The Training Needs of Officers Working in the Municipal Police

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper was written in order to present research undertaken in the Municipal Police of Thessaloniki (MPTH). The research objective was to outline the educational/training needs of officers working within this organisation.

Design/methodology/approach: 118 questionnaires were distributed to municipal police officers. Subsequently, six semi-structured interviews with selected officers were held, enriching with qualitative data the research. The combination of quantitative as well as qualitative data, provided the researchers with a more complete “triangulated” view of the organisation.

Findings: The research concluded that the officers working for MPTH, receive inadequate training. This has contributed to the reduced degree of service response towards the needs of the general public. Specialised/thematic and regular training interventions are required, particularly in areas related to new or important functions of the MP officer profession. At the same time, "gaps" and "shortcomings" were found in matters affecting the general organizational/operational level of MPTH, but also problems inherent in the industry, problems on communication/contact with citizens and other services.

Research implications: Thorough training on specific fields as well as other, (more radical), interventions need to be made within MPTH: on its structure, the way it operates and the degree of independence the organisation obtains in relevance to central administration authorities as well as political parties.

Originality/Value: The present research has explored a relatively new institution in Greek public administration, which, although quite ambitious, has not, so far, achieved a wide degree of acceptance among Greek citizens. Therefore, the researchers have followed a multi-dimensional approach, trying to assess whether training gaps are the main sources of problems within MPTH.

Keywords: education and training, training needs assessment, Municipal Police officer role, knowledge, skills, attitudes.
1. Summary introduction

Nowadays, public administration has to adapt to a continuously changing social environment where all administrative tasks need to be executed effectively, with quality and at the minimum cost. In that respect, in many countries, Local Governments (LGs) very often serve the purpose of reducing central government administration structures, so as to obtain a more decentralised way of dealing with local needs. These needs are more proximate to LGs rather than central administration authorities, therefore, they might be addressed more effectively by local authorities. In order to achieve that, training of those working within LG services seems to be all too important. The development of scientific/technological knowledge in the recent years, has brought to the fore notions such as lifelong education and training. Many theorists in the field of Adult Education have emphasised on the importance of continuous education/training, on trainee involvement in the training process, on taking into account the experiences of the trainees and, in general, on dealing with all trainees as adults (Rogers, 2002, Jarvis, 2004).

Municipal Police (MP), an institution of public administration, serves a new form of soft policing, where MP officers, exercise duties which complement the role of the national police force. In Greece, the first MP force has been founded in year 1985 within the (Municipal of) City of Athens. Other, big cities (such as Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece) have later followed. Each MP service has been founded as an independent organisational entity, which reports to the mayor. MP officers wear uniforms but are not allowed to carry any weapons or any defensive equipment. They have a wide range of responsibilities: traffic policing, outdoors trade/advertising, authorisations/licences to local businesses, smoking policies, maintaining order in public places, construction regulations etc.

Although MP forces, across the country, serve a “real” need (taking up responsibilities which cannot be served by national police forces, which normally deal with the more “serious” aspects of law violation), there have been substantial problems which affect their operation: lack of political support from central administration, fragmented rules and regulations, overregulation at times, “inteventions” from political parties etc. All these problems have, at times, damaged the institution. The paper presents research undertaken in the Municipal Police of Thessaloniki (MPTH). It explores the educational/training needs of officers working within this organisation.

It consists of the following parts: 1) Summary introduction, 2) Literature review, 3) Statement of research objectives, 4) Methodology, 5) Presentation of key findings, 6) Limitations of the research and 7) Conclusion.

2. Literature review

The term “need” has been defined as the “gap” between a “present situation” and a “desired situation” (Altschuld & Kumar, 2010, Gupta, 2007, Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). We identify, in particular, a “training need” when such a gap can be covered/remedied with the use of an
educational/training intervention (Peterson, 1998). In that respect, it is important to point out that:

- Each “need” (e.g. problem, insufficient degree of effectiveness etc.) is not necessarily an “educational/training need” (Brown, 2002).
- The “desired situation” should be describing a necessity or an “objectively correct” need and not a simple wish/desire.
- Training needs should be examined with an interdisciplinary approach.

