



Law enforcement officers are crucial in maintaining public safety and upholding the law. Their job demands quick thinking, sound judgment and the ability to make split-second decisions in high-pressure situations. As society evolves and law enforcement faces new challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need for cognitive brain training exercises among police officers. This article explores the importance of such training and its potential impact on policing effectiveness and community relations.

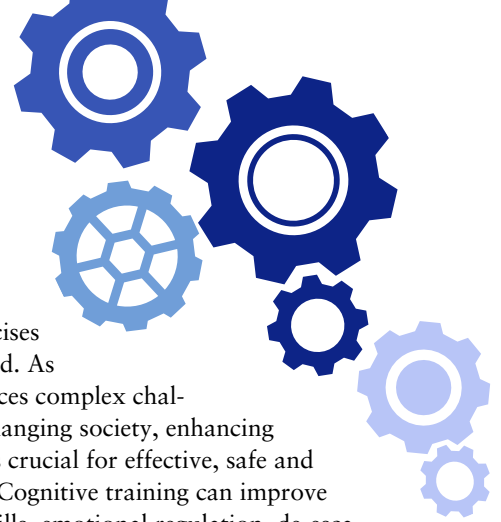
Police work requires officers to possess various cognitive skills, including attention to detail, situational awareness, decision-making under pressure, memory recall and emotional regulation. Traditional police training primarily focuses on physical fitness, tactical skills and legal knowledge. However, recent research suggests that cognitive training can significantly enhance officers' ability to perform their duties effectively and safely. The same study demonstrates the long-term health benefits for officers.

Cognitive brain training exercises are designed to improve various aspects of mental function, such as memory, attention, brain speed, problem-solving and emotional intelligence. These computer-based exercises, hidden in gamification, challenge users to think critically and

respond quickly to changing scenarios. By regularly engaging in these exercises, officers can strengthen their cognitive abilities, leading to improved performance in the field. The exercises through the NTOA's partnership with BrainHQ require a commitment of an hour a week, spread across several days.

One primary benefit of BrainHQ training for public safety is enhanced decision-making skills. Research shows that the best decision-makers are first good problem solvers. In high-stress situations, officers must quickly assess potential threats, evaluate multiple courses of action and choose the most appropriate response. Cognitive exercises that improve decision-making speed and visual acuity can help officers develop better judgment, potentially reducing the likelihood of excessive force incidents or other adverse outcomes.

Moreover, cognitive training can improve officers' ability to recognize and manage their own emotional responses. Law enforcement personnel often face traumatic and emotionally charged situations, which can lead to burnout, compassion fatigue and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). By incorporating mindfulness and emotional regulation exercises into their training regimen, officers can develop greater resilience and maintain their mental well-being in challenging circumstances.



Implementing cognitive brain training programs in police departments has shown promising results. For example, a study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania found that officers who underwent cognitive training demonstrated improved performance in situational awareness, decision-making and emotional control. These improvements translated to more effective policing and reduced use-of-force incidents. Many organizations that subscribe to the BrainHQ system have shown more than 400% cognitive performance increases in as little as 10 weeks.

Integrating cognitive brain training into police academies and ongoing professional development programs is gaining traction across the United States. Some departments have partnered with neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists at Posit Science to develop tailored training programs that address the specific needs of law enforcement personnel. These programs often combine computer-based exercises with real-world simulations to provide a comprehensive approach to cognitive enhancement. Posit Science currently is engaged in an in-depth research study with several academies across the U.S. They also are concluding a field study with the Canadian Emergency Responders Robotics Association on specific exercises for UAS pilots and robot operators.

However, implementing cognitive training programs is not without challenges. Some officers may be resistant to new training methods, particularly if they perceive them as less relevant than traditional tactical skills. Additionally, budget constraints and time limitations can make it difficult for departments to invest in comprehensive cognitive training programs.

To overcome these obstacles, police leadership must prioritize cognitive training and communicate its importance to officers at all levels. Departments can increase buy-in and participation by framing cognitive exercises as a valuable tool for enhancing job performance, officer safety and long-term officer wellness. Moreover, integrating cognitive training into existing training schedules and utilizing technology-based solutions can help address time and budget constraints.

The benefits of cognitive brain training extend beyond individual officer performance. As police departments face increasing scrutiny and calls for reform, demonstrating a commitment to evidence-based training can help rebuild public trust. Departments signal their dedication to continuous improvement and professional excellence by investing in cognitive training.

In conclusion, the necessity for police officers to complete cognitive brain training exercises cannot be overstated. As law enforcement faces complex challenges in an ever-changing society, enhancing cognitive abilities is crucial for effective, safe and equitable policing. Cognitive training can improve decision-making skills, emotional regulation, de-escalation techniques and cultural awareness, leading to better outcomes for officers and their communities.

As police departments evolve and adapt to new realities, it should be a priority to incorporate cognitive brain training into their standard practices. By doing so, they can equip officers with the mental tools necessary to navigate the complexities of modern policing, reduce adverse incidents and foster stronger relationships with the public.

Ultimately, cognitive training represents an investment in the future of law enforcement — one that has the potential to create safer communities and more effective police forces across the nation.

References

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About the author

Jeff Selleg manages the BrainHQ implementation project for the NTOA. He began his career in law enforcement in 1996 and retired as a commander from the Port of Seattle (WA) Police Department in 2022. He served as a member of Valley Regional SWAT from 2000 to 2022, starting on the entry team and further serving as an explosive breacher, sniper, sniper team leader, entry team leader and team commander. He also served as a patrol and administrative services commander with collateral duty commands over the Explosive Detection Canine Unit, the Bomb Disposal Unit and SWAT. He served as a member of the Washington State Tactical Officer's Association board of directors from 2007 to 2020, including several years as president.

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