Dorothy and Swap, Walter(2005). *Deep Smarts: How to Cultivate and Transfer Enduring Business Wisdom*

⁵ The phrase “experience deficit” was used by Niagara Police Deputy Chief Gary Beaulieu on Friday, June 20, 2008, during a PF/LASA Program Advisory Board meeting, at Niagara College, Welland Campus

⁶ Ericsson, Anders et al (2006). *Cambridge handbook of expertise and expert performance*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Ordinary repetition of simple tasks is vital for low-level performance mastery, but by itself, repeating the same task or drill will not develop the ideal personality and expert.

The Ericsson study refutes the notion that great performers are born with exceptional innate qualities. Instead, these people are ‘made’ through a structured socialization process of superb teaching and intense practice during a “decade of dedication” that supports the 10-year rule of acquiring expertise. Elite performers have some genetic gifts, but they reach peak performance by “taking great pains to maximize that gift.” Ericsson defined an expert as any individual, professional or otherwise, who has attained superior performance by instruction and extended practice. This ideal personality and performer consistently achieves superior performance goals in an effortless and natural way that is often wrongly attributed to special innate, predisposed characteristics. Ericsson’s team of researchers found that other than physical characteristics such as height and body size, there are no characteristics of the body or brain that restrict an individual from reaching expert level in any task or job. Many experts have invested more than 10,000 hours of practice before the age of 20 years, to form basic fundamental traits and skills. However, elite performance requires learning and practicing elite tasks, referring to techniques that are not well known or widely publicized.

Ericson concluded that ideal, expert performers are products of specific socialization characterized by:

- i) passion – doing what you love to do,
- ii) relevant and immediate applicable experience,
- iii) structured learning outcomes, and
- iv) at least a decade of incrementally-complex repetition governed by expert design, instruction, and meaningful feedback.

In other words, structured meaningful *nurture* is far more potent than *nature*.

Part B: Concept of ‘ideal applicant’

An ‘ideal’ applicant is defined as an applicant suitable for selection as a police constable. Almost 50 years of formal empirical research has failed to reach a consensus or agreement on:

- i) what is the ‘ideal’ personality of a police recruit.
- ii) who is attracted to policing
- iii) how to development recruits
- iv) how to transfer organizational expertise to solve the “experience deficit.

There were 8 conclusions reached after reviewing the literature on ideal applicants.

1. The most compelling conclusion is that both the ideal and unsuitable police recruit personalities are *contextual* and *situational*. An individual police recruit’s personality must be viewed within the totality of circumstances and is expressed and continually changing through ongoing experiences. The preferred police personality depends on analyzing the big picture and each specific performance during an investigation or call for service.

Ideal police personality traits depend on the context, formed by the complex interaction of social, cultural, and organization variables, and *situation*, referring to specific assignments characterized by wide ranging, unpredictable challenges and problems. Police work is multidimensional: multiple aspects and myriad tasks. There is no definitive, concrete list of personality traits that are preferred in every police situation or context. There is no generic personality that guarantees peak performance in every branch of a modern police organization or in every unexpected, divergent call for service or investigation.

2. Police work is performed in a complex, divergent arena that includes a wide range of extreme behaviors, from violent criminal acts to socially-acceptable law-abiding conduct. In other words, the arena of police work involves diverse personalities. Consequently, wide ranging personalities are attracted to policing. Empirical evidence shows that the similar personalities are attracted to both policing and criminality. Both 'good' and 'bad' characters find the policing playing field appealing.

The multi-dimensionalism of police work attracts both functional and dysfunctional personalities. Police work attracts applicants with extreme personality differences. It attracts those with positive and those with negative personality traits. Research shows that current police selection processes are far from perfect. They have a number of weaknesses that require significant future research and corresponding reform.

3. The traditional definitions of positive and negative police personality traits must be revisited. Some conventional negative traits are needed for efficient police performance in certain assignments and situations. This does not mean that unlawful practices or deviant behavior is acceptable. Instead, significant research is needed to review what personality traits are *actually* negative in a contextual and situational perspective. Some examples include:

- i) non-conformist original thinkers. Para-military structure, e.g. police services, often does not embrace non-conformists. However, empirical evidence shows that original thinking non-conformist boat-rockers are needed for efficient organizational growth.
- ii) risk-takers. Those who find danger and risks appealing suffer intensely from boredom. An attraction to risk is essential for personal growth. It motivates peak cognitive and physical performance and prevents the onset of complacency and lethargy.

4. There are two primary traits that matter during the recruit selection process. All the police competencies may be grouped into:

- i) strong moral character, and
- ii) achievement – orientation.

Both traits are simple, empirical indicators of future performance and provide a solid foundation for a coachable protégé. Strong moral character does not imply sainthood. It refers to a commonsense ability to accurately determine right from wrong. Strong moral

character is a non-negotiable public expectation that forms the core values that will drive rapid decision-making, required in front-line policing.

