

IX – SUPERVISION

The primary resource the Dallas Police Department has to serve the citizens of Dallas is the time and skills of its employees. Indeed, 96 percent of the department's budget is devoted to personnel related expenditures. Ensuring high quality employees and the development of employee skills (as discussed in Chapter VIII) is necessary but not sufficient to provide high quality services. In addition, employees must use their time and skills productively. Strong and effective first line supervision is necessary to achieve this objective. This chapter discusses the current state of supervision in the Dallas Police Department and makes recommendations to strengthen supervisory practices.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Level Of Supervision Department Employees Receive Is Not Consistent

Effective first-line supervision is essential to ensuring that department employees make productive use of their time; however, the level of supervision department employees currently receive is not consistent. The preponderance of the patrol supervisors interviewed as part of this engagement indicated that they focus their attention on issues related to personnel administration, paperwork and responding to citizen complaints rather than on reviewing the work of their subordinates, ensuring that they make effective use of their time, and providing coaching and assistance as needed. In addition, much of the supervision that is provided is negative. In the patrol division, for example, sergeants are required to monitor the automatic vehicle locator system (AVL) to identify officers who are spending too much time on calls. While ensuring the time officers are out of service on calls is not unduly lengthy is extremely important, monitoring the AVL system to make this determination contributes to the perception among some officers that supervisors are “out to get them.” A better approach would be for supervisors to monitor how officers spend their time on calls by going to calls with them and making first hand observations. (Dispatchers can monitor the AVL system and let supervisors know if officers are spending too much time on calls.) In addition, the perception of many employees is that supervisors focus little attention on providing positive feedback to employees by writing formal commendations.

Activity analysis surveys¹ asking patrol sergeants to estimate how they spend their time confirm that supervisors spent relatively little time actively supervising their subordinates. For example, the 51 patrol supervisors who participated in the survey estimate that they spend only about a third of their time (32.88 percent) on activities relating to direct supervision.² Of these activities, approximately 60 percent are mandated.³ Indeed,

¹ Patrol supervisors and investigative supervisors were asked to indicate the percentage of time over the course of year that they devoted to various activities. The results for individual survey respondents were then tabulated and averaged over all individuals participating in the survey.

² These activities include reviewing offense reports, monitoring the AVL system, responding to calls-for-service to which a supervisor is required to respond and monitoring officer activity on calls for service to which the response of a supervisor is not required.

³ Patrol supervisors are currently required to monitor the AVL system and to respond to selected types of calls.

supervisors currently spend about twice as much time on paperwork related activities (22.28 percent)⁴ as they do observing officer performance on calls-for-service to which a supervisor is not required to respond (9.71 percent).

Activity	Percent Of Supervisor Time Devoted To Activity
Review offense reports	3.64%
Monitor the AVL system(a)	4.85%
Respond to calls-for-service to which a supervisor is required to respond(a)	14.67%
Monitor officer activity on calls-for-service to which the response of a supervisor is not required	9.71%
Test drugs(a)	2.02%
Conduct internal investigations and division referrals	4.90%
Change and/or review tapes in video cameras mounted on patrol elements and perform related coordination ⁵	1.30%
Handle issues relating to personnel administration	9.64%
Conduct special projects related to your sector (e.g., services, requests, crime problems and traffic complaints)	8.78%
Conduct special projects related to your watch or division (e.g., crime initiatives, mobile field force training and pepperball training)	5.35%
Monitor the court notification system and log city subpoenas	2.20%
Read and respond to e-mails	2.30%
Other paperwork (e.g., log the activity of patrol officers; complete weekly and monthly activity reports, targeted enforcement activity reports, shopping cart activity, post reports for correction and maintain record of "logged items")	17.78%
Serve as acting watch commander	6.10%
Other activities(b)	6.76%
Total	100.00%

(a) Required activity.

(b) The percent of time devoted to other activities was adjusted to account for rounding errors.

⁴ These activities include monitoring the court notification system and logging city subpoenas, reading and responding to e-mails, and other paperwork.

⁵ This activity is performed by one or two sergeants per shift. It is not a regular duty performed by all patrol supervisors.

The situation with regard to investigative supervisors is significantly better. Investigative supervisors devote 41.86 percent of their time to monitoring progress on cases and reviewing case reports.