For the purpose of this research, the “training needs” term has been used in order to include all knowledge, skills and attitudes which are necessary for performing the role of an MP officer. As mentioned earlier, the elements which form part of the general knowledge/skills/attitudes background of the MP officer role, should not be interpreted as individual entities; on the contrary they should be examined and understood within their totality.

A number of theorists have agreed upon the definition that the training needs assessment is the process of identifying the training needs of a specific target group. Such an assessment is usually performed in order to define the exact content of a training intervention, so as the gaps identified could be addressed, within a specific context. (Goldstein, 1993, Altschuld & Kumar, 2010, Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). In addition to that, Altschuld and Kumar (2010) have also emphasised on the importance of prioritizing/putting a hierarchy on training needs. Carafella (2002) also commented that each training needs assessment should result in specific conclusions/recommendations on the content of future training interventions. Moreover, it helps identifying several problems which are organisation-specific (Brown, 2002, Witkin & Altschuld, 1995).

In the last decades, within the field of training needs assessment a substantial number of approaches/models have been developed. The O-T-P model is a popular one, especially within business training contexts. According to this model there are three levels of training needs assessment:

- Organizational Analysis,
- Task Analysis and
- Personal/individual Analysis (Holton at all, 2000, Goldstein 1993, Brown, 2002).

There is also the model of Witkin and Altschuld, which has the following steps (Altschuld & Kumar, 2010): a) Pre-assessment, b) Assessment and c) Post-assessment. Moreover, Witkin and Altschuld (1995) identified three levels of needs:

- Level 1 (L1, the primary level), which comprises the needs of those receiving the services or making use of the products of an organization (e.g. students, patients, clients, customers etc.)
• Level 2 (L2, the secondary level), which includes the needs of the individuals or groups who deliver the services to those participating in Level 1. Level 2 is therefore related to teachers, health care personnel, sales people, etc.
• Level 3 (L3, the tertiary level), which comprises the needs in resources and supportive structures (buildings, facilities, classrooms, benefits etc.).

3. Statement of research objectives

Policing work has its own individual characteristics, being very different to administrative work of any other public sector service. In that respect, there is a constant need for continuous education and training on knowledge skills and attitudes (Jaschke, 2007). In Greece, training of MP officers has been influenced by: a) the type of training which is addressed to all public servants and b) the training which is relevant to policing duties. In order to exercise their tasks, all MP officers have to undergo a six-month initial training programme before undertaking any responsibilities. The issue is whether such an intervention has been efficient, or, there are other “gaps” that need to be addressed as well. In that respect, the research presented here, has been developed in order to explore the following research questions:

Question 1 (Q1): Is the organisation (MPTH) sufficiently performing its role towards its customers?

Question 2 (Q2): Do the officers of MPTH identify “gaps” concerning their knowledge, skills and attitudes which are considered important for carrying out their professional role?

Question 3 (Q3): Could the “gaps” identified, be remedied with training interventions, or, are they due to other reasons?

4. Methodology

As mentioned earlier, the research was based on the Municipal Police of Thessaloniki (MPTH). The target group was the employees/officers of MPTH, in total 180 people.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was followed. The research was conducted using the method of analysis of the "scope or frame of reference”, the use of questionnaires in a substantial part of the target population (N = 118, 65% of the total population), and interviews of selected persons. The use of questionnaires has been a very popular way of assessing training needs. Questionnaire reliability issues have been addressed with the initial use (pilot use of the questionnaire) in a small number of employees.

