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Integrity Problems in the Police Organization; Police Officers' Perceptions Reviewed

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Integrity Problems in the Police Organization; Police Officers' Perceptions Reviewed

by Karin Lasthuizen, Leo Huberts & Muel Kaptein

Abstract

What do Dutch police officers think about the extent and acceptability of integrity violations? This paper concentrates on the views of police officers on deviant behaviour in the working place. The discussed integrity violations cover a wide spectrum; corruption (with gain for oneself or family and friends), fraud and theft, conflict of private and public interest (through gifts and assets, jobs and activities), improper use of violence towards citizens and suspects, improper (investigative) methods of policing, abuse and manipulation of information, discrimination and sexual harassment and waste and abuse of organizational resources.

The data in this study is taken from the so-called Integrity Thermometer, a written questionnaire carried out in several Dutch police organizations between 1996 and 1999, whereby 3.125 respondents were interviewed.

The results of this survey offer useful insights into a policy approach to deal with integrity violations in the organization. By combining the perceptions employees have: on the one hand the extent, and on the other hand the acceptability of unethical behaviour at the working place; a classification of integrity problems occurs indicating the seriousness of integrity violations. We distinguish four types of integrity problems, described by us as urgent problems, recurring problems, specific problems and non-problems. This typology of integrity problems does not only hold for the police organization, it can be useful for other organizations as well.

Every type of integrity problem asks for its own policy. The management of the organization can use the views of the employees as a starting point for an integrity policy or to evaluate the integrity policy. In line with the views of employees we argue that the course of action needs to stress awareness, prevention, repression or monitoring. Besides presenting our results, the aim of our contribution is to discuss the worth of employees' perceptions for management, strategy and (integrity) policy.

Introduction

This paper concentrates on the views of police officers on deviant behaviour at the working place within the Dutch police force.

Before discussing the findings from our survey research on integrity perceptions of police officers, we will describe briefly the context of the Dutch case and define the concept of integrity by presenting a typology of integrity violations, that we will use as a frame for analysis.

Integrity and the Dutch Police Force

In the Netherlands, a country with about 16 million inhabitants, the police force totals about 45.000 police officers. In 1994, a major institutional reform took place, re-organizing the Dutch police into 25 regional police forces and one central force. Still the Dutch police is highly centralized, in comparison to for instance the USA. Recruitment, training, salaries, uniform, and much equipment is determined nationally. Although the administrative form is regional, the two central Ministries, Internal Affairs and Justice, in The Hague do have crucial steering on the police organization.

The Netherlands does not have a reputation of corruption in public life in general and in the police in particular. The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index shows a stable picture of the Netherlands being among the least corrupt nations, even in comparison to many other western democratic countries (Huberts, 2002). Although the police has been involved in a number of public scandals, in the seventies in Amsterdam and in the so-called IRT case in the nineties (Enquêtecommissie opsporingsmethoden, 1996; Huberts, 1994; Punch, 1985, 1996), research on misconduct in the Netherlands shows that explicit cases of corruption in the public sector are rare (Fijnaut, 1993; Van den Heuvel, Huberts & Verberk, 1999, Ruimschotel, 1992).

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In the Dutch police force integrity violations concern more often theft, small fraud, questionable activities in private time, leaking of information and waste and abuse of organizational resources. Moreover, private time misconduct like domestic violence, drunken driving etc., form a relatively common subject of investigation for the Internal Affairs Bureaus (Bommels, 1997; Van der Steeg, Lamboo & Nieuwendijk, 2000).

Integrity became a topic on the political agenda for the first time in 1992, when the late Mrs. Dales, Minister of Internal Affairs, brought up the matter in a speech (Dales, 1994). Since then, policies have been developed and a National Integrity System has been constructed (Huberts, 2002). Nowadays integrity plays a role in every Dutch police force. One of the first initiatives to implement integrity, was the distribution to every police officer in the country of a copy of the integrity statute by the council of Chief Commissioners in 1997 (see Table 1).

