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Emotional Intelligence in Policing

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In any policing controversy—excessive use of force, racial profiling, police suicide, discourtesy—separating human emotions from that controversy's cause is difficult. An officer's emotional intelligence—whether the lack of emotional awareness or the inability to control emotions—will emerge. There can be no escaping one's emotions; indeed, if repressed, they cause even more problems. This is of particular concern to law enforcement, due to the myth that an officer should grin and bear emotional crises and shake them off at the end of the shift.

That myth has been contradicted by research, which has uncovered a much different reality. Contemporary psychological research shows that the strong, silent type (typical of many police officers) cannot suppress human emotions without suffering serious consequences. Emotional intelligence is just as serious in training.

Many officers are just now appreciating how deeply the emotional intelligence competencies affect the police profession. Indeed, emotional intelligence is at the core of policing.

Most police training and education efforts have downplayed if not ignored the role of emotions. Often, academy educators leave it to field trainers to help new officers through emotionally charged and stressful situations. Departments occasionally provide stress management programs or use untrained mentors to help officers manage their emotions. But few of these approaches consider emotional intelligence.

The Roots of Emotional Intelligence

In 1995 Daniel Goleman, a Harvard-trained psychologist and writer for the New York Times who focuses on the brain and behavior research, popularized emotional intelligence through the bestselling book by the same title.¹ Emotional intelligence became a business trend. The Harvard Business Review article on the topic attracted a higher percentage of readers than any other article published in that periodical in the last 40 years.²

Goleman based his book on the work of psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer, who first presented emotional intelligence as a psychological theory in 1990 after years of psychological research challenging intelligence quotient (IQ) and personality tests as legitimate measures of intelligence.³ IQ by itself—the measures still used to hire and select police recruits—does not actually predict job performance very well. Using IQ by itself denies other forms of intelligence, particularly what was then the most controversial: human emotions and emotional intelligence's significant, perhaps primary, role.

The corporate sector quickly accepted the EI concept. Many business leaders agreed with the basic message that personal qualities strongly influence success. All corporate sectors had examples of brilliant executives who did everything well, except for getting along with others or handling stress, stalling their corporate careers because of their lack of EI.

After nearly two decades of scientific inquiry, EI is arguably now as legitimate as other psychological approaches.⁴ Now of age, EI offers a great deal to police educators, recruiters, and leaders.

What Is Emotional Intelligence?

EI is the ability to interpret, understand, and manage one's own and others' emotions. EI is not about becoming emotionally detached; it is about becoming emotionally mature and confident. The ability to be self-aware and then regulate one's own emotions is one of the most profound EI competencies that emerged from the research. According to a later version of EI that Goleman promulgated, EI includes

- personal competencies like self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-control, and
- social competencies like conflict management, empathy, and leadership. Both competencies are necessary in policing.

EI Competencies in Police Training

In the police problem-based learning (PBL) program discussed on pages 29-37 in this issue of Police Chief, EI training plays a major role. It is also part of the PBL-based field training system for recruits called the police training officer (PTO) program.

In both these programs, EI learning takes the form of what psychologists Mayer and Cobb⁵ call socioemotional learning: it teaches police instructors and students how to examine their own EI competencies. These competencies include the following, among many others:

- Becoming more aware of emotional triggers that can instigate an angry violent response, such as when officers are called

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- Learning tactics to manage one's own mental state during stressful situations, such as a hazardous police chase
- Being more attentive to the impact of daily emotions on long-term moods and attitudes toward colleagues and others

In the police PBL program, EI competencies first emerge during an online Web course. Each student—a police instructor—then embarks on an individual field project about real-life learning and teaching in other professions in their own community. They bring their research to an intensive two-week course. During this course, the students learn how to self-direct their own EI skill development, practicing daily mindfulness and tracking their own EI learning in journals.

PBL students practice these skills for two weeks. Facilitators then review the results of their EI skill development with the students during interviews. Students are encouraged to continue EI awareness when they begin to teach using the PBL method. For months following the training, many PBL students continue to correspond with facilitators, as well as with each other, on a Web site bulletin board set up for this purpose (www.pspbl.com).

Does It Work?

Do programs designed to improve EI competencies work? Research suggests they do, if carefully delivered by appropriately prepared instructors.⁶ A recent study by Fabio Sala shows that workshop interventions improve EI competencies such as self-confidence, conflict management, communication, and conscientiousness.⁷ More intense, long-term efforts may have even greater impact.

EI training also affects stress management. One study incorporating EI into stress management programs revealed that "those frontline operational police officers [who] were able to understand and manage their emotions reported lower levels of stress and were, according to their reported lifestyles, at less risk of suffering from stress in the future. These results were evident across the sample with no real differences evident regarding the age, gender rank or length of service of the officers involved."⁸ In other studies, EI awareness training appears to reduce officer burnout.⁹

How Can We Train EI?

Emotional competencies can change, but only through positive development by experiential learning, habitual self-reflection, and long-term meditative work. Intellectual exercises or reading assignments by themselves are unlikely to work, because emotional responses do not emerge from the part of the brain where higher-level mental functions occur, like reasoning and language. Instead, they come from the interior limbic system in the brain, where emotions like anger and fear emerge.

Goleman calls this the "primal brain," and according to him we often unknowingly act according to these primal emotions. This process is called negative habituation, and is why, without positive, habitual self-awareness training, changing EI competencies is difficult.

