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## **A TAXONOMY FOR SECURITY ASSIGNMENTS**

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### Abstract

Despite its importance in most security plans, the position of security guard has undergone very little systematic examination. In response this paper proposes a formal taxonomy of security guard positions as a starting point for research. A number of procedures that could be used to test the taxonomy are proposed. Finally, implications of this work are discussed for both researchers and practitioners in the security field.

### A Taxonomy for Security Assignments

In today's post-9/11 world, a great deal of attention has been dedicated to protecting people, property, and other resources from terrorism, but also from vandalism, theft, and other forms of harm (Hall, 2003). Although a significant portion of this attention has focused on the technologies that make efficient monitoring and patrol possible (DeCorte, Holland & Martin, 1994; Hunter, 2004), less has focused specifically on the security forces that ultimately utilize that technology. In fact, even prior to 9/11, very little research has focused on the job done by security personnel. This is not to say that there has been nothing said or written on the topic, but much of what has been done does not really constitute research. Rather, the vast majority of what has been documented on the subject could more aptly be considered something similar to a case study. In most circumstances, these "case studies" consist of an author, usually who has been working in the field of physical security for some time, recounting details of his or her experiences regarding systems or projects that worked well (e.g. Alexandre, 1997; Johnson & McCatty, 1998). While the authors of this paper in no way want to discount the importance of bringing experience to bear on the field of physical security, we believe that a much more systematic approach to examining the issues in the field of physical security is prudent.

The aim of this paper is thus to attempt to provide a framework for understanding one aspect of the system that provides physical security, namely

the role of security guards or security forces. In our attempt to provide this framework, we will adopt principles from the field of Industrial/Organizational (I/O) Psychology as a means for better understanding the various jobs of security forces. As most I/O Psychologists will attest, any attempt to conduct research or applied analysis (whether developing selection requirements for a job, conducting a training needs analysis, identifying performance metrics, etc.) must first begin with a formal understanding of what the specific job one is working with entails. In most cases, this understanding begins with a formal process of job analysis to determine the important aspects of the job in question (Brannick, 2002). However, the process of job analysis is a very specific one. A job analysis must be conducted for each and every job type. For example, a contract security firm that provides security forces for department stores, a hotel chain, and a nuclear power plant would want to conduct a job analysis for all three jobs. While many of the basic functions for all three jobs are similar (e.g. protection of assets by monitoring CCTV cameras and making rounds), they also differ enough to merit individual attention (e.g. do they carry firearms and are they permitted to use force). Failure to do so would not only hurt the organization's ability to adequately conduct the staffing practices mentioned earlier (selection, training, and performance appraisal) but would also put it in a vulnerable legal position if any of the staffing practices were to be challenged in court (Gatewood & Field, 2001).

While there seems to be some tacit acknowledgment of the need for changes in staffing practices in conjunction with changes in the requirements of various security related jobs (ASIS International, 2003), very little work has actually been conducted that attempts to distinguish one type of security position from another. And in many cases, descriptions of various security jobs have been artificially combined. For example, a recent search for a description of the position of “security guard” on the US Department of Labor’s O\*Net internet job database (US Department of Labor, 2004) described such varied tasks as mobile guard duty, sentry guard duty, armored vehicle assignments, and personal body guards all under the title of “security guard.” While there is no doubt that all of these are security related positions, clearly many of the vital functions and attributes of each of these positions differ dramatically. We acknowledge that a more complete breakdown of each of these security positions may be beyond the scope of what the Department of Labor is trying to achieve with it’s database, but further searches in a variety of other resources turned up very little in the way of a formalized breakdown of the various security related jobs.

As a result, the purpose of this article is threefold. First, the authors will propose a more complete framework, or taxonomy, of various security related positions in an attempt to establish more structure around the numerous responsibilities that security professionals engage in. A formal study to test the propositions that we will set forth is beyond the scope of this paper.

Nevertheless, our second goal will be to describe a set of procedures that we believe will be useful in testing our propositions regarding a security guard taxonomy. Finally, we will discuss the impact that an effective security guard taxonomy could have on both those doing applied work, as well as those conducting research.

