



EXPERT INSIGHT

REDEFINING THE FUTURE OF FRONTLINE SECURITY

International Security Journal speaks with Dr Linda Florence Ph.D., CPP, Chairman of the Board at the International Foundation for Protection Officers (IFPO)

For an individual working as a frontline security officer, the job they are undertaking right now looks vastly different to the one that they were doing even five or ten years ago. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that frontline workers are now being required to take on a number of health and safety responsibilities, in addition to the day-to-day security tasks they have carried out in the past.

With so much change having taken place and so much still to come, the current climate is an ideal time to gauge what frontline security workers think about their work and

where the challenges may lie as we move forward over the coming years.

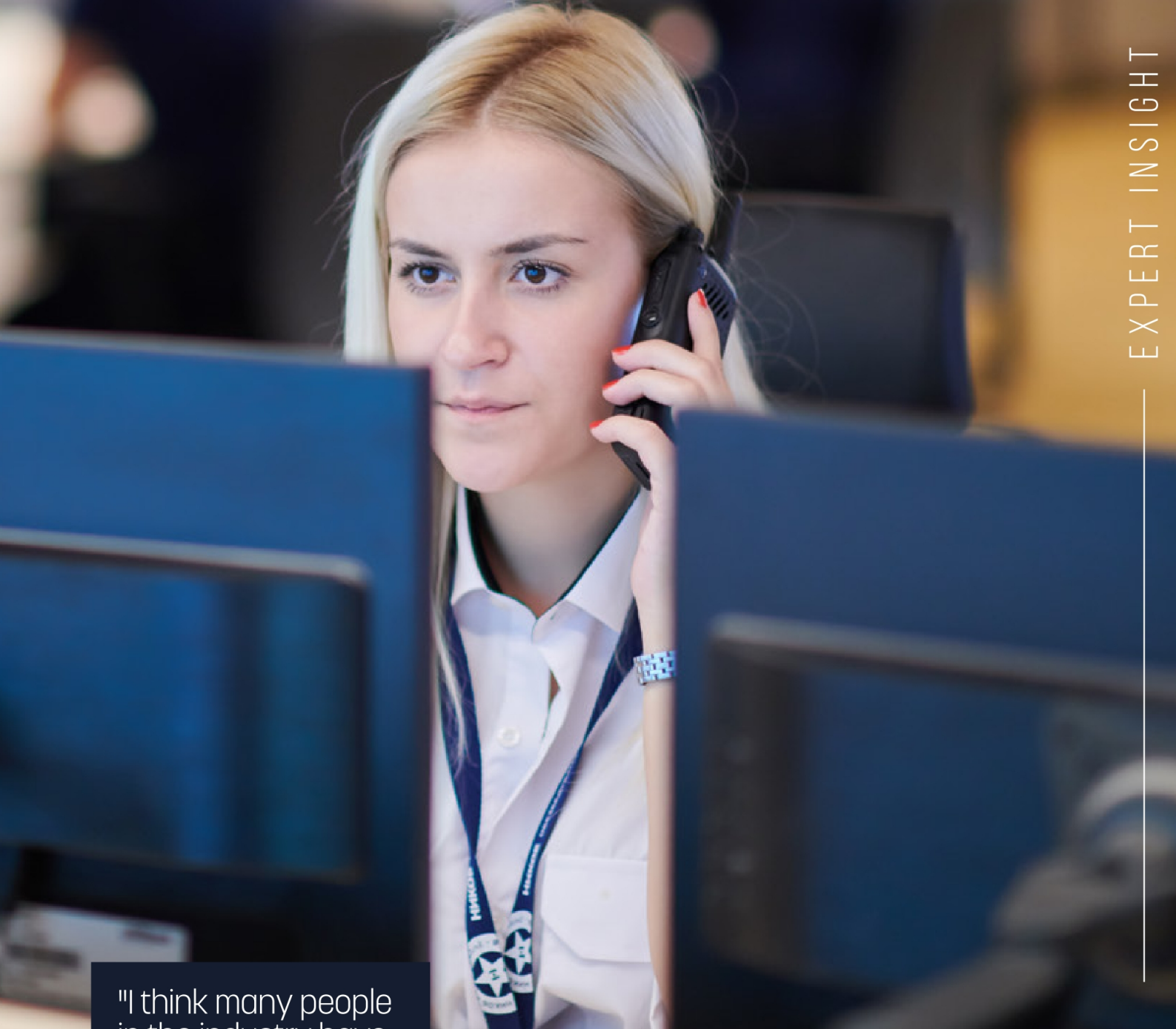
Therefore, the International Foundation for Protection Officers (IFPO), in conjunction with Perpetuity Research, has undertaken the first large scale study of frontline security officers since the 1980s in order to give us a better picture of what life is really like on the frontline.

