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# Personality Differences Between Police and Fire Applicants

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*An increasingly common administrative policy is to combine police and fire departments into one collective unit titled something such as "Department of Public Safety." However, in order to make such a combination, job incumbents must be able to perform the duties of both a patrolperson and a firefighter. Thus a combination of police and fire departments assumes that police and fire applicants are similar in skills, abilities, and personality characteristics. The purpose of the present study was to determine if police and fire applicants were similar in terms of personality. The results indicated that there were significant personality differences between police and fire applicants. These differences were discussed in terms of the policy of combining police and fire departments.*

A practice of increasing popularity in the area of public personnel management is the combination of the traditionally separate police and fire departments into one unified organizational area typically called something similar to "Department of Public Safety." In

such a department, each individual would be expected to perform the functions associated with being both a police patrolperson and a firefighter.

While there are many arguments for and against such a reorganization, there is little empirical evidence available that would support either side. Proponents of a combined police and fire organization argue that a unified department would reduce operating costs as well as response time due to the more efficient manner in which personnel could be utilized. Opponents of the reorganization argue that police and fire personnel are involved in different tasks, thus different individuals should be hired for the respective jobs so that each applicant can perform the job for which he or she is best suited.

While the available literature contains some evidence that police and fire positions involve different knowledges, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics (Ronan, Talbert, & Mullet, 1977; Ronan, Anderson, & Talbert, 1976; Kimbrough & Mullins, 1978), it is not known whether or not individuals who apply for police positions are

different from the types of individuals who apply for fire positions.

The answer to the question regarding differences in job applicants is important as there is a body of literature that indicates that personality is related to job performance for both patrolpersons and firefighters (Matarazzo, Allen, Saslow & Wiens, 1964; Johnson & Hogan, 1981; Azen, Snibbe, & Montgomery, 1973). Thus, if the personality of fire applicants is different from that of police applicants, an argument could be made against the combination of the two departments. That is, if different personality traits are characteristic of success in the two jobs, then it is only reasonable that different types of applicants be selected for the two jobs.

In order to test the hypothesis that differences exist between the personalities of police and fire applicants, applicants for positions in the police and fire departments of a medium-sized town were administered the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) (Hathaway & McKinley, 1943) and the Trait Evaluation Index (TEI) (Bruce, 1968). Differences in mean scores for each of the scales between the police and fire applicants were then tested.

### Method

*Subjects.* The subjects in the study were 91 applicants for the position of police patrolperson and 35 applicants for the position of firefighter.

*Procedure.* Each of the applicants was administered both the MMPI and the TEI as part of the employment selection procedures for the positions of firefighter and police patrolperson. The TEI is a 124-item personality inventory that measures 24 personality dimensions. Research on the TEI indicates that the test has adequate reliability and validity (Nelson, 1968). The MMPI contains 566 true-false items and has been successfully used as a psychological screening device for police patrolpersons (Cohen & Chaiken, 1973).

*T-tests* were conducted to determine whether or not there were significant differences between police and fire applicants for the 13 scales of the MMPI and the 24 scales of the TEI.

### Results and Discussion

As indicated in Tables 1 and 2, the results indicated that there were significant differences between the scores of the police and firefighter applicants on the personality inventories. The *t*-tests indicated that police applicants scored higher on the K (fake good) and Hypochondriasis scales, and lower on the Social Introversion scale of the MMPI than did firefighter applicants. In addition, police applicants scored higher on Personal Adequacy and Sincerity, and lower on Social Orientation, Compliance, Elation, and Femininity scales of the TEI.

TABLE 1. Comparison of Police and Fire Applicant MMPI Scores

MMPI Scale	Fire X	Police X	<i>t</i> -test	<i>p</i> <
L	51.34	52.79	.89	.40
F	50.85	50.88	.01	.99
K	54.14	58.74	2.45	.02
Hypochondriasis	46.37	50.22	2.29	.02
Depression	53.00	51.34	.98	.33
Hysteria	50.89	53.81	1.82	.07
Psychopathic deviate	55.03	58.07	1.51	.13
Masculinity	53.77	54.48	.41	.69
Paranoia	54.37	51.62	1.25	.22
Psychasthenia	53.02	52.63	.23	.82
Schizophrenia	50.68	53.25	1.13	.26
Hypomania	58.57	57.12	.70	.49
Social introversion	50.54	47.70	1.90	.05

Note: All means are listed in *t*-scores.



TABLE 2. Comparison of Police and Fire Applicant TEI Scores

TEI Scale	Fire $\bar{X}$	Police $\bar{X}$	t-test	p <
Social orientation	12.51	11.14	2.15	.03
Compliance	18.98	17.03	3.21	.001
Benevolence	23.11	20.29	2.87	.005
Elation	12.69	10.63	3.23	.001
Ambition	12.15	12.18	.05	.96
Motivation	15.58	16.70	1.38	.17
Self-confidence	14.07	13.90	.22	.82
Dynamism	17.18	16.12	1.69	.09
Independence	12.07	13.29	1.60	.11
Personal adequacy	16.56	18.03	2.46	.02
Caution	17.56	18.67	1.13	.26
Self-organization	12.47	12.92	.66	.51
Responsibility	18.51	19.78	1.81	.07
Propriety	15.73	15.09	1.08	.28
Courtesy	13.93	14.10	.26	.79
Verbal orientation	9.80	10.62	1.06	.29
Intellectual orientation	11.65	12.71	1.19	.24
Perception	12.13	11.99	.19	.85
Self-control	17.85	17.40	.72	.48
Fairmindedness	16.35	15.46	1.18	.24
Adaptability	14.87	13.98	1.50	.13
Sincerity	15.92	17.85	2.94	.003
Masculinity	10.15	11.19	1.79	.07
Femininity	12.78	11.33	2.60	.01

The results if this study seem to indicate that police and fire applicants are at least minimally different in terms of personality as there were significant differences between the two groups in 10 to 37 comparisons. These ten differences can be contrasted to the two statistically significant differences that would be expected by chance alone.

In terms of practical applications, these findings suggest that the combination of

police and fire departments should perhaps be discouraged. Previous research (Strong, 1943) indicates that homogeneous personalities are attracted to and are successful in any given profession. Thus, it does not seem prudent to combine two professions such as firefighter and police patrolperson which require different knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics and whose job applicants have different personalities.

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