With regards to the quantitative part of the research, the researchers have adopted Witkin, and Altschuld’s (1995) distinction of training needs (see part 2 of the article), focusing on Levels 1 and 2 (since the research was about training, needs in resources, buildings, equipment etc. have not been explored). In Table 1, we have outlined the general structure of the
questionnaire (which had six parts, A, B, C, D, E, F) in relevance to the level of needs explored, the research questions (Q1, Q2 and Q3) and the data obtained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Level of need</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data obtained</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Profile of the respondents: demographic data, level of education, job, responsibilities/duties.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>L1</td>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Views of the employees with regards to whether: a) the organisation is sufficiently performing its role towards (the expectations of) its customers, the public and b) lifelong education/training would improve quality and effectiveness of the organisation.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Views of the employees on the characteristics of their role (communication with citizens/other services, access to information/training, job satisfaction).</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Views of the employees about possible “gaps” concerning their knowledge, skills and attitudes, which are important for their professional role – quantitative data.</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Views of the employees about: a) additional knowledge, skills and attitudes which might be required for their professional role and b) disadvantages on training they have received so far (qualitative data).</td>
<td>2 (open questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>Views of the employees on whether the “gaps” identified could be remedied with training interventions, or, are due to other reasons.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
Part D of the questionnaire, is the centre of the training needs assessment process. In this part, respondents have been asked to identify “gaps” between what they know and what they should know, in order to perform their role. There have been identified four general categories of knowledge/skills:

i. Knowledge of law (constitutional, administrative, civil, criminal etc.).

ii. Knowledge/skills, which are related to specific responsibilities (maintaining order in public places, outdoors trade, outdoors advertising, traffic policing, etc.).

iii. Other (general) knowledge/skills (police practice, driving, self defense, foreign languages, IT skills, knowledge on social issues, human resource management, psychology, sociology, first aid skills etc.).

iv. Social/interpersonal skills (communication/customer focus, problem solving, self-control, conflict resolution, team work etc.).

The researchers have devised these categories of knowledge/skills based on:

- the duties of MP officers, which are described in the law/regulations concerning the operation of MP force,
- the content of initial training all MP officers receive before taking up duties,
- the views of ten key-people (directors of MPH, supervisors, officers with excellent track record), who have been interviewed in order to provide a general frame of the MP profession. These interviews took place before the beginning of the research phase (quantitative research).

In this part of the questionnaire (part D), for each of the above categories of knowledge/skills (i, ii, iii and iv), the respondents were asked to assess in a Likert scale from 1 to 7 (1: insufficient, 7:very high) two things:

a) the level of knowledge/skills which is normally required for performing the role of MP officer (desired/ideal level). The researchers have then calculated the mean of all answers, in order summarise the views of all respondents and assess the desired level of knowledge/skills which is important for performing such a role. This measure, in some respects, outlines the importance MP officers place, on each particular set of knowledge/skills.

b) their own level of knowledge/skills, which they portray while performing their tasks (current/actual level).

By comparing these two levels (a and b), for each category of knowledge/skills (i, ii, iii and iv), the researchers were able to identify specific gaps, which would later require some training interventions. The quantitative data were processed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

In addition to the questionnaire, six semi-structured interviews were conducted with some employees, in order to diminish the disadvantages of a pure quantitative approach. In that
respect, triangulation of data was achieved, which usually increases the quality of each research approach (Cohen et al., 2000). Semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to define six set axis of questions, providing, in addition, a degree of flexibility when outlining the views of the respondents, therefore, delving into issues which might have not been possible to explore with questionnaires. Therefore, 17 open questions have been devised. These questions were similar to those from the questionnaire, appropriately modified for an interview.

5. Presentation of key findings

With regards to the general profile of those responding to the questionnaire (quantitative data extracted from part A of the questionnaire) the findings were as follows: Sex: Male (69.49%), Female (30.51%). Age: 25-35 (48%), 35-40 (17.80%), 40+ (34.2%). Educational Level: University degree (47.46%), High School (52.54%). Main job/responsibilities: Traffic policing (32.20%), General policing (35.39%), Administration/support (25.42%), Other (6.99%).

Regarding the first research question (Q1), from both quantitative (see Table 2), as well as qualitative (analysis of) the data, it appeared that the officers of MPTH seemed to believe that their organisation responds satisfactorily to its law-related responsibilities. They acknowledged, however, that such a response is not conceived so favourably by the members of the public. According to the respondents, the reasons for this “gap” are organisational problems within MPTH, insufficient knowledge of the public (citizens) regarding the role/responsibilities of MP, unpleasant mentality from some members of the public towards MP officers, lack of support/political leadership and lack of training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response of MPTH to its law-related responsibilities.</th>
<th>1: not at all</th>
<th>2: not much</th>
<th>3: neutral</th>
<th>4: somewhat</th>
<th>5: very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response of MPTH to the expectations of its customers (members of the public)</td>
<td>0.86 %</td>
<td>12.71 %</td>
<td>55.08 %</td>
<td>28.81 %</td>
<td>2.54 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response of MPTH to the expectations of its customers (members of the public)</td>
<td>2.55 %</td>
<td>32.2 %</td>
<td>44.92 %</td>
<td>18.64 %</td>
<td>1.69 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

