



Hiring by Hunch, Policing by Damage Control

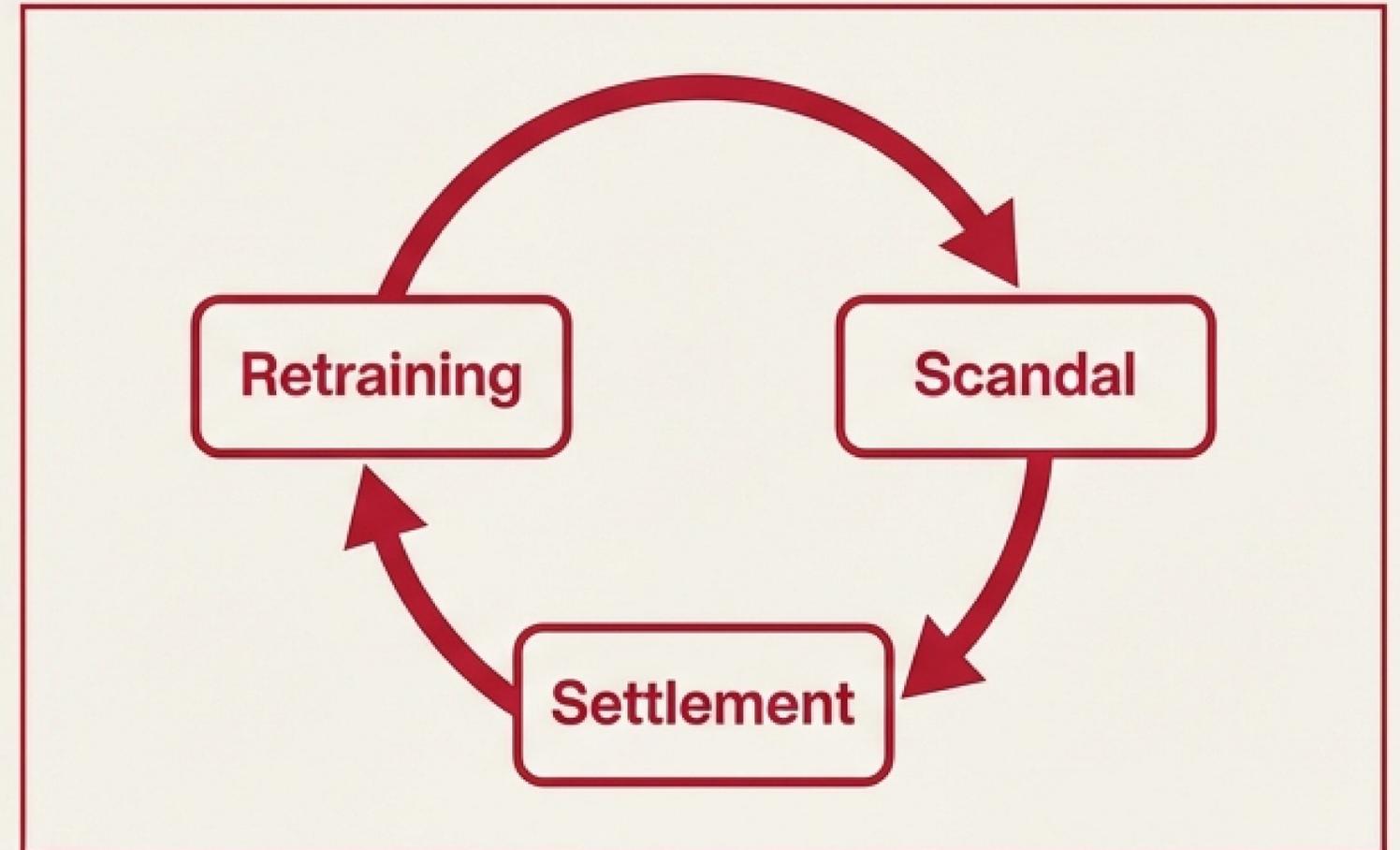
Why Subjective Clinical Screening Fails to Stop Predictable Police Misconduct

The Myth of the “Unforeseeable” Bad Apple



The Systemic Reality

A meaningful share of police misconduct is predictable before the officer is ever armed or hired.



The Default Narrative

Misconduct is treated as an emergent problem—caused by stress, poor supervision, or sudden post-hire moral collapse.