Achievement-orientation refers to a proven *need* and ability to achieve incrementally challenging and complex self-initiated and organizational goals. Achievement-orientation is compelling evidence of past peak performance. It includes myriad personality traits and the remainder of police competencies including:

- strong work ethic
- analytical thinking
- problem solving
- strong communication skills
- flexibility / diversity
- capacity to learn
- ability to work in a team and alone, and
- cognitive, emotional and physical maturity.

Limiting the selection process to identifying the two primary traits will identify the coachable candidate and ensure selection equality. It will prevent the wrongful exclusion of bright, energetic candidates who can apply for police jobs for the right reason – personal growth through social benefit as opposed to pension and paycheque.

5. Police recruit post-hiring personalities are the products of both *predisposition* and *socialization* but socialization has far greater influence. Pre-selection personality serves as a starting point only, one that dramatically changes through a complex series of positive and negative experiences. Although the socialization process includes unexpected and unpredictable experiences, the process can be controlled by strategic planning. The most efficient way to control socialization is expert mentoring, referring to structured mastery teaching and learning strategies. Socialization is the most compelling change agent that affects police personality. Controlling the change agent through balanced experiences engenders functional personality traits.

6. Not all mentors have equal capacity. The socialization process in policing is unique, not generic. No two police careers are the same. Consequently, no two police personalities are the same. An individual's police personality is dependent on the volume and nature of relevant experience. A decade of policing, for example, has different meaning for each individual police officer. A decade of police experience will not produce a generic personality.

7. The Colgan Institute⁷ identified two major obstacles to development of full potential:

- i) cossetting, defined as indulging students by permitting inappropriate, immature behaviour that weakens and creates dependency, and

⁷ Colgan Institute News(Aug 2007)

- ii) insufficient challenge – failure to raise the bar and inject learning rigor compatible with the level of instruction prevents personal growth and motivation. Protecting students from failure is an obstacle to reaching full potential.

8. **Former LAPD officer George Reming’s 1987 PhD dissertation⁸ may be the most realistic, blunt study ever written about police hiring and police personalities. The study is a must-read.** A number of conclusions emerge from this landmark study.

Reming concluded that the multidimensionalism of policing attracts a wide range of personalities and prevents the emergence of only one generic police personality. His provisional theory hypothesized that:

- i) individuals seek environments that are congruent with their personality types,
- ii) certain specific dimensions of an individual’s occupational choice represent a manifestation of personality,
- iii) an individual’s personality cannot accurately be explored by merely observing his/her behavior because how the individual actually wants to respond does not always manifest in overt behaviour. An individual’s disposition to respond in a certain way does not always reveal itself in controlled conduct. In other words, people often act contrary to their personality to get what they want. Consequently, the best way to determine personality is exploring the manner in which he/she is disposed to respond, not in the way he/she actually responds.

There are significant frailties in the police selection process. Reform is needed to match police recruit personalities with the correct police assignments. The most glaring weakness with the selection process is the arbitrary and subjective definition of negative personality characteristics and the bias of police recruiters, administrators, and psychologists. Applicants are frequently rejected on the basis of a recruiter’s, administrator’s, or psychologist’s personal beliefs and values that lack objective justification. Matching personality with assignment starts with identifying the differences in motivation for becoming a police officer. The concept of “negative characteristics” needs to be revisited and studied. According to Reming, empirical evidence shows that some characteristics, wrongly classified as “negative,” are desirable for some aspects of policing.

Why a candidate applies for police work combined with his/her expectations and goals, reveal significant information about the candidate’s personality and suitability for specific dimensions of police work. A candidate’s reason for seeking police employment is often ignored, resulting in organizational chaos. For example, energetic candidates who apply because of the right reasons, such as to “fight crime,” are often assigned off the frontline, away from high-risk situations while the less motivated candidate whose primary aim for getting a police job was financial security “may be assigned to patrol the roughest neighborhoods, *scared stiff* because the closest he/she came to hand-to-hand combat in his/her life was Accounting 101 in college.” The inevitable result, according to Reming, is “two *mediocre* and *dissatisfied* employees (p. 80).” He concluded that it is futile and unreasonable to seek candidates with “positive characteristics and a multitude

⁸ Reming, George(1987) *Personality Characteristics of Supercops and Habitual Criminals*. A dissertation presented to the faculty of the California Graduate Institute. Los Angeles, California

of skills and talents that would qualify the candidate for the entire range of activities within the police department (p. 79).”