Activity	Percent Of Supervisor Time Devoted To Activity
Monitor progress on cases assigned to unit detectives and provide advice and support or monitor high profile cases	26.09%
Review and approve case reports	15.77%
Respond to citizen complaints and concerns	15.59%
Handle issues related to personnel administration	16.68%
Perform paperwork (other than paperwork associated with personnel administration)	14.27%
Other activities	11.60%
Total	100.00%

The inconsistency in the level of supervision employees receive is also reflected in the results of the employee survey. While three out of five survey respondents (63.1 percent) agree or strongly agree that they receive the supervision they need to effectively perform their job responsibilities a sizable percentage (21.4 percent) disagree. Additionally, while 42.2 percent of the survey respondents agree or strongly agree that managers and supervisors review the work of their subordinates on a timely basis more than a third (36.5 percent) disagree or strongly disagree. Moreover, close to two-thirds of the survey respondents (64.5 percent) disagree or strongly disagree that police department managers and supervisors view helping employees improve their job performance to be one of their primary responsibilities.

The Lack Of Consistent Supervision Adversely Affects Department Operations And The Level Of Service Citizens Receive

Inconsistent supervision has an adverse impact on department operations and the level of service citizens receive. These adverse consequences, which are most notable for patrol operations, manifest themselves in a number of ways.

- **Patrol officers do not return to service promptly after completing a call.** In interviews officers reported that it is not uncommon for officers to “milk calls” – that is, to stay out of service after completing a call rather than returning to service promptly so that they are available to respond to subsequent calls. Review of dispatch data strongly supports these observations. As the following table shows, the amount of time it takes officers to complete calls (after they have arrived at the incident scene) varies dramatically for the same type of call.

Call Description	Call Completion Time					
	15 Minutes	30 Minutes	60 Minutes	120 Minutes	240 Minutes	480 Minutes
Home burglarized and burglar may still be there	19.1%	23.1%	32.9%	19.1%	4.3%	1.5%
Home burglarized but burglar has left	12.4%	20.9%	39.1%	22.3%	3.6%	1.7%
Someone is firing gun but no one appears to be injured	47.1%	26.2%	20.2%	5.3%	0.8%	0.4%
Teenagers racing up and down street	58.6%	23.8%	14.2%	3.0%	0.2%	0.2%
Fight where someone has been cut or shot	13.9%	13.1%	18.6%	21.8%	22.4%	10.2%
Nuisance such as a loud party or barking dog	32.9%	23.5%	26.9%	14.7%	1.7%	0.3%
Robbed while walking down street but robber has left	12.8%	14.6%	32.3%	31.5%	7.2%	1.6%
Suspicious person loitering in neighborhood	41.7%	27.2%	23.7%	6.4%	0.7%	0.3%

Indeed, the standard deviation of call completion times – a measure of variability in response – is large and, in fact, exceeds the average call completion time for each type of call.

Call Description	Average Call Completion Time (Minutes)	Standard Deviation (Minutes)
Home burglarized and burglar may still be there	50.2	62.7
Home burglarized but burglar has left	55.1	71.2
Someone is firing gun but no one appears to be injured	24.6	33.1
Teenagers racing up and down street	19.1	32.0
Fight where someone has been cut or shot	107.3	118.8
Nuisance such as a loud party or barking dog	35.2	35.4
Robbed while walking down street but robber has left	63.1	65.0
Suspicious person loitering in neighborhood	27.0	34.7

While some of this variation reflects differences in the circumstances encountered when responding to calls, the high level of variation also suggests that some officers may not immediately return to service when a call is completed.

The consequences associated with officers spending more time on calls than necessary is clear. When officers are out of service longer than they need to be, they are unable to answer subsequent calls and call response times increase.

It should be stressed that the department is aware of this problem and established the requirement that a patrol sergeant monitor the AVL system to try to address it. As previously noted, however, this is a negative form of supervision.

- **The number of elements responding to calls varies significantly.** The department has developed clearly established policies relating to the number of officers who should be dispatched to an incident. Typically, after the initial response an assessment should be made as to whether additional elements should be dispatched or whether one of the elements responding to the call can return to service. An important role of supervisors is to monitor response to incidents and ensure the response is appropriate (neither too high nor too low). Discussions with patrol officers, however, suggest that at present while dispatch policies typically determine the initial response to an incident scene the number of additional elements responding to the scene is based on the discretion of the officer in the field. Not surprisingly, as the following table shows, there is significant variation in the number of officers who respond to various types of calls.⁶ Please note that some of this difference results from the fact that additional officers may be called to an incident scene after the initial response based on need.