An evaluation of the integrity policies of the Dutch police force (Adviescommissie Politie en Integriteit, 2001; see also Van den Heuvel & Lamboo, 2001) shows a multitude of policy instruments emphasizing culture and cultural change (awareness, leadership, openness to discussion, code of conduct, mentorship, training) and structural and organizational demands (instructions, ombudsman/trusted representative, Internal Affairs Bureaus, circulation of personnel, job mobility, division of roles, selective screening). The integrity policy of the Dutch police force can be characterized as a general approach to enhance integrity within the organization: most of the policy instruments aim to discourage integrity violations in the wide sense.

Table 1	The Integrity Statute of The Dutch Police Force

Democratic consciousness

- A police officer is loyal to Dutch law and order

- A police officer acts on article 1 of the Dutch constitution

- A police officer puts the public benefits above his own, private gain

Trustworthiness and respect

- A police officer doesn't lie

- A police officer reports truthfully and correctly

- A police officer adheres to set agreements

- A police officer questions unethical behaviour and misconduct in the police force

- A police officer respects people

- A police officer does not make racist or sexist comments to citizens or colleagues

- A police officer takes care of arrested persons in a correct manner

- A police officer attends to people in a decent manner

- A police officer takes a complaint seriously at all times

Independence and impartiality

- A police officer will withhold from accepting gifts

- A police officer does not arrange private discounts on services or goods whilst in function

- A police officer avoids high-risk contacts in private and keeps professional contacts transparent and open for discussion

- A police officer reports about all paid and unpaid private time activities to superiors

The use of violence

- A police officer dislikes violence, but knows that the use of violence is sometimes unavoidable

- A police officer has the authority to use violence only when it is deemed appropriate and proportional to the situation

Dealing with confidential information

- A police officer does not abuse information

- A police officer knows how to keep a secret

The appropriate use of authorities

- A police officer uses his authority objectively

- A police officer only uses legal investigative methods

Clarifying the Concept of Integrity

Clarity about concepts like corruption, ethics and integrity is important, especially when it concerns public debate, policy-making and theory development on an international level. At the same time it is clear that we are discussing phenomena in which the content will always be contested. Let us summarize a number of aspects.

Corruption is often defined as involving behaviour on the part of officials in the public sector - politicians, civil servants, police officers - who improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves, or those associated with them, by the misusing of the public power entrusted to them. A brief definition is the abuse of public office for private gain. In this more narrow definition, corruption is a specific type of violation against the moral norms and values for behaviour. Broader interpretations focus on corruption as a synonym for all violations of the moral norms and values. It is then identical to the concept of 'integrity', a concept that has become more prominent in the discussion in many (developed) countries (Huberts & Van den Heuvel, 1999; Huberts, Pijl & Steen, 1999; Klockars, 1997). *Public integrity* denotes the quality of acting in accordance with the moral values, norms and rules accepted by the public.

It is important to realize that both broader and smaller concepts of corruption are present in international discussion (see Barker, 1978; Barker & Carter, 1996; Crank & Caldero, 2000; Klockars, 1997; Newburn, 1999; Roebuck & Barker, 1973; Sherman, 1974): corruption as the umbrella concept, covering all or most types of integrity violation or unethical behaviour and corruption as a type of integrity violation concerning misuse of public power for private benefit. In both interpretations, a point for debate is what are relevant "morals" or "ethics"?

Public ethics might be defined as the collection of values and norms in the public sector, functioning as standards or yardsticks for assessing the integrity of one's conduct. The *moral* nature of these principles refers to what is judged as right, just, or good conduct. *Values* are principles or standards of behaviour that should have a certain weight in choice of action (what is good to do, or bad to

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refrain from doing). *Norms* state what is morally correct behaviour in a certain situation. Values and norms guide the choice of action and provide a moral basis for justifying or evaluating what one does.

In this paper we define p*olice integrity* as referring to the quality of acting in accordance with the relevant moral values, norms and rules accepted by society. Several dimensions are relevant in distinguishing specific forms of police *integrity violations* or forms of misconduct. For instance, are we dealing with behaviour on- or off-duty? Did it take place within the organization or are citizens and other organizations from outside the police force involved? Are we talking about misconduct with a 'noble cause' or is it's sole goal private gain? Was it carried out with malice aforethought or was naivety the cause? Did it break a written rule and procedure or are (unwritten) norms and values in force at stake? And, how serious is the integrity violation?