According to Reming, the public is misled by the prevalent myth that all police careers are created equal. Research shows that “nothing can be further from the truth (p. 78).” As many as 300 different job assignments have been identified in major police departments. Some are extremely dangerous, some are not. The corresponding qualifications vary considerably. The most dangerous is frontline patrol in high-risk areas, a branch erroneously considered to be a “generalist” assignment. Many frontline patrol assignments require unique “specialist” traits (p. 75). Cosner et al (2003) supported this finding by identifying multiple tasks and corresponding demands within police organizations. A Task Demand Analysis Model revealed that the demands of patrol branch, traffic division, community policing, and detective division differed considerably. Patrol officers require rapid decision-making skills to solve problems by applying myriad statutory and case law provision. Traffic enforcement is a narrow enforcement branch that concentrates on singular events. Community policing requires a proactive style of relating to citizens. Detectives need “stage presence” that combines extraordinary communication/interview skills, applied law knowledge, and the skill of strategic investigation independence (p. 6).

III. Anecdotal Research Findings

Despite the benefits of the Ride-along program (explained in Part 1), there are a number of weaknesses that challenge the developmental process, including

1. Cognitive diversity. A pedagogical approach called the ‘rapid decision-making’ (RDM) scenario-based model is the exclusive teaching and evaluation strategy used for two reasons: (i) it replicates police work (ii) it is the best way to teach volumes of information to large class sizes. An eighteen-year study revealed a phenomenon: an annual 3-1 RDM range. Some students display remarkable rapid decision-making skills. Other students take three times longer to make a decision. This represents a significant cognitive diversity and a significant pedagogical developmental issue.
2. Low percentage of students who apply for the Ride-along program. The Ride-along program is not a credit course. It is a value-added component that supplements the official program of study. It is an *invaluable opportunity* that is offered for free – no tuition fees are attached. Regardless of the value, the highest percentage of students/class who applied was only 33%. The average is 10%. An informal survey asked why students fail to take advantage of this extraordinary benefit – the primary reason was fear of failure at the interview and being rejected by the selection board.
3. 50% failure rate. Despite after-hours free training seminars designed to teach specific ‘interview success skills,’ 25-50% of applicants fail the abbreviated ECI interview. The ‘pass’ standard is significantly lower than actual ECI standards. The primary reasons for failure have been:
 - i) poor verbal communication skills

- ii) lack of 'real-life' experience
- iii) acute performance anxiety
- iv) failure to prepare

4. Post-selection complacency and arrogance. Students who are selected must complete General Occurrence Reports for every call investigated, including minor 'no-report' calls. They must also keep a police notebook. Students are routinely informed of the significant improvements in written communication that these assignments engender. Despite these benefits, there has been a significant decline in work submission since 2002 – less than 40% of students have submitted the required assignments down from 100% in the 1990-98 and 75% 1999-2001. Additionally, less than 40% of students earn a pass mark of 50% on their first submitted GOR.

6. Safety concerns. In 2000, the ride-along program was suspended for one semester by the Niagara Regional Police Association until safety issues were addressed through formal protocol. Although a general order and protocol was written, further review is needed to study more safety issues, specifically what calls students should be prohibited from attending and what to do with the student when such a call is received. Liability is a concern. Students sign liability waivers. No student has been killed or suffered catastrophic injury yet but the consequence of death or serious bodily harm needs further study.

7. The naming of the program as "Ride-along" created undignified branding. The term "Ride-along" sends the wrong message to students and the public that any one is allowed to be a passenger in a police cruiser. The term inappropriately brands the profession and the developmental program. Other professions have dignified titles including "internship."

8. Less than 5% of participating students have earned an OACP certificate during the term of the Ride-along program. Recruiters have criticized students for being in the program without having earned an OACP certificate. The argument has been, "if a student cannot become a suitable "applicant" by earning an OACP certificate, the ride-along experience is meaningless."

IV. Conclusion

1. Suitable "applicants" are developed, not born.
2. Development doesn't just happen randomly. It is a product of structured coaching and mentoring.
3. Quality coaching/mentoring creates meaningful, memorable experiences that dramatically move a student toward reaching full potential. Conversely, the absence of quality coaching/mentoring causes a failure to develop to full potential.
4. Be careful who we exclude as police officers. None of us were perfect "applicants." We all needed development. Our mentors and our experiences made us who we became as police officers. It's easy to forget the developmental stage we were at when

we were hired. Our expectations for recruits grow as we become more experienced. We expect recruits to be us.

5. I'll use a football analogy to explain the basis for a proposed model that will be explained in the **Part 3** of this discussion paper – don't expect a rookie quarterback to throw for 500 yards without constant coaching. He has to be taught. If he is taught properly, he will perform to those expectations. If he's not, he won't. You get back what you put out. We don't toss novice athletes away because they are not developed to where they are supposed to be. Instead, we coach them, give them opportunities to develop, let them compete and grow until the **best rise to the next level**.