

Importance of Interactive Decision Training at the Academy

by Jason Sherwin and Mark Rusin



At the start of an officer's career, there are two stages of training that help to ensure greater public and officer safety. In the first stage, the

recruit completes training at the academy. In the second, the recruit's academy performance feeds into the field training that follows. Both stages of training require the development of skills in observation and analysis, leading to timely and accurate decision making. In this article, we highlight the use of an interactive decision training platform, e-TRAIN, to accomplish these stages of training.

e-TRAIN provides scenario-based training that allows recruits to experience real-life situations in a safe and controlled environment. Specifically, e-TRAIN is a video-based platform designed to increase efficiency of an officer's observation and analysis skills. The net result after academy is that recruits develop decision-making skills and situational awareness across broad areas of law enforcement. For those areas not sufficiently developed, e-TRAIN metrics guide Field Training Officers (FTOs) on which skills need to be honed in the field.

In part 1 of this article, we report on the integration of e-TRAIN at a training academy. In part 2, we look at a specific officer who exhibited a deficiency when compared to peers. Specifically, we highlight how data collected with e-TRAIN informed this recruit's skill development in the academy and laid a roadmap for FTO supervisors to mitigate decision hesitancy in the field.

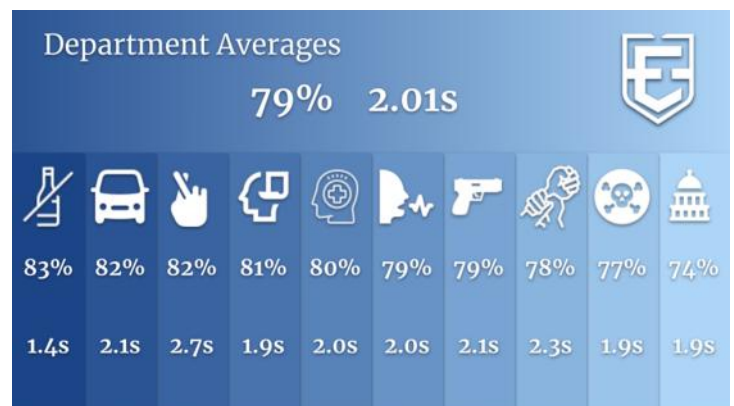
Part 1: Integration at Syracuse Police Department Academy

In Fall 2023, the Syracuse Police Department Academy ("Academy") partnered with deCervo to integrate its interactive decision training product, e-TRAIN, into academy curriculum. Recruits completed 3-4 scenarios as homework twice weekly and then reviewed them together as a class.

Over a 2-month training, the recruits demonstrated good performance. Their overall accuracy rate ("Accuracy") was

79% and average decision time ("Response Time") was 2.01 seconds. Since all scenarios in e-TRAIN are novel to recruits, the Accuracy and Response Time are vital metrics to gauge how efficiently the recruits apply new skills to unfamiliar situations. Specifically, low Response Time, while maintaining high Accuracy, is important because it quantifies how efficiently a recruit observes and analyzes a novel situation before deciding. With these metrics, we trace the development of each recruit's decision efficiency.

We examined how the recruits' decisions broke down by specific topic areas. For instance, the recruits showed highest Accuracy in decisions about DUIs (83%) and Vehicle Stops (82%). They showed fastest Response Times in DUIs (1.4s) and Tactics (1.9s). In the figure below, the remaining decision categories are indicated via icons and Accuracies below each, with Response Times in the lowest row.



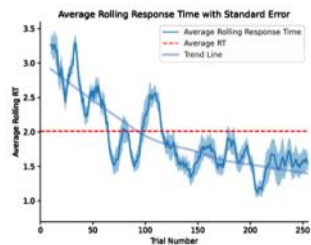
Part 1: Recruits Developed More Efficient Observation and Analysis Before Decisions

During the 2-month training, the recruits reduced their Response Times significantly. From this result, and similar ones we have observed in other academy trainings, we infer that recruits increased the efficiency of their observation and analysis skills ahead of making decisions.

The figure below shows how Response Time changed

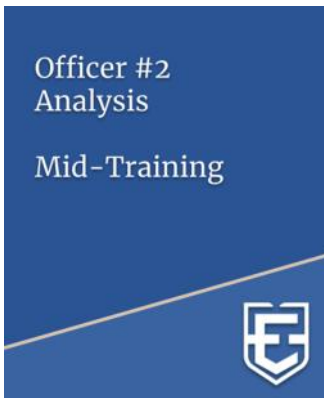
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during the 2-month training. The recruits condensed their Response Time from 3s to an average of 1.6s. Importantly, during the same 2-month period, the overall Accuracy did not change significantly. As a result, we infer that the recruits recalled learned information more quickly and were able to apply that information effectively to novel situations.



Response Times have stabilized around 1.6s

single-choice compares to Academy peers. Officer #2 is circled to the right.



Part 2: Preparation for Transition to FTO

Over the second month of training, Officer #2 continued use of e-TRAIN both as homework and in-person during classroom discussion. Along the way, Officer #2 continued to be challenged with single- and multi-choice questions. In this time, we observed that Officer #2's decision hesitancy declined. By the end of the 2-month period, Officer #2 halved the Accuracy difference between single- and multi-choice questions to -7%. In fact, for the last fifty questions of training, Officer #2 showed a +2% difference in Accuracy between multi- and single-choice questions.

The case of Officer #2 illustrates the importance of e-TRAIN metrics for FTO supervisors. The FTO of Officer #2 can utilize the information about his/her decision hesitancy evolution in at least two ways. First, the FTO can pair this recruit with another officer who is known to excel in teaching decision confidence in the field. Second, the FTO can directly train that skill with the recruit. We can generalize from Officer #2 how all recruits' FTO supervisors could benefit by knowing specific weaknesses measured with e-TRAIN so those areas can be deliberately trained in the field.

From recruit training, to FTO transition, we have used e-TRAIN metrics to hone decision skills with interactive training at the Syracuse Police Department Academy. Looking ahead, we envision extending these tools to hone in-service / remedial training too, before problems arise

The growth and development of the recruits from this training is also clear from the observations of their instructors. For instance, one of the Academy's instructors remarked that these recruits were the most well-prepared he had ever encountered upon graduation.

Part 2: Decision Hesitancy in One Recruit

Despite these overall trends, the instructors also observed one recruit who exhibited decision hesitancy in live training scenarios. We sought to use e-TRAIN to quantify how this decision hesitancy was manifesting in the recruit's observation and analysis skills, and whether these effects manifested in e-TRAIN metrics. For simplicity, we will refer to this recruit as "Officer #2."

We distilled Officer #2's efficiency in observation and analysis into a probe of his/her multiple vs. single choice Accuracy. Specifically, we examined if the recruit is able to decide single answers among a binary choice with the same Accuracy as among multiple choices. We found that Officer #2's Accuracy dropped by 14% when answering multiple-choice compared to single-choice questions. Midway through the 2-month training, the figure below shows how Officer #2's Accuracy change from multiple-

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in the field. In these ways, we are using a tool for interactive decision training, deCervo's e-TRAIN, to augment officer safety and that of the public. **ILEETA**

About the Authors

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