The research has shown that the training needs of those working within MPTH are related to autonomous fields of knowledge/skills (general training needs). However, the nature of their responsibilities and the difficulties that arise on the job, showed that training on specific areas (specific training needs) are equally important. This is where more specialised knowledge and skills (e.g. on traffic policing or on outdoors/open trade) might be very crucial.
With regards to the second research question (Q2), Tables 3-6, outline the training needs “gaps” of MPTH officers in relevance to the four main categories of knowledge/skills explored.

### i) Knowledge of law

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank (importance)</th>
<th>Mean (desired level)</th>
<th>Rank (gap)</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application of law in practical situations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.8559</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal law</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.7458</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal proceedings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.6017</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil law</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.2712</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative law</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.4492</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional law</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.0424</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic (introductory) knowledge of law</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.20339</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

With relevance to the knowledge of low, it appeared that the biggest “gaps” have been identified on the areas of practical application of law and on criminal law. These are the issues, which, according to respondents, have been ranked as the most important ones (requiring the highest level of knowledge/skill) in the law field. It seems that there is a greater need for more hands-on training/practice on the duties/responsibilities which are law-related. Another thing that came up, was that making the distinction between various fields of law, is not something that all respondents could easily do; for example, in the research, the knowledge of administrative law appeared less prominent (in terms of its importance as well as the knowledge gap identified).

### ii) Knowledge/skills related to specific responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank (importance)</th>
<th>Mean (desired level)</th>
<th>Rank (gap)</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traffic policing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.5847</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors trade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.5593</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitary facilities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3898</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public spaces, protecting public property</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.3898</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outdoors advertising 5 6.2797 2 2.04237
Maintaining general order 6 6.2797 5 1.87288
Other responsibilities 7 6.2373 4 1.92373
General constructions regulations 8 5.8475 1 2.63559

Table 4

Regarding knowledge and skills related to specific responsibilities (see Table 4), it needs to be mentioned that issues such as these, have not been included in the basic training all MP officers follow in the beginning of their employment. It was expected, therefore to appear quite substantial training “gaps”. For example, knowledge on general constructions regulations is the field with the biggest gap between what the respondents know and what they should know; the reason is that this has been a recently introduced, -as well as a quite complicated- domain in the responsibilities of MPs. Unfortunately relevant training interventions have not been introduced so far (by the correspondent authorities). Equally substantial training “gap” has been identified in the field of outdoors advertising; although there have been several circulars clarifying some issues on this field, it has been argued that the relevant legislative framework is quite complex and, at times, “badly written”.

iii) Other (general) knowledge/skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank (importance)</th>
<th>Mean (desired level)</th>
<th>Rank (gap)</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police practice</td>
<td>6.4407</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.70339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving (use of vehicles)</td>
<td>6.3475</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.48305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First aid skills</td>
<td>6.1610</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.26271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology, sociology, communication</td>
<td>6.1186</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.15254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign languages, IT skills</td>
<td>6.0593</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.54237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource management</td>
<td>5.9915</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.04237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of the environment</td>
<td>5.8729</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.68644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self defense</td>
<td>5.7627</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.44915</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With regards to other knowledge/skills, which are considered important for the general set of MP officers duties, the biggest training gap has been identified in the field of self defense. In the past, there have been some violent incidents towards officers of MPTH, which highlighted the need for thorough training on self defense techniques, as well as for providing officers with the proper protective/defensive equipment. The interviews with the officers have shown that these are very sensitive issues, since there have been arguments for and against adopting a more decisive approach on violent incidents: personal views on these matters are often influenced by gender, personality traits as well as (possible) psychological dilemmas of the officers involved. Another issue which arose from questionnaires as well as interviews, was that there has been lack of training on first aid skills (second biggest “gap”) as well as on applying theoretical knowledge of psychology/sociology/communication into everyday practice (third biggest “gap”).