### Classifications of Security Positions

*Classification by Industry* - One way that various job categories can be broken down is by the industry. While all security guards could be said to work in the security industry, this type of classification actually refers to the industry that the security officer serves. ASIS International (2004) has a listing of various industries served, which they call "security specialty areas," covering twelve distinct industries. Of these twelve, eleven are relevant to the job of a security guard. They include: educational institutions, financial institutions, gaming/wagering, government industrial, healthcare, lodging, manufacturing, retail, security sales equipment and services (where services such as alarm response would relate to a security guard), transportation, and utilities. While this list is a reasonable starting place, we would add a number of other industry areas including personal security, detention centers, military (e.g. securing bases, weapons/ordnance, and ordnance delivery platforms), and government services (such as guards at city halls, court houses, etc.). It is important to make a distinction between these final two on our list and the "government industrial" category proposed by ASIS. We feel they are clearly distinct because ASIS

defines “government industrial” as “concerned with the classification, declassification, and protection of national security information in the custody of *industry*” (ASIS, 2004; italics added), whereas military and government services involve the direct protection of government entities, rather than industrial entities working for the government.

We feel that the ASIS list, in combination with our additions, make for a fairly complete listing of industries where security guards may be employed. It is, nevertheless, possible to imagine two security guards in two different industries performing very similar jobs, such as a guard patrolling a hotel and one patrolling a university dormitory. Both are interested in protecting the property from vandalism and fire, as well as the persons residing there from injury, harassment, or crime. And indeed it is possible to imagine two security guards in the same industry performing very different tasks such as a bank security guard and an armored car guard. Fundamentally their job is similar -- protect the money -- but the way in which they go about this task is very different. As similarities and differences do exist within and between these industries, we feel that it is necessary to go farther in the creation of a taxonomy for security guard positions.

*Proprietary vs. Contract Guards* - A second distinction often made by security managers between various guard positions is by the nature of their employer. “Proprietary guards” are those guards that are employed by the entity that they are assigned to protect, whereas “contract guards” are employed by a

third party security service (ASIS, 2003). There is great debate in the security field about which setup is best (Cummings, 1998; Ledoux, 1995); the purpose of this paper is not to weigh in on that issue. Rather, we are simply interested in pointing out that these two arrangements are in fact highly distinct, and that distinction no doubt impacts the nature of the job, an assertion that in no way takes a position in this debate. We thus believe that the distinction is a valid one.

Although the duties performed by both types of guards may be similar, important differences do exist. For example, the argument is often made that proprietary guards will exhibit more loyalty to the protected entities' interests than a contract guard (Cummings, 1998). A proprietary guard has more of a vested interest in protecting an entity because his or her future employment is intertwined with the success of that organization (Fisher1996), as opposed to a contract guard who may only be assigned to a given locality for a few weeks or months. In addition, it is much more likely that a proprietary security guard will participate in organizational training programs such as new employee orientation/socialization training and organizational sponsored culture training (i.e. Diversity, Preventing Sexual Harassment, etc.) as well as participate in organization sponsored social and community service activities. A contract security guard, in contrast, will receive most, if not all, of his or her training from the hiring organization. Finally, the distinction between proprietary and contract guards may make a difference in the level of active involvement that the guard will take in representing the protected entity from a public relations standpoint.

*Public vs. Private* - The public versus private distinction relates to the nature of the entity that the guard is protecting. This is not to be confused with public and private companies as it relates to an organization's status on the stock market, but rather to the degree of openness that the institution has to the public. A guard that is working in a hospital, for example, would be working in a fairly public institution; where a large number of people are relatively free to come and go as is necessary (of course with some exceptions to secure areas such as pharmacy drug storage, etc.). On the other hand, a guard working in a secure facility, or controlled access location, such as a nuclear power plant would be working in a relatively private institution because the facility would not generally be open to the public to come and go as they please.

This distinction is an important one for a number of reasons. First of all, guards in a public place will be watching for different kinds of threats than in a private place. In a public venue, guards must focus extensively on behavioral cues to determine that all is well, while guards in a private area can often look for badges, familiar faces, and behavioral cues to make the same determination. Secondly, in a controlled access, or private, environment, more energy will be spent monitoring the access points of that facility, as guards conduct sentry duties. In a public setting, it will often make less sense to extensively monitor access points (except perhaps with video monitoring equipment), in favor of devoting more time and energy to patrolling or mobile guard duties.

It is worthy of note, however, that the public/private distinction is not an either/or dichotomy. There are a number of circumstances that make this distinction more of a continuum. For example, in the previously noted example of the hospital, the general facility is more of a public place. However, there are also private places within the larger facility where access is controlled. Another example is today's post-9/11 airport terminal, where the public is free to come and go but only if they have a reason for being there (i.e. they are taking a flight) as well as the proper documentation. Another example is a controlled access apartment or office complex where people who do not live or work there are free to come and go, but only if they are there to visit or meet with a resident. Even then, the person they are visiting may have to clear them prior to their arrival.