Agencies frequently portray later misconduct as a surprise when, in many cases, it was a foreseeable institutional choice.

The Evidence Deficit: The Data We Have vs. The Data We Use

8,539

Candidates screened across 150+ agencies.
6,075 hired and tracked over 5 years.

15 of 19

Pre-hire misbehavior indicators significantly
predicted later misconduct (Hazard ratios
reaching up to 14.59).

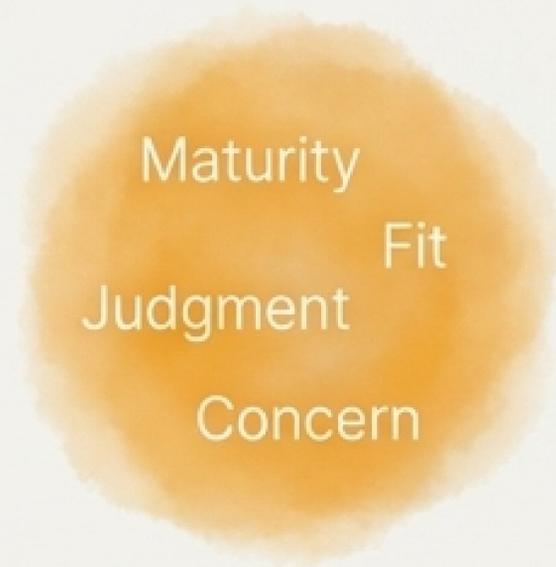
5%

The Institutional Failure:
Disclosing prior misconduct
reduced a candidate's hiring
chances by only ~5%.



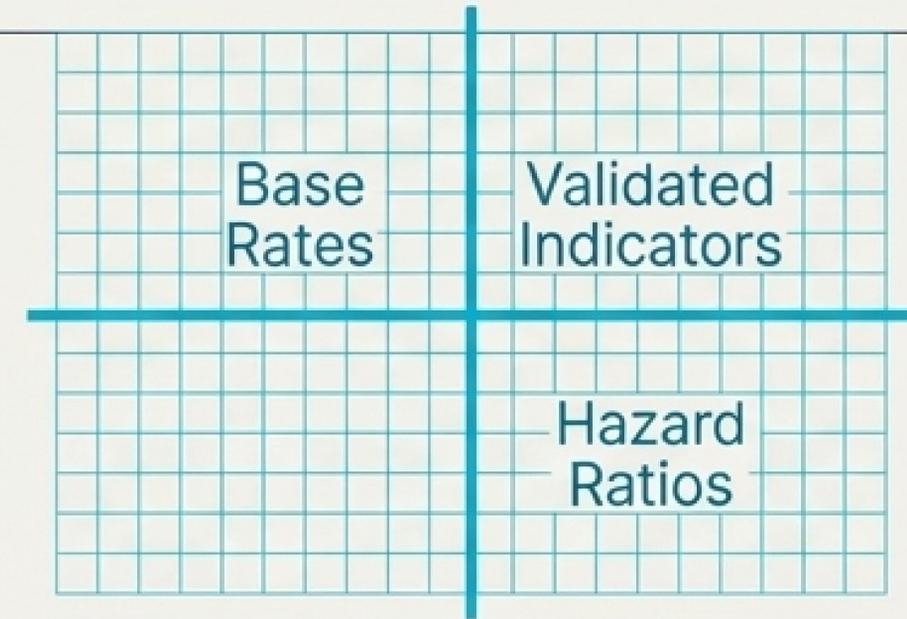
The profession does not suffer from an absence of information; it suffers from the institutional misuse of it. Agencies hire through the warning signs.

The Category Error of Modern Police Hiring



Clinical Impression

- Current State (Subjective)
- Relies on late-stage clinical psychology to form generalized “whole person” narratives.
- Flattens critical red flags into broad suitability judgments.



Actuarial Prediction

- Required State (Objective)
- Relies on personnel psychology to identify behavior-specific, empirically validated misconduct risks.
- Binds human judgment to structured evidence.

Clinical evaluation is a poor substitute for identifying which applicants bring empirically demonstrable misconduct risk into the institution.

Dissecting Pre-Hire Risk

Deconstructing vague narratives into four validated domains of behavioral signal.



