

Personnel System Identifies Commendable Actions and Problematic Trends

Everyone stands up a little straighter, smiles a bit more often and works a little harder when they receive well-deserved praise for going above and beyond the call of duty. At California's Orange County Sheriff's Department, a new Personnel History Index (PHI) tracks emails, phone calls and verbal compliments, and ensures that deputies receive the recognition they've earned.

Orange County rolled out the new PHI in April 2012 with the Commendation/Complaint module, and plans to integrate five other databases into the system in the near future: internal affairs, traffic collision, use of force, workers' compensation claims and civil litigation claims. Once complete, the system will unite disparate databases and allow employees to review all personnel data retained by the department. A comprehensive database will allow the department to conduct comparative analysis and identify problematic trends.

"What we're trying to get to is a way to ensure that positive incidents are acknowledged and areas for improvement are identified," says Capt. Mark Long, commander of the Strategy, Accountability, Focus and Evaluation (S.A.F.E.) Division. "For example, our use of force database is pretty robust. We created it in-house, and it gives us a lot of information on which deputies use force and whether the incidents result in injuries to the suspects or the deputies. When the full system is up and running, we can also look at workers' comp claims and see if we can correlate the use of force with injury claims. It may show us that we need to work on training on alternate ways of taking people into custody. It will give us the tangible cost of using force because we will be able to quickly identify the number of lost days and medical costs related to these injuries."

"We suspect that the more often force is used, the more injuries are incurred by suspects and our employees," Long says. "We want to reduce both. We may find that the more often force is used, the more often civil litigation claims are filed. A decline in the use of force might create a corresponding decline in claims, judgment and lawsuits."

Capt. Wayne Byerley, a member of Long's division who played an integral role in system development, adds, "We want to reduce the amount of claims and lawsuits by creating a system of accountability."

Accountability includes the commendations, along with trends that indicate areas for improvement. Byerley says Orange County needed to ensure that if a deputy did something extraordinary, "like running into a burning building and saving a baby," it was properly recorded so that the deputy would receive a significant commendation such as consideration for the Annual Medal of Valor.

"Also, we get requests all the time from different civic groups to recommend someone to receive their Deputy of the Year award," says Long, who gave a presentation on the system at the Spring 2012 National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Technology Institute for Law Enforcement. "In the past, something might happen on the midnight shift, a note might get written and not go anywhere. With the new PHI system, it gets routed to the appropriate place. And if a deputy gets multiple commendations, we can take note of that as well."

Byerley says that the previous system used by Orange County only allowed for one-way communications. If a captain wanted more information about an incident, there was no way to return a report to the originating sergeant. That led to officers going outside the system with emails and written notes, and some commendations and complaints were never recorded. With the new PHI, communication can flow both ways.

Long says that even under the old system, Orange County historically did a good job of documenting major complaints, but found that, "The little stuff, the low-level complaints from the public, wasn't well documented. I'm not talking about incidents that are a violation of policy or a serious allegation against a deputy, just comments that might indicate a deputy could improve public interactions. We all need to be reminded that we're in a customer-service business. We're not looking to mete out discipline. Instead, we use the feedback we receive through the system as an opportunity to improve."

The driving force behind the initiative is the reduction of litigation costs and injuries to employees, but there are other benefits as well.

“One of the things we’re trying to do is to improve our service delivery,” Long says. “This is not a system of discipline; this is a system of identifying risk factors and improving performance. We want to reduce our exposure, but we also want to get deputies into mentoring or customer relations programs if they need it.”

Byerley adds, “We want this to be a positive experience for people, not a negative one.”

Orange County kicked off the program by conducting four training sessions and making an in-house tutorial available after the April 2012 rollout. Aiming for a positive and interactive experience, the department continued to tweak and improve the system based on user feedback. The PHI uses Microsoft® CRM as its framework, with customized features that fit the sheriff’s department workflow. Long says Orange County purchased 628 licenses at a total cost of \$328,000, and used Microsoft partner Tribridge to build the customized system.

“We had a deputy create the in-house databases we’d been using previously to capture information, and that created a little bit of a disconnect with our IT people,” Long says. “We decided in September 2011 to come up with an integrated solution that the IT people would embrace and our own people would find user-friendly.”

“Microsoft was great about providing assistance,” he adds. “CRM provides an excellent platform for many future projects the department is considering. The company wants to market CRM for various uses, and thinks that government agencies in general are an untapped market. I’ve heard that some other California law enforcement agencies are interested in working with Microsoft to develop their own systems, and although I think there’s a benefit in this kind of system for everybody, it’s of more benefit to bigger agencies. When you have 3,600 personnel, it’s hard to keep track of everybody manually.”

The reporting aspect of the system will be especially helpful.

“For a PHI to be truly effective, you have to be able to generate reports and make comparisons. With our old system, the databases didn’t talk to each other,” Byerley says. “Once we get everything on this platform, we’ll be able to generate the reports we need to make good business decisions.”

Long adds, “With all the technical jargon, county purchasing rules, attorney precautions, and lack of resources, challenges abound. Buying licenses and developing systems takes time and costs money, but if it makes us better at our jobs or helps us win or prevent a lawsuit, it’s money well spent.”

For more information on the Orange County PHI project, contact Capt. Mark Long at mlong@ocsd.org. For more information on Microsoft CRM, visit <http://crm.dynamics.com/en-us/home>. For information on NIJ Technology Institutes for Law Enforcement, contact NIJ Law Enforcement Program Manager Michael O’Shea at michael.oshea@usdoj.gov.



This article was reprinted from the Winter 2013 edition of *TechBeat*, the quarterly newsmagazine of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center System, a program of the National Institute of Justice under Cooperative Agreement #2010–MU–MU–K020, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

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