*High Tech vs. Low Tech Tools* - Another proposed categorization of security positions is by the technological level of the tools and skills that are used to perform the duties of the job. This classification actually incorporates two distinct areas, both the level of the technology being used and the level of knowledge that is required to successfully utilize that technology. In essence, this creates four subcategories that constitute the broader high tech vs. low-tech classification. These subcategories are depicted in Figure 1. On the horizontal, the level of technology of the tools used is broken into high tech and low-tech subdivisions. On the vertical, the type of technical knowledge needed for the successful completion of the job is broken into two subdivisions, namely operational knowledge and analytical knowledge. We define operational

knowledge as the knowledge of what the basic functions and uses of the technology are and how to implement those functions. Analytical knowledge, in contrast, involves more than just knowing the basic, practical functions of a technology and how it operates are; a higher-level understanding of the principles, complexities, vulnerabilities, and troubleshooting is involved. This higher level of understanding typically results in more robust and effective use of the technology.

*Figure 1* Subdivisions of Security Jobs Based on Technology Level

	Low Technology	High Technology
Operational Knowledge	Example: A guard with padlock keys making rounds.	Example: A guard watching Closed-Circuit Television monitors to detect security problems.
Analytical Knowledge	Example: A guard that engages in locksmith functions, such as changing lock cores, producing copies of keys, etc.	Example: A guard installing, repairing, and troubleshooting a Closed-Circuit Television monitoring system.

We believe it is clear that the level of technology used, and how it is used, is a factor that is critical in fully understanding security guard job assignments.

Increasingly, technology is a driving force in many changes that have come to the security industry, and many more that are still to come.

*Sworn vs. Non-Sworn Officers* - There are two common instances of individuals being deputized and serving as security guards. The first is in those states where police officers are permitted to moonlight as security guards (e.g. Anderson, 2000). The second involves entities such as university campuses, large research facilities, some military installations, and even government localities (such as the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.) where the security guards are actually police officers. In either case, the distinction between sworn officers and those who are not is a very important one. Sworn officers (even those that are moonlighting) usually have given an oath that applies twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. As such, they often have the ability to arrest and detain individuals for suspicion of a crime. For guards who are not sworn officers, however, the only abilities they have to arrest another individual is under the rules that govern citizen's arrest, and only if that is permissible under state law. There are, moreover, a number of complex legal issues that must be carefully considered when contemplating the use of off-duty police officers as security guards (Peck, 1999).

*Use of Force and Armed Guards* - Although the use of deadly force and the arming guards with firearms could be seen as separate issues, they are very closely related, so we will deal with them together. The issue of arming guards, and then giving them the right to use force (especially deadly force) against an

adversary is a somewhat controversial topic. It is also an issue that can readily be used to make a distinction between various types of security guards. On the one hand, there are guards who are not given the right to use force. For these guards, it is their duty to handle minor situations and disturbances, but when and if a situation escalates to a more serious level, their job is to call in other resources (e.g. police officers or higher level security guards) that are more appropriately equipped and trained to deal with such situations. This is often referred to as “observe and report.” On the other hand, there are security guards who are equipped, trained, and prepared to employ force (even deadly force) to prevent or deter others from harming those they protect, or from stealing or sabotaging valuable assets. Besides the additional liability that comes with such responsibility, additional training is of course necessary and more stringent selection standards are highly advisable.

*Object of Protection* - The object or person(s) being protected might also play a part in differentiating between various security guard positions and the way those guards react to various emergency situations. Guards can be tasked to protect individuals, physical assets, or information and other, less tangible, assets. The duties of these guards vary dramatically. In fact, even when two guards are both assigned to protect physical assets, the nature of their assignments can depend critically on the nature of the asset they are assigned to protect. For example, a security guard who is responsible for protecting a shopping mall would react to a fire very differently than one who is tasked with

the protection of nuclear weapons. In the former example, a guard who spots a fire might be responsible for notifying the fire department, initiating an evacuation, and keeping bystanders away from the blaze. In the latter example, however, a guard who spots a fire might still be responsible for starting an evacuation and notifying some other post (who would conduct a larger scale evacuation and perhaps call in a fire fighting unit), but the guard might also be tasked with attempting to fight the fire on the spot. A fire that burns down a food court and a men's shoe store will be destructive and could cause harm, but it would be much less devastating than a fire that ignites critical assets. As such, additional training in fire suppression as well as basic information about the workings and dangers of nuclear weapons may be necessary.