### iv) Social/interpersonal skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social/interpersonal skills</th>
<th>Rank (importance)</th>
<th>Mean (desired level)</th>
<th>Rank (gap)</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7881</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.43220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/customer focus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7542</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.33051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team work, collaboration with colleagues/other services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7203</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.28814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7203</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.60169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving (indoors and/or outdoors)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.6864</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.67797</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

Social/interpersonal skills are usually considered very important for the policing role, therefore, there has always been training on these issues for those entering the profession. As a result, the “gaps” identified within this field appeared to be smaller, than the ones in other fields. In relevance to this, the reader should keep in mind that self-report subjectivity might be an issue when social skills are explored; it is much easier for a person to admin that he/she lacks...
specialised knowledge on a specific matter, e.g. practical application of psychology/sociology knowledge (which is due to lack of training), rather than to admit that he/she lacks qualities such as self-control or communication skills (which might be due to personal/individual deficiencies). This argument, combined with the fact that social skills have been considered very important by the majority of the respondents, highlights the importance of providing extended and practical training in combination with the correspondent theoretical background (knowledge on psychology/sociology/communication). Within this group of social skills, problem solving and conflict resolution were identified as “problematic areas”.

With regards to the third research question (Q3) the data derived from the questionnaires, as well as the qualitative data from the interviews, showed that several weaknesses of the organisation (MPTH) were due, not only to training “gaps”, but to other reasons as well. The following issues arose:

- Weaknesses of MPTH which are relevant to the nature (and specific characteristics) of the organisation: On one hand, the majority of the respondents have acknowledged (with varied degrees) the policing nature of the organisation: need for discipline, tight internal control, wearing a uniform etc. On the other hand, they accepted that in some respects, they are personally responsible for the deficiencies of their organisation (lack of employee interest, low morale of public servants etc.).
- Lack of long term vision for MPTH, which is related to political parties “interventions”, within its structure and role. This is an issue, which has also been discussed in most interviews with the respondents, where they emphatically stressed that the institution of MP has not formed a vision from the beginning of its operation, nor has achieved a satisfactory degree of independence from central government as well as political parties.
- Lack of communication channels with the public (citizens). Although the intention of those setting up the MP was to create an institution which would be “close” to the citizens, such a goal has not been achieved. The respondents have identified a degree of prejudice/reservedness between MP officers and the public, which is demonstrated when conflicts arise.

All these issues bring to surface the need for a general restructure of MPTH, where continuous education and training could have an important role to play. However, other, more radical political decisions/changes should be made, which would take into account the general context in which such an organisation would operate, in relevance to the expectations and needs of the general public.

6. Limitations of the research

With regards to the first research question (Q1), the response of the Organisation (MPTH) to the public’s needs has been assessed according to employees views (MP officers: the service providers). There should be a more thorough exploration of these issues based on:
• mainly the citizens point of view (the service receivers).
• the supervisors point of view (those being in charge of MPTH).

Due to the fact that the research explored employee views on organisational training, responses to questions on these issues could be biased by the respondent’s unwillingness to acknowledge their own deficiencies in performing their professional roles. They might also have training needs which are not conscious to them, meaning that they are unaware that such needs exist.

7. Conclusion

Considerable training “gaps” have been identified with regards the duties of MP officers. There is a need for including more fields in the content of training officers (should) follow (e.g. on general constructions regulations, self defense techniques etc.) as well as deepening some fields which are already part of their formal training (e.g. adopting a more practical approach when training officers on law enforcement issues, communication etc.).

With regards to the structure, the characteristics and the way of operation of MPTH (non-training needs), the research has shown that there is lack of vision/mission of the organisation, “unorthodox” interventions from general administration as well as political parties. There have also been identified organisational and mentality-intrinsic issues within MPTH (lack of morale of public servants employed, lack of orientation on the policing degree of the services provided etc.).

References