



Tracking Group Behavior Via Early Intervention Systems



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Since the late 1970's police departments nationwide have developed Early Intervention Systems (EIS) to monitor individual officers' actions which might be indicative of stress. Stress issues can potentially manifest into problems on the street. These EIS have become very sophisticated in many agencies with numerous triggers ranging from a minimum of tracking complaints and use of force, to tracking preventable accidents, performance issues and utilization of sick leave to name a few. The Phoenix Police Department and Pittsburgh P.D. are examples of very complex systems, which monitor officers on a daily basis.

It appears, however, that a void exists in most agencies in tracking group behavior of officers assigned to platoons, squads, and even different shifts. This is especially troubling when examined in the context of infamous scandals in recent years involving groups of officers as opposed to individuals who have engaged in serious criminal misconduct, which went undetected for long periods of time. The Miami River Cops, the Washington Dozen, the Rampart scandal, the L.A. Majors, the Buddy Boys, the Dirty Thirty, and the Atlanta 3 represent a small sampling of some of the worst law enforcement scandals in U.S. history, all of which involved groups of officers as opposed to individual officers who went undetected for long periods of time before they were exposed and prosecuted.

For example, if three officers receive one theft complaint each in six months, it might not trigger an alert in an EIS. However, if all three of these officers work on the same squad, it could signal a significant problem which would go undetected in most EIS because they are not structured to identify potential problems involving groups of officers.

Another void which most EIS fail to identify concerns supervisors -

For example, if one squad has several officers who are receiving numerous complaints of excessive force, it would be prudent to determine who the squad supervisor is to determine if his action or inaction is a factor. If that same supervisor is transferred to another squad and now that squad is

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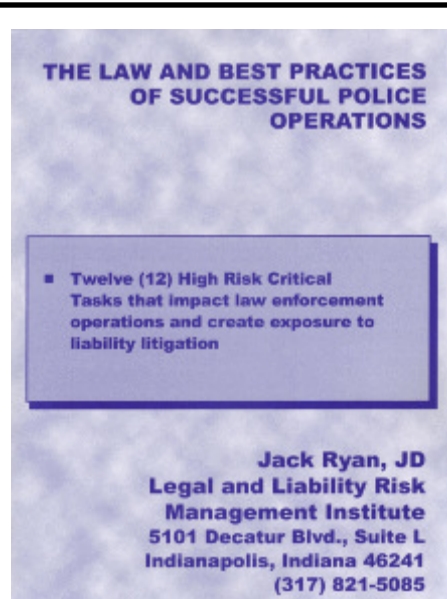
receiving an increase in complaints, it would be important to identify this information in case action is appropriate.

The same would apply to field training officers and training advisors in the academy. If several officers who have been trained by the same FTO become involved in misconduct, it would be important to be aware of that information in case the FTO is contributing to the problem by failing to encourage ethical behavior of trainees he/she is supervising.

The most important lesson we have learned about EIS is that in order to be successful they have to be fair and credible. False alerts happen on a regular basis and police managers are wise not to over react when an officer becomes identified. The administration must be aware of officers who are engaging in improper behavior as soon as possible in order to protect the public, the department and the officer involved. Law enforcement is a stressful occupation and occasionally an officer or group of officers can destroy the credibility of an entire agency by their misconduct. A functioning EIS, which monitors individual officers, squads, FTO's and supervisors is an important management tool.

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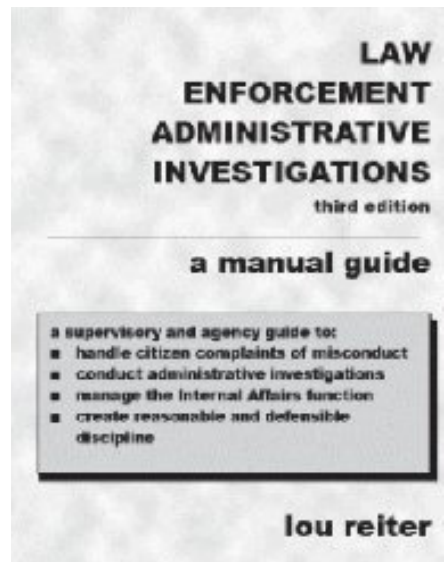
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