Taking these dimensions into account, we developed a typology with 10 categories of integrity violations (Huberts, Pijl & Steen, 1999) presented in Table 2.

Table 2	Typology of Integrity Violations
1.	**Corruption**, including bribing, 'kickbacks', nepotism, cronyism and patronage (with gain for oneself, family, friends or party)
2.	**Fraud and theft** of resources, including the manipulation of information to cover-up fraud
3.	**Conflict of (private and public) interest through gifts** (services, promises) or the possession of assets
4.	**Conflict of interest through jobs and activities**, outside the organization (e.g. 'moonlighting')
5.	**Improper use of violence** towards citizens, suspects
6.	**Other improper (investigative) methods of policing** (improper means for -often- noble causes)
7.	**Abuse and manipulation of information** (unauthorized and improper use of police files; leaking confidential information)
8.	**Discrimination and sexual harassment** (indecent treatment of colleagues or citizens)
9.	**The waste and abuse of organizational resources**
10.	**Private time misconduct** (domestic violence, drunken driving, private crime etc.).

In this paper we will use the above typology to analyse the integrity perceptions of police officers in the Netherlands.

Perceptions of Dutch Police Officers on Integrity and Integrity Violations

What do Dutch police officers think about the extent and acceptability of integrity violations? In this paper we will report research findings on police officers' perceptions on integrity and misconduct at the working place. Their opinions about the extent and the acceptability of integrity violations are described and reviewed.

The data in this study is taken from the so-called Integrity Thermometer (Kaptein, 1998; Kaptein & Wempe, 2002), a written questionnaire developed with the aim to determine how the

employees of an organization think about integrity and integrity violations in their working environment and to help develop integrity policies through organizational management (Kaptein & Van Reenen, 2001). The data used here were collected between 1996-1999 in several different regional police forces in The Netherlands. The response varied between 40 and 60 percent. All data was accumulated into one large data set, including 3.125 respondents working in the Dutch police force.

In the Integrity Thermometer we find several questions about different forms of deviant behaviour and misconduct. The respondents were asked *how often* they think these forms of integrity violations occur at their working place.
Additionally, they were asked *how acceptable* they find the (possible) occurrence of these matters at work.

The scale of response about the extent of deviant behaviour is as follows:

"To my opinion the following matters occur within my unit 1. never, 2. almost never, 3. sometimes, 4. relatively often, 5. often."

The scale of response concerning the acceptability of deviant working behaviour is:

"If these matters (would) occur within my unit, in my opinion that is 1. always unacceptable, 2. most of the time unacceptable, 3. sometimes acceptable, 4. most of the time acceptable, 5. always acceptable."

The Integrity Thermometer does not include questions about one's own personal unethical behaviour.

The questions about different forms of deviant behaviour and misconduct at the working place can be categorized in our typology of the 10 types of integrity violations (see Table 2). The

Integrity Thermometer does not ask for private time misconduct. Accordingly, this 10th category is left out of consideration.

Table 3 shows our research findings. First, for all 9 types of integrity violations the specific manifestations are described. Second, the bar *perception of the extent* presents the percentage of police officers who notify that the integrity violation often, relatively often or sometimes occurs within their unit. Third, the bar *acceptability* gives the percentage of police officers who indicate that they find it always, most of the time, or sometimes acceptable if these violations (would) occur within the unit. Note that for some integrity violations the percentage under 'acceptability' is missing. For these questions only the perceived extent is measured and not the judgement regarding the acceptability.