Prior Occupational Trouble

Negligence warnings, unfavorable terminations, repeated job-hopping.



Law Enforcement Trouble

Prior reprimands, demotions, unjustified use of force (highly commensurate).



Temper & Violence

Documented physical altercations, domestic violence citations.



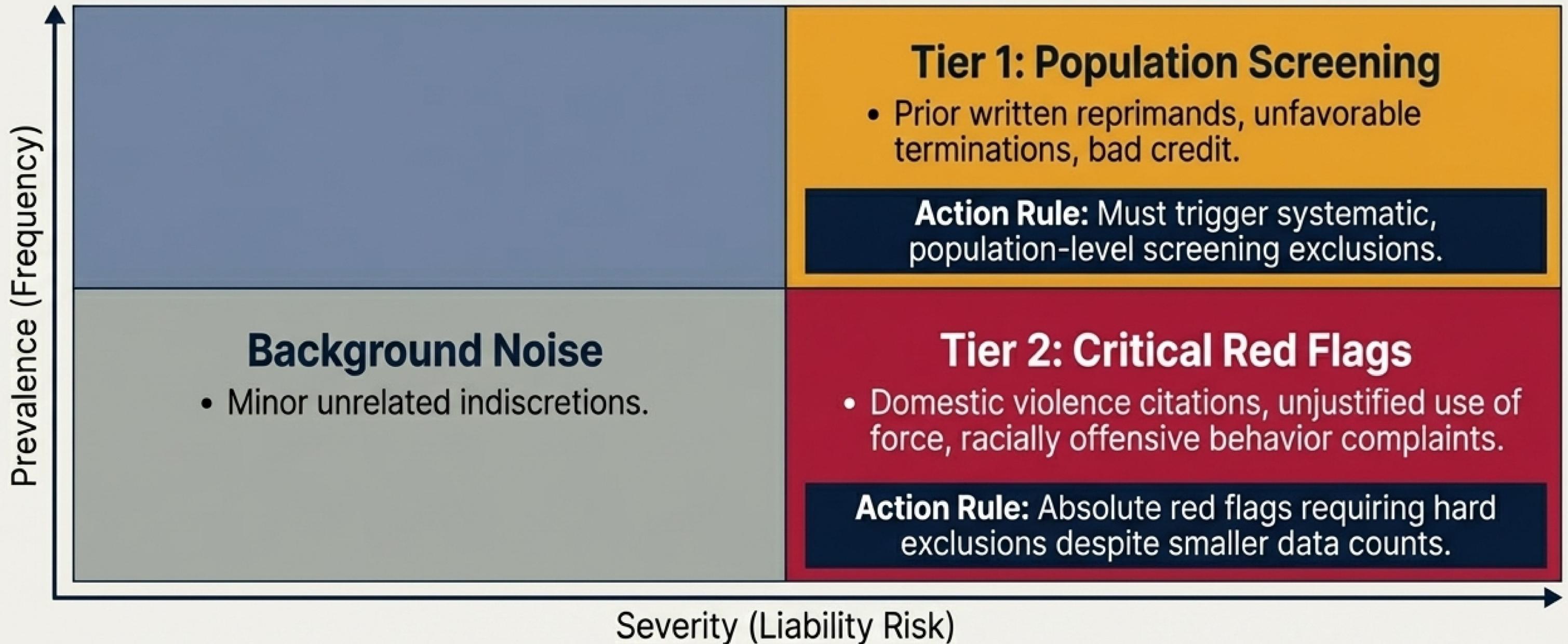
Irresponsible Behaviors

Bad credit, moving violations, alimony/child support arrears.

Synthesis Note: Prior behavior is the strongest signal of future behavior when the predictor closely resembles the institutional criterion.

The Predictive Risk Matrix

Not all warning signs are equal. Evidence demands a calibrated, tiered response.



Takeaway: A system that treats all adverse facts as just “something to discuss” dissolves meaningful distinctions back into unstructured discretion.

The Lateral-Hiring Myth

Bureaucratic convenience masquerading as pre-vetted safety.

The Assumption

Prior law enforcement or military experience serves as a protective credential, inherently lowering institutional risk.