Call Descriptions	Officers Dispatched	Officers Responding					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Home burglarized and burglar may still be there	2	1.8%	67.4%	22.2%	7.4%	1.1%	0.1%
Home burglarized but burglar has left	1	68.1%	23.4%	7.4%	1.0%	0.1%	0.0%
Someone is firing gun but no one appears to be injured	2	38.7%	47.4%	9.6%	3.9%	0.4%	0.0%
Teenagers racing up and down street	1	57.2%	32.9%	7.0%	2.6%	0.3%	0.0%
Fight where someone has been cut or shot	2	8.2%	39.6%	40.8%	10.4%	0.9%	0.1%
Nuisance such as a loud party or barking dog	1	42.8%	42.7%	9.5%	4.6%	0.2%	0.2%
Robbed while walking down street but robber has left	2	26.1%	53.8%	14.1%	5.3%	0.6%	0.1%
Suspicious person loitering in neighborhood	2	30.1%	50.9%	13.3%	5.3%	0.4%	0.0%

When more patrol elements respond to an incident scene than are needed the department's overall capacity to respond to calls is reduced and response times to subsequent calls increase.

⁶ It should be noted that some of this variation results from the fact that when two officers are assigned to the same patrol element two officers may respond to calls when only one officer is needed. However, dispatchers try to minimize the frequency with which this occurs.

- **The number of officers assigned to two-officer elements is not managed.** In general, there is no reason for patrol officers to be deployed in two officer elements. Doing so increases response times to calls-for-service because there are fewer elements deployed than if the entire patrol force were deployed in one-officer elements. In addition, this practice results in over-response to calls that require only a one officer response when a two-officer element is dispatched to the call. As the following table shows, however, each of the six patrol operations divisions currently deploys a number of two-officer elements.⁷ This table also shows that the number of two officer elements deployed (as reflected in the standard deviation) varies considerably by day.⁸

Division	First Watch		Second Watch		Third Watch	
	Average Two-Officer Elements Deployed	Standard Deviation	Average Two-Officer Elements Deployed	Standard Deviation	Average Two-Officer Elements Deployed	Standard Deviation
Southeast	3.9	2.3	4.9	1.8	14.7	3.6
Southwest	3.3	2.2	4.3	1.9	8.0	3.2
Central	2.2	1.6	1.2	1.1	2.4	1.2
North Central	1.0	0.8	3.0	1.5	3.3	2.1
Northwest	1.9	3.6	2.2	1.3	6.3	1.5
Northeast	6.1	2.3	4.2	1.8	8.4	2.8

Interviewees indicate that the number of two-officer elements deployed depends not on department policy but on officer preference. Officers who prefer to work with a partner are assigned to two-officer elements while officers who prefer to work alone are assigned to one-officer elements. Without effective supervision there is no way to curtail and eliminate unnecessary deployment of patrol officers in two-officer elements.

- **The quality of preliminary investigations at crime scenes varies significantly.** A key to solving crime – especially burglaries – is to have the responding officer perform a thorough preliminary investigation at the crime scene. In general, it is very difficult to solve cases without leads⁹ and the best time to identify leads is as soon after the commission of a crime as possible. In the Dallas Police Department, however, the quality of the preliminary investigations performed by officers is quite inconsistent. Some investigators report that officers do not even correctly identify the

⁷ The number of two-officer elements depicted in this analysis excludes two-officer elements that consist of a field training officer and his or her trainee.

⁸ This analysis is based on a review of how patrol resources were actually deployed during four sample weeks in 2003 (January 19, 2003 to January 25, 2003; April 20, 2003 to April 26, 2003; July 20, 2003 to July 26, 2003; and November 2, 2003 to November 8, 2003).

⁹ Some of the Dallas Police Department investigators interviewed estimated that three percent of cases without leads that are investigated are solved.

name and address of the victim. This oversight makes it difficult to impossible to even contact the victim much less to follow-up on leads.