To find out more about the key takeaways of the IFPO Research Project and what impact they may have on the wider industry, International Security Journal caught up with Dr Linda Florence Ph.D., CPP, Chairman of the Board at IFPO.

Gaining understanding

Even throughout the challenges posed by COVID-19, IFPO has remained active, providing support and guidance for its many thousands of members. The organisation is present all over the world and has a particularly quick growing branch in the UK and Ireland, led by Mike Hurst CPP CPI.

To gain a better understanding of the thoughts of its members, IFPO launched its Research Project, in conjunction with Professor Martin Gill and his team at Perpetuity Research. Dr Florence described what the purpose of the research was: "The



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IFPO Research Project was focused on the competency of frontline workers and what they think about their work.

"We wanted to assess their perspectives of their tasks and any difficulties they felt they had with what they were being asked to do. We looked at how we could enhance their capabilities as well as the effectiveness of their training. There are huge amounts of research on security at supervisor or CSO level

but very little on frontline workers, especially from a truly global perspective."

To give it that genuinely global feel, the project was carried out across nine countries, Canada, Ecuador, Ireland, India, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, the US and the UK. The survey received more than 10,000 responses with the research then bolstered with in-depth one-on-one interviews with a selection of respondents, conducted by the Perpetuity Research team.

Dr Florence continued: "The survey was not to be filled out by managers, it was to be completed by frontline workers. The results were completely

anonymised so that the respondents could be as transparent and honest as possible."

Security as a career

The findings of the project were released in October 2021 and Dr Florence was pleased to reveal that they provided a positive picture of what it's like to work on the security frontline. She said: "One of the most pleasing things that we found was that more than half of the respondents view security as a career.

"I think many people in the industry have assumed, wrongfully so it

turns out, that security is viewed as a second career. The perception has been that individuals leave law enforcement or the military and find a part time job in private security. However, we found that those working on the frontline are actually younger than we thought and they see it as a full time career.

"They find that the work is interesting but not necessarily hard, they also emphasised the need for proper training. There is a direct correlation between on the job training, on-site training and a higher success rate. There was a recurring theme of the need for training, leadership support and communication from supervisors down to the frontline."

The requirement for clear communication from those in leadership positions was also a constant theme throughout the findings: "Being supported and having regular communication were incredibly important to the respondents, it led to higher job satisfaction levels. This isn't particularly security related, it

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comes back to leadership and the use of soft skills.

"What the frontline workers are asking for is emotional intelligence, training, communications training and also help with report writing and investigations. One of the biggest surprises from the study is that the area many security officers were least comfortable with is report writing. Given that this makes up a large part of the job for many security officers, I think that means



that we as managers are really dropping the ball in this area."

Training, training, training

With such a large-scale sample of responses, the IFPO Research Project certainly has a lot of validation to it and therefore, could provide a number of vital lessons for the wider industry to learn. Dr Florence believes that the importance of training is one of the key takeaways from the research.

"I think this research is a crucial starting point but is just the tip of the iceberg. I've read through the report several times now and the thing that kept jumping out at me was training, training, training. For example, there is a huge requirement for site specific training, especially where those contract officers are required to move from one location to another.

"Another key takeaway when it came to the provision of training is the credibility of the instructor. If you hire an instructor and they don't have the requisite experience, security officers aren't going to pay much attention to them. Training providers have to make sure that their instructors have 'been there and done that'."

The global nature of the research also provided some surprising results when comparing findings from country to country. Dr Florence

explained: "I think one of the main conclusions was around the use of "officer" or "guard" as a job title. It differs completely from country to country and therefore we have to move away from the stigma attached to one or the other. We can't be so egocentric in any particular country as to assume that our way is the right way.

"In addition, we found that workers in Nigeria are more likely to see great value in their work and view it as a career path. Conversely, frontline officers in the UK were least likely to see it as a career. I think there are certainly some areas which are worthy of further study."

So, what will the study mean for the wider global security landscape? Dr Florence concluded: "Based on this, I see us moving towards a greater reliance on private sector security, with the possible consolidation of the larger providers in the market. I see an increase in legislation and regulation and from what we've found in this research, there won't be any resistance to that development."

The IFPO Research Project will undoubtedly go down as one of the most important studies carried out in the security industry. The work completed by IFPO and Perpetuity Research is likely to shape the way we train and communicate with frontline security workers for many years to come.