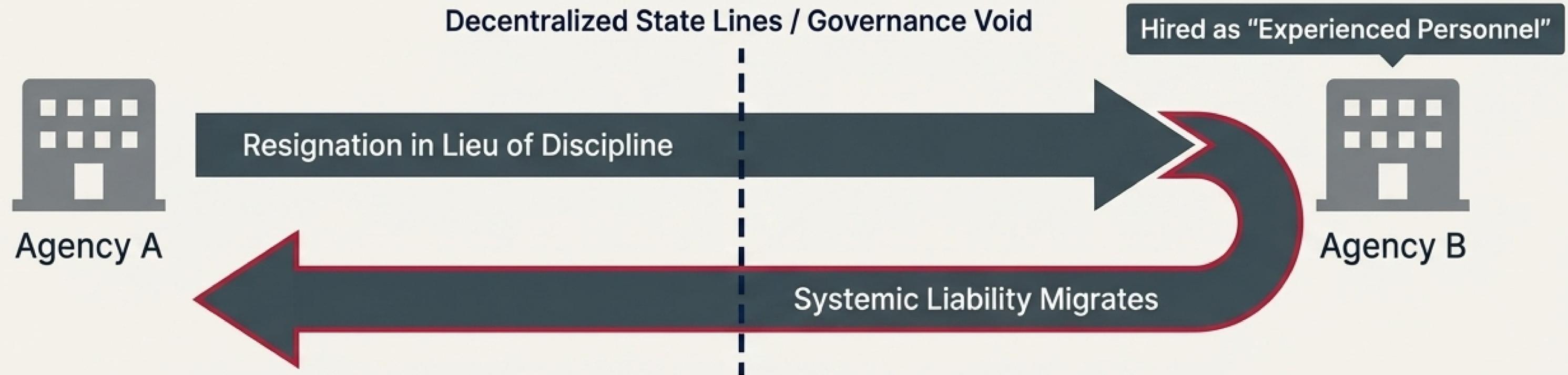
The Reality Check

For 11 of 15 misconduct indicators, prior badge experience did not reduce risk, and actually elevated it for excessive force, ⚡ sexual harassment, and vehicle misuse. ⚠

The “Commensurability” Principle: Prior misconduct inside a police setting strongly predicts future misconduct because the norms, tasks, and opportunities for abuse are identical. **Lateral experience is often a conduit for recycled risk.**

The “Muni Shuffle”

How fragmented national standards pipeline recycled public liability.



1. The Vulnerability

A lack of unified national standards allows known predictors of future misconduct to be administratively negotiated away.

2. The Shuffle

Officers facing discipline resign to preserve their certification and avoid formal termination.

3. The Blind Acceptance

Resource-strained departments, eager to bypass expensive academies, hire lateral transfers, structurally discounting prior red flags.

Bottom Line: An unresolved disciplinary history in one jurisdiction becomes a staffing solution in another.

The Asymmetry of Consequence



Synthesis Statement: Agencies do not suffer from an inability to recognize or condemn bad conduct. They suffer from a **refusal to use exclusionary** discipline at the gate when prevention is still cheap and possible.

Anticipating Institutional Resistance

Objection	Reality
People change. Youthful misconduct isn't destiny.	We manage probabilities, not destiny. High-risk empirical signals demand structural caution, not blind optimism.
Objection	Reality
Hiring requires holistic clinical context.	Context should bound evidence, not erase it. Unstructured "whole person" narratives usually dilute the strongest warning signs.
Objection	Reality
Strict rules will worsen our staffing shortages.	Fast, cheap hiring simply transfers long-term constitutional, financial, and safety risks directly to the public.

Moving Prediction Upstream

Current Flawed Architecture



Proposed Objective Architecture



Blueprint for an Objective Model

1

Temporal Sequencing & Early Collection

Move validated prehire screening upstream to gather predictive indicators early and at lower cost, before conditional offers.

2

Item-Level Specificity

Replace broad constructs with concrete, validated behavioral indicators (e.g., prior reprimands, bad credit) for hiring decisions.

3

Tiering & Calibration

Differentiate indicators into Tier 1 (common, stable) and Tier 2 (rare, severe red flags) based on prevalence and severity.

4

Structured Verification

Confirm disclosed information through standardized questionnaires, follow-up interviews, and background investigations.

5

Reduced Discretionary Latitude

Use structured decision rules, algorithmic support, and cutoffs to constrain judgment by predictive evidence.