For example, a stress management class can have some impact but may not suffice in the long term. These workshops typically target learning skills at the cognitive, exterior level. Skills at that level are highly perishable. They do not become a positive habit.

The trick to learning EI skills is to become competent and aware of emotional responses as they happen. Unfortunately, our own responses, often invisible to us, emerge from the primal brain. Students will not just learn these skills or pick them up on their own; they need to learn how to practice emotional self-awareness.

As Blum and Polisar note, "Training police officers to effectively manage stress exposure events will require different methods and content than have been traditionally applied to police recruits and trainees. Officers must possess adaptive expertise in managing their minds, emotions, and physiological reactions in real time."¹⁰

Daily Journaling

Trainees keep a daily journal recording the learning process to obtain in-depth information on the history, problems, personalities, relationships, strengths, and weaknesses. Trainees record relevant information to strengthen the learning process, identify areas for improvement, facilitate self-evaluation and creative thinking, and provide the opportunity to revisit the problem-based learning process and its application to police functions.

Lessons for Success

Police can use EI training in many significant ways. Leadership training and recruit selection procedures are two. Already some new EI-based command courses have materialized. Further, many emotional intelligence tests—EQ tests—offer recruiters additional screening methods to use with traditional systems.

But the most promising area for policing's use of EI is training and education. Students already train with EI competencies in the police PBL program for academy instructors, with other programs sure to follow. The U.S. Department of Justice COPS Office is currently funding curricula development for a series of training courses with PBL and EI components for the Regional Community Policing Institutes.

Course designers and academy administrators unfamiliar with EI theories must consider how to incorporate them. These are EI training course writing tips to include in every EI course:

- Convince students that they succeed by developing their EI skills in different ways, depending on what extent they choose to develop their skills. You cannot force someone to become EI aware. You can only point the way by helping them see how they personally respond to different situations.
- Give students plenty of time to practice their new skills. Facilitators need to create a classroom environment where time is set aside to practice. Students need to be encouraged to practice daily at home and on the job.
- Use PBL to deliver EI skills. Traditional teaching approaches like lectures, guided discussion, and PowerPoint do not address learning at the emotional (affective) level that lies beyond the cognitive domain. Instead, PBL concentrates on hands-on problem solving with real-life, relevant problems.
- Provide feedback from facilitators. The Police PBL program uses regular personal interviews and journaling as a basis for facilitator feedback. The PTO program uses journaling.

Emotional intelligence represents a significant step for police training, leadership, and recruiting and hiring. It is a new concept, so implementation will be gradual. But hiring and keeping the next generation of police officers requires considering EI.

- ¹ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).
- ² Cary Cherniss, "Emotional Intelligence: What It Is and Why It Matters," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 15, 2000. www.eiconsortium.org/research/what_is_emotional_intelligence.htm, September 23, 2006.
- ³ P. Salovey and J. Mayer, "Emotional Intelligence," *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality* 9 (1990).
- ⁴ John Mayer, D. Caruso, and P. Salovey, "Emotional Intelligence Meets Traditional Standards for an Intelligence," *Intelligence* 27 (2000).
- ⁵ John Mayer, D. Caruso, and Casey D. Cobb, "Educational Policy on Emotional Intelligence: Does It Make Sense?" *Educational Psychology Review* 12 (2000).
- ⁶ C. Chernis and D. Goleman, eds., *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2001).
- ⁷ Fabio Sala, "Do Programs Designed to Increase Emotional Intelligence at Work—Work?" 2005. www.eiconsortium.org, September 2, 2006.
- ⁸ Margaret Chapman and Robin Clarke, "Emotional Intelligence Is a Concept That Can Be Used in Stress Management: A Response to Slaski," *Stress News* 15 (July 2002).
- ⁹ Donna Ricca, "Emotional Intelligence, Negative Mood Regulation Expectancies, and Professional Burnout among Police Officers," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 2003.
- ¹⁰ Lawrence Blum and Joseph M. Polisar, "Why Things Go Wrong in Policing," *The Police Chief* 7 (July 2004): 49–52.

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Police Training Officer Program

In 1999 the COPS Office funded the Reno, Nevada, Police Department and the Police Executive Research Forum to develop an alternative national model for field training that would incorporate community policing and problem-solving principles. The result of their collaboration, a new training program called the Police Training Officer (PTO) program, developed by Gerard Cleveland and Gregory Saville, incorporates contemporary methods of adult education and a version of the problem-based learning (PBL) method of teaching adapted for police. Most importantly, it ensures that academy graduates' first experience as law enforcement officers reflects policing in the 21st century.

The PTO program is the first new post-academy field training program for law enforcement agencies in more than 30 years. This new approach forms the foundation for life-long learning that prepares new officers for the complexities of policing today and in the future. The flexible program can be tailored to each agency's unique needs and can incorporate future changes in policing. An important long-term benefit to the agency is further institutionalizing community policing and problem solving.

First tested in the Reno Police Department and subsequently tested by five other agencies, the PTO program has produced outstanding results. New officers enter the field with problem-solving skills rarely seen at that level. They also display leadership skills and a willingness to work as partners with the local community to fight crime and disorder problems. The PTO program is producing officers who have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitude for today's law enforcement environment.

Agencies can use the PTO program outlines available from COPS to develop their own in-house programs adapted to their particular training needs. Course writers and instructors must be trained in PBL and EI to effectively deliver this program. In 2005 the PTO program became available through local Regional Community Policing Institutes.

For more information: www.cops.usdoj.gov

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