*Day vs. Night Guards* - The distinction between daytime and night time guards may seem trivial at first, however, a closer inspection reveals that there are indeed differences between the two types of positions. Consider, for example, the work of a security guard at a museum. The duties that the guard may fulfill are, in fact, different depending on the time of day that the guard works. During the day the guard may be involved in a variety of public interface functions such as collecting tickets, giving directions, and generally making sure that visitors behave in an orderly fashion. In the nighttime shift, however, the crowds are not present. In these instances, guards function in more solitary guard roles such as monitoring CCTV feeds, making rounds, and responding to alarms. Clearly these are different functions and require individuals with different skill sets.

*The Specific Assignment* - Finally, we must look at the specific security assignment. Even if all other aspects of the job covered thus far are the same -- two guards work in the same industry, they are employed by the same entity (e.g. proprietary guards), they protect the same type of location, neither are sworn officers, they don't carry firearms and aren't trained to use deadly force, and they protect the same type of asset -- the two jobs can still have important differences. As an example, look to the gaming industry. You may have one security position that is required to be out on the floor as a physical deterrent as well as an emergency response unit, and another that is required to sit at a desk and control cameras and view video monitors. In both cases, the guards work for the same industry, most likely are employed by the same company, both protect the casino floor, are not sworn officers, don't carry guns or use deadly force, and are tasked to protect the monetary assets of both the casino and it's patrons from theft, scams, and cheating. The jobs even both require looking for many of the same types of behavioral patterns and cues, but the jobs are nevertheless vastly different. In the case of the guard out on the floor, he or she must be physically able to walk the floor and confront adversaries if necessary, block out intense auditory distractions, and even deal with patrons by answering questions, giving directions, administering medical assistance, etc. On the other hand, the security guard in the monitoring room must be able to block out distracting visual stimuli, be able to scan large numbers of monitors at the same time, and have proficiency in manipulating the cameras and other technology that is at his or

her disposal. Clearly there are some similarities between the two jobs, but many differences as well.

After reviewing these seven dimensions of a security guard position, it is possible to see that one must consider all of them when attempting to classify the nature of any given security assignment. The question remains, however, why it is important to classify each job in the first place. Although we have touched on it briefly in the previous discussion, this is a topic that we will turn to in greater detail shortly. First, however, we need to discuss techniques that could potentially be used to test the validity of the proposed taxonomy.

### Testing the Taxonomy

While it is our belief that the above taxonomy will provide valuable insight into the nature of the work that various security-related positions engage in, we are well aware that there may be other possible taxonomies. Therefore, it is important that the taxonomy outlined in the paper be subjected to empirical evaluation. While a full-scale study of this type is outside the scope of this paper, we attempt here to outline some techniques that can be used in this kind of study. Three of these techniques are subsets of job analysis techniques, and all three subsets contain a number of specific techniques within them. However, we will also describe some techniques that would not be considered job analysis but which may, if used correctly, provide useful ways to test the taxonomy we have outlined. Therefore, we will simply give an overview and brief description of

each technique and list some specific methods that could be included in that subset.

*Job Analysis Interview* - A job analysis interview is simply a process of asking job incumbents about the various aspects of their position as well as any knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are necessary for successful completion of the job. There are a number of variations on this method and all can be useful for various purposes. One may decide to conduct a structured or unstructured interview. A structured interview is simply a process where all incumbents are asked the same questions in the same order. The advantage to this type of interview is that it will likely provide the most standardized form of output. However, one disadvantage is that the process doesn't allow for a great deal of flexibility to address unique responses or probe for more information that might be helpful in these early stages. As such, it may be useful to start with unstructured interviews in order to get preliminary information, and then develop and conduct structured interviews once the researcher has a better understanding of the issues he or she would like to address. These interviews can be conducted one-on-one or in focus groups. However, if it is decided to employ focus groups, one should be cautious that all the members in the focus groups are doing the exact same job. (For further information about the use of interviews for job analysis see: Gatewood & Field, 2001; Markowitz, 1981).

Another job analysis process that includes the use of interview techniques that may be useful is called the critical incident technique. In this process, the

goal is not to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are necessary to perform the job but rather to identify the “critical” aspects of performance on the job as well as examples of exceptionally good and exceptionally poor performance. This last piece of information may be especially helpful in that many of the critical incidents of various guard positions, such as responding to a fire, may be very similar but examples of good and poor performance may be very different, as was discussed earlier in the firefighting example. As with the conventional interview, the critical incident technique can be structured or unstructured as well as conducted in groups or with individuals. Besides using this information to compare various guard positions, this information would also be very useful if employed in a more traditional manner, such as determining training needs and creating performance metrics (for more information on critical incidents techniques see: Anderson & Wilson, 1997; Bownas & Bernardin, 1988).