Without effective supervision it is unlikely that the quality of preliminary investigations at crime scenes will improve. Performing thorough preliminary investigations and returning quickly to service to reduce response times are competing imperatives that individual police officers, if left to their own devices, will resolve differently. An effective patrol supervisor who is in the field actively supervising patrol officers, however, can both encourage officers to return to service after completing some calls while maintaining positive pressure on officers to conduct thorough preliminary investigations at other incident scenes.

- **The quality of officer interactions with citizens is not consistently high.** Interview findings and discussions with citizens suggest that most police officers are professional in their interactions with citizens. However, this is not always the case. Discussions with citizens in the ten public “drop in” sessions conducted during this engagement suggest that the interactions of some officers with citizens is anything but professional. For example, citizens in drop in sessions reported instances of officers being rude and, perhaps worse, indifferent to their needs. Presumably, if patrol supervisors were more active in directly reviewing and observing the officers they supervise this sort of unacceptable behavior would be severely curtailed if not eliminated.
- **The quality of offense reports is inconsistent.** Patrol supervisors do not consistently review and approve offense reports. Indeed, the results of the activity analysis survey indicate that patrol supervisors devote only 3.64 percent of their time (about 15 minutes a day) to reviewing offense reports. Not surprisingly, therefore, the quality of offense reports is, at best, inconsistent. Staff review unit personnel, who are responsible for reviewing reports to ensure they are complete and communications unit supervisory personnel, estimate that more than 50 percent of the reports reviewed by them are returned to an officer for correction.
- **Patrol officers receive little direction about the activities on which they should focus.** Because patrol officers receive little supervision they have a great deal of discretion about how they spend their time. In interviews some officers indicated that they focus on responding to calls, others indicated they focus on “dope houses,” while others indicated that they had no real focus. Without consistent supervision this situation is unlikely to change. As a consequence, efforts to achieve division or department goals will be hampered.

While issues relating to the absence of consistent supervision are most notable for patrol operations they also manifest themselves in other aspects of the department’s operations. Some investigators assigned to operations divisions, for example, spend only part of their time conducting follow-up investigations. The rest of their time is devoted to conducting proactive investigations. While these officers should be commended for their initiative, other units in the patrol operations divisions (e.g., the deployment units) are supposed to focus on proactive crime reduction activities. With more consistent supervision investigators would not be allowed to conduct proactive investigations just because they believe that doing so is important. The traffic section has also suffered from inconsistent supervision. This has resulted in a situation where,

reportedly, the number of traffic tickets written by selective enforcement officers can drop off dramatically toward the end of a shift.

It should be noted that consistent, effective supervision is important not just to ensuring officers focus their time, attention and skills on activities that are of the most value to the police department and the Dallas community. Effective supervision is also needed to support ongoing training and professional development efforts. Supervisors play a key role in coaching, mentoring, training and developing the skills of the staff reporting to them. Indeed, to be most effective, the in-service training officers receive should be consistently and systematically reinforced by line supervisors. Such responsibilities, however, are generally not even considered to be part of the role of a supervisor in the Dallas Police Department. Fewer than one in five respondents to the citizen survey (17.1 percent) “agree” or “strongly agree” that police department managers and supervisors view helping employees improve their job performance to be one of their primary responsibilities. 64.5 percent of the survey respondents disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

A Number Of Factors Contribute To The Ineffective Supervision That Currently Characterize Much Of The Department’s Operations

The fact that supervision is not more attentive is not surprising given a number of the issues facing the department. First, and perhaps most importantly, a preponderance of first line supervisors lack a strong understanding of what is expected of effective supervisors. For many supervisors, the job is limited to personnel administration, paperwork and “customer relations.” The fact that little or no direction is provided to subordinates is not of great consequence to these supervisors because providing direction and guidance is not central to their understanding of their job responsibilities.

In addition, the leadership problems that currently plague the department trickle down to the supervisory levels. As discussed in Chapter IV, supervisors are hesitant to take needed action to address personnel related issues – especially issues relating to employee discipline – for fear that their decisions will not be supported by managers and leaders “up the line.” This overall climate tends to chill proactive action on the part of supervisors who understand their role but do not supervise aggressively for fear that their efforts will not be supported.

