Train Your Police Dog Like AI Learns

Artificial intelligence can do remarkable things, but it didn't get there by being given only a few examples. AI requires enormous amounts of information presented in different ways, different circumstances, and different contexts before it can reliably recognize patterns and apply what it has learned to something new.

There may be an important lesson in that for police canine training.

Dogs need information too.

Dogs tend to learn in context. If we continually train the same behaviors in the same locations, with the same equipment, the same people, the same odors, and under the same conditions, the dog may become extremely good at performing within that training picture.

But deployment won't necessarily look anything like training.

Our responsibility, therefore, is to provide the dog with enough **information, different contexts, and deployment-related experiences** that the dog learns to generalize.

Information

Every training experience gives the dog information.

The dog learns what produces reinforcement, what matters, what doesn't matter, and what behavior solves the problem.

But one experience provides only one piece of the picture.

As trainers, we need to continually expand that picture.

Context

Then we change the context.

Different locations. Different surfaces. Different buildings. Different people. Different quantities. Different packaging. Different weather. Different airflow. Different distractions. Different distances and durations.

We want the dog to discover:

The context changed. My job didn't.

That is generalization.

Deployment

Finally, our training needs to provide information that prepares the dog for the realities of deployment.

A detection dog needs experience with the types of odor problems it may encounter operationally.

A tracking dog needs experience with changing surfaces, track age, contamination, cross-tracks, environmental conditions, and unfamiliar locations.

An apprehension dog needs experience with different people, movements, clothing, environments, lighting, positioning, distractions, and circumstances.

We cannot show the dog every deployment it will ever encounter.

But we can give the dog enough information about the world it will work in that it can solve a problem it has never seen before.

That is where the comparison with AI becomes useful.

AI needs information and variation to generalize.

So does the police dog.

The objective isn't simply to create a dog that performs well during training.

It is to develop a dog with a broad enough library of experiences that when the context changes, the dog can still accomplish the mission.

Maybe that should become one of the questions we ask ourselves every time we train:

> ***What information did I give my dog today that will help it solve tomorrow's deployment?***