*Job Analysis Questionnaires* – An alternative method for collecting job analysis information would be the use of a questionnaire. A questionnaire collects many of the same types of information that would be collected in an interview; however, the questionnaire typically allows this information to be collected in a more standardized and efficient manner. Questionnaires typically address such topics as required KSAs, working conditions, tasks, and tools employed. Respondents typically respond to questions using standardized rating scales. Researchers can find a variety of prefabricated questionnaires available, or

they could create one themselves. (For more information on job analysis questionnaires see: Gael, 1988; Gatewood & Field, 2001).

*Other Job Analysis Methods* - In addition to the interview and questionnaire methods already discussed, there are other techniques that can be employed to collect job analysis data. Examples of these types of techniques include observation, work participation, and worker diaries. Observation is simply the process of observing work being done and writing personal reflections about that work. Similar, but more in depth, is the process of work participation. In this process, the job analyst actually participates in the job being studied for a set length of time and makes observations about the work. Finally, worker diaries involve giving job incumbents a notebook and instructions where they are asked to record everything that they do in their job as they are doing it. Over a number of days or weeks, all aspects of the job should be recorded (for more information about these types of techniques please see: Gatewood & Field, 2001).

*Non-Job Analysis Methods* - Of course, the previously mentioned methods all relate to a single type of job relevant data collection, job analysis. There are a variety of other methods that could also be employed to explore potential differences between security guard positions that correspond to the various categories described above. For example, one could attempt to find differences by showing that cognitive ability differentially predicts job performance for one position as opposed to another. In a similar vein, one may find that occupational

interest surveys predict satisfaction with a chosen job differently for different types of security guard positions.

In all of the methods mentioned above, the process for evaluating the validity of our proposed taxonomy is similar. The general process is to compare the results from jobs that should differ (based on the taxonomy we have laid out) to see if they actually do. If the results indicate that two positions are in fact distinct, evidence exists that our taxonomy has validity. If differences are not found, this indicates that our taxonomy may be flawed or incomplete, and should be revised.

A final note of caution, although the techniques that are described above appear rather straightforward, one should keep in mind that these are just brief descriptions. These techniques are in fact quite nuanced and are best performed by trained and experienced job analysts or others familiar with the techniques described.

### Implications

As was stated previously, the aim of this paper is to attempt to provide a framework for understanding one aspect of physical security, namely the role of security guards or security forces. In order to achieve this aim, the authors proposed a more complete framework, or taxonomy, of various security related positions in an attempt to establish more structure around the numerous jobs that security professionals are required to complete. We also described a set of procedures that we believe will be useful in testing our propositions regarding a

security guard taxonomy, and we strongly encourage others to evaluate this taxonomy using these or other methods. Finally, we wished to discuss the implications that the development of a security guard taxonomy could have on both those doing applied work as well as those conducting research. It is toward this goal where we now turn.

From a research perspective, it is our hope that this paper will draw attention to the need for a more systematic study of the roles performed by security guards. A review of the literature in the field shows a significant lack of research in this area. We believe that furthering this field is a worthwhile exercise, and should start with research. By proposing the taxonomy above, we hope to create a framework upon which future discussion and study can proceed. With time, we believe that these early efforts can lead to better methods of selecting, training, and evaluating the performance of security personnel.

From an applied perspective, it is our hope that this and future work will help security professionals to better understand and leverage the jobs that security guards perform. These jobs are the backbone of the physical security world. Advanced technology and explicit procedures can have great value, but without the right people with the right training and the right performance expectations, their value will be greatly diminished. This taxonomy can provide the first steps in assuring that we have selected the best people and given them the most appropriate training for the work that they do.

## Conclusion

The taxonomy of security guard positions we have outlined is, we believe, a good start in attempting to bring some structure to the study of these jobs. But it is just a start. We encourage others to take what we have started and carry it forward either by testing our model, fine-tuning it, or developing an entirely new one. It is only through this type of focused attention on the unique issues inherent in the work of a security guard that we can come to a fuller understanding of the job they do as well as how we can design their work to be more rewarding and maximize the potential that their work holds. In the “new normal,” this is a task that we must undertake.

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