6

Reallocation of Professional Roles

I-O psychologists design the system and structure processes; clinical evaluators have a bounded, post-offer role.

7

Transparency in Reasoning

Articulate screening logic based on specific, tiered indicators to explain why a candidate was screened out or advanced.

8

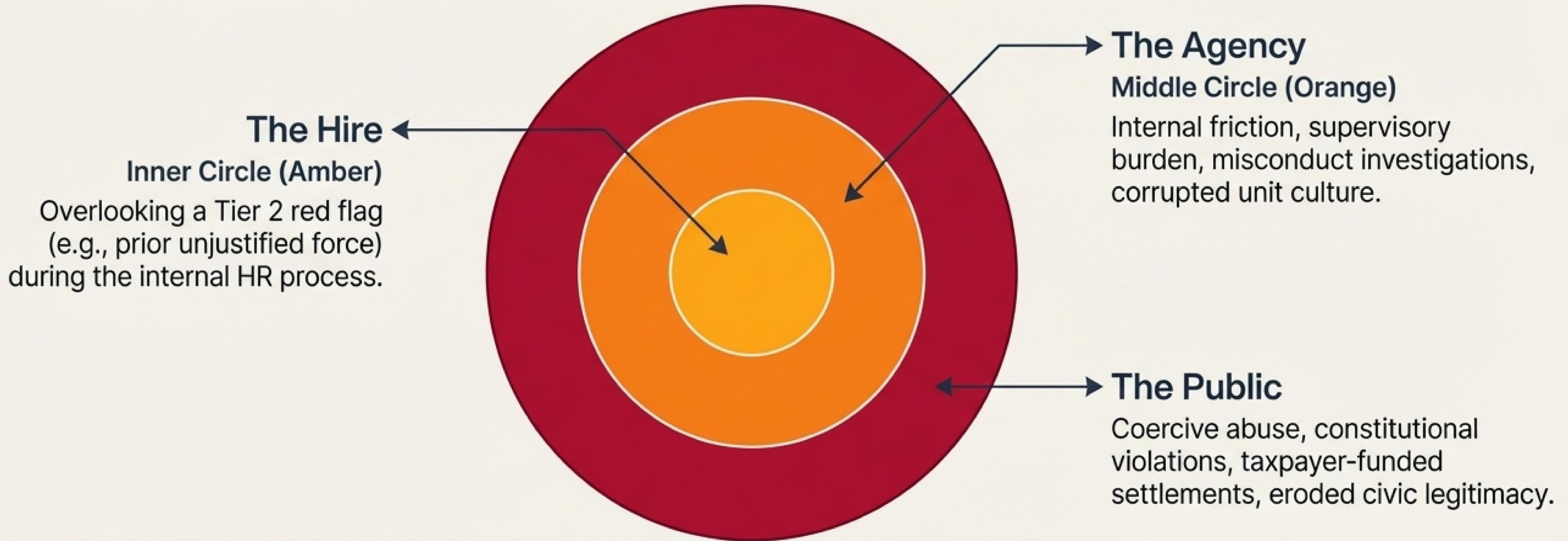
Defensible Audit Trail

Document the logic of each hiring outcome to enable audits and ensure public accountability and legitimacy.

The Paradigm Shift in Police Hiring

	The Clinical Paradigm (Current Model)	The Actuarial Paradigm (Objective Model)
Core Mechanism	Generalized Impression	Validated Prediction
Primary Tool	Subjective Clinical Interviews	Actuarial Decision Rules
Treatment of Risk	Flattened into "Overall Suitability"	Tiered by Prevalence & Severity
Lateral Hires	Assumed Safe (Vetted by Experience)	Scrutinized for Commensurate Risk
System Design	Decentralized / Variable	Standardized / Criterion-Linked

A Civic Crisis, Not Just an HR Issue



Delegating the state's monopoly on force demands the highest level of predictive discipline, not discretionary leeway.

Stop Screening by Impression. Start Screening by Evidence.

- The warning signs of police misconduct are visible, measurable, and highly predictive.
- The excuse of the 'unforeseeable' bad apple has expired. We preserve the optics of rigor while avoiding the discipline of actual prevention.
- It is time to replace policing by damage control with front-end, actuarial discipline.

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