Internal management and operational issues also hinder effective supervision. The administrative burden of some supervisors is so great that the time they have available for direct supervision is limited. As the activity results indicate, patrol supervisors devote roughly a third of their time to paperwork (22.28 percent) and personnel administration (9.64 percent). Investigative supervisors also spend about a third of their time on administrative issues (personnel administration accounts for 16.68 percent of their time and other paperwork accounts for 14.27 percent). In addition, spans of control for some supervisors are so high that effective supervision is made all but impossible. As the following table shows excessively high spans of control are especially problematic in the patrol operations divisions. The average number of officers per sergeant during a four week sample period ranged from a modest 7.1 officers per sergeant on the first watch in the North Central Operations Division to a high of 13.8 officers per sergeant in the Central Operations Division on the third watch. However, during some individual shifts the ratio of officers per sergeant was so high (ranging from 16.0 officers per sergeant in

the Central Operations Division and the Northwest Operations Division on the first watch to 33.0 officers per sergeant in the Northwest Operations Division on the third watch) as to make effective supervision virtually impossible.

Division	First Watch		Second Watch		Third Watch	
	Average Officers Per Sergeant	Maximum Officers Per Sergeant	Average Officers Per Sergeant	Maximum Officers Per Sergeant	Average Officers Per Sergeant	Maximum Officers Per Sergeant
Southeast	10.8	20.5	8.7	12.0	12.7	21.0
Southwest	11.8	27.0	11.4	24.0	13.5	24.0
Central	8.7	16.0	7.3	18.0	13.8	20.0
North Central	7.1	19.0	10.6	32.0	8.5	16.5
Northwest	9.4	16.0	9.8	25.0	12.6	33.0
Northeast	10.8	20.5	12.9	39.0	13.2	24.0

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department Should Take Both Immediate And Long-Term Steps To Strengthen Supervision

Improving the quality and consistency of first line supervision is essential to any effort to improve the police department's performance. As the current situation reveals, even well meaning, dedicated officers will not focus their time, attention and skills on the activities that are the most important to the department unless their supervisors encourage them to do so. Officers who are less dedicated, on the other hand, may not work as diligently as they should unless their supervisors provide positive pressure to do so.

The department should, therefore, take a number of immediate and long-term steps to strengthen supervision.

- Require all supervisors and mid-managers to attend supplemental supervisory training.** As discussed, many mid-managers and supervisors, while hard working and committed employees, lack a complete understanding of their roles and responsibilities as supervisors. The department should, therefore, devise a short training class to be attended by all supervisors that reviews expectations for supervision including, but not limited to: ensuring subordinates make effective use of their time; active and real time observation and review of employee work; employee discipline; coaching, mentoring, and training; and the development of staff skills. In addition, this training should stress the importance of creating a positive work environment and of commending excellent work. This training should also clearly specify expectations for how supervisors should spend their time. In particular, the percentage of the work day that supervisors should devote to actively observing and reviewing the work of subordinates should be specified.

- **Develop and implement systems to monitor supervisory performance.** Given that for many department supervisors the gap between current practice and the expectations outlined in this report is large; it is not realistic to assume that behaviors will change simply by reinforcing expectations in a short training session. The initial training effort must therefore be supported by a system to monitor performance in the field. While care should be taken to ensure that the system does not become overly bureaucratic and create an excessive administrative burden, the system must be sufficiently structured to serve as an effective tool for monitoring supervisory performance. At a minimum, supervisors should be required to account for how they spend their time (perhaps by completing a simple timesheet) and to document the coaching subordinates receive. Once established the system should be used to monitor the performance of each individual supervisor. The results of this review should be reflected in the supervisor's performance evaluation.

- **Reduce the administrative and other burdens placed on supervisors.** Supervision should be the top priority of first-line supervisors in the Dallas Police Department and the demands currently placed on them should be modified to reflect this priority. To free up the time needed to focus on supervision the paperwork burdens currently placed on supervisors should be reduced. (Chapter XI discusses the steps that should be taken to reduce this paperwork burden.) In addition, other tasks assigned to supervisors – for example, special projects – should be reviewed to ensure that they do not require so much time that they prevent supervisors from focusing on providing needed supervision.

- **Ensuring reasonable supervisory spans of control.** While supervisory spans of control are reasonable in many department units (and in some cases are too narrow) the spans of control for some functions – especially patrol – are unreasonable. Unless spans of control are reduced to manageable levels, the quality of first line supervision will not improve. (Adjustments to supervisory spans of control, where needed, are presented in the discussion of individual bureau operations presented in chapters XIV to XVIII.)