Table 3 Perceptions on Integrity Violations	perception of the extent	acceptability
	in % of respondents saying it is "sometimes", "relatively often" or "often" occurring at work	in % of respondents saying it is "sometimes", "most of the time" or "always" acceptable
1 *Corruption*		
favouritism of family and friends	19	17
favouritism/nepotism within the organization	68	6
2 *Fraud and theft*		
declaration fraud	19	2
taking lost properties for private use	3	-
the use of working hours for private purposes	52	30
the use of organizational resources for private purposes	57	52
3 *Conflict of interest through gifts*		
arranging private discounts on-duty	13	3
accepting gifts with a value over 25,- Euro	5	20
4 *Conflict of interest through jobs and activities*		
activities which possibly conflict with organizational interests	27	11
5 *Improper use of violence*		
use of improper and/or disproportional violence	12	-
6 *Other improper use of (investigative) methods of policing*		
use of illegal investigative methods	9	-
wrongfully reporting in official reports and records	5	-
7 *Abuse and manipulation of information*		
abuse of confidential information	11	-
lying	53	14
8 *Discrimination and sexual harassment*		
sexual harassment	16	5
discrimination on the basis of sex	19	3
discrimination on the basis of race	18	3
gossiping	89	-
telling dirty jokes	82	-
incorrect care of suspects	15	-
racist and sexual remarks towards citizens and suspects	24	-
9 *Waste and abuse of organizational resources*		
false sick reporting	48	9
minimal effort and commitment	68	20
careless use of organizational resources	39	4
10 *Private time misconduct*	-	-

Integrity violations in the Dutch police force: perceived extent

For the perceived extent of integrity violations it holds that *indecent treatment of colleagues* as gossiping and telling dirty jokes frequently occurs at the working place. More than 80 percent of the police officers indicate that this behaviour - sometimes, (relatively) often – occurs within their unit. (We see that discrimination and sexual harassment occur less frequently, making clear that police officers perceive telling dirty jokes as rather harmless and not as a kind of sexual harassment.) Furthermore two thirds of the police officers perceive *waste and abuse of organizational resources* like minimal effort/commitment and *corruption* as nepotism/favouritism in their working environment. *Fraud and theft* occurs according to a small majority when it comes to private use of organizational resources and working hours, just like lying *(abuse and manipulation of information)*. Finally, over 40 percent of the police officers hold the opinion that false sick reporting and careless use of organizational resources (*waste and abuse)* occur at their working place.

It can be seen that integrity violations that occur relatively often mainly deal with behaviour *within* the organization and have to do with *police culture*. These integrity violations are not unique for the police. However, the fact that they occur so frequently might have to do with the police organization itself. The police force works in the margins of society, in the frontline there is always a confrontation with 'wrongdoing'. In such a working climate loyalty to one's colleagues and internal solidarity are crucial. But the reverse side of the coin is the 'code of silence', covering up for each other, never let a colleague down and closing the ranks (see Punch, 1985; Skolnick, 2000; Weisburd & Greenspan et al., 2000). This will be at the expense of an open working climate and sometimes also for the integrity of the working environment.

Does this mean that we could characterize the police organization as largely corrupt with employees just pursuing private gain ('get one's share') and improper use of violence or other

improper (investigative) methods of policing ('the end justifies the means')?

We see (Table 3) that taking lost properties for private use and declaration-fraud *(fraud and theft)*, accepting gifts and arranging private discounts on services/goods on-duty *(conflict of interests through gifts)* - integrity violations with a direct personal financial gain - are less often perceived. The same holds for *improper use of violence* or *other improper (investigative) methods of policing* including wrongfully reporting in official reports and records and the *abuse of confidential information*. Besides, indecent treatment within the organization does not necessarily mean that citizens and suspects (outside the organization) are mistreated.

In this respect a critical note is the fact that we only have data of the *perceived* extent; behaviour outside the organization is more out of sight for colleagues than behaviour within the organization. Nevertheless we modestly conclude that integrity violations which occur less often mainly deal with behaviour *outside* the organization, involving external parties like citizens or suspects, and violations of *written rules and procedures*.

An exception to that rule seems to be conflict of interests through other jobs and activities. Although the Integrity Statute prescribes that officers should report off-duty business to their superiors, 27 percent of the police officers think that this kind of possible conflict of interest occurs in their unit.

Integrity violations in the Dutch police force: acceptability

The extent of integrity violations perceived by police officers itself does tell us something about the acceptability of these matters. But how do police officers judge the situation when they are asked directly, whether they find the occurrence of integrity violations in their working environment acceptable? In Table 3 their answers can be found in the bar 'acceptability'. The percentages reflect how many police officers find it - sometimes, most of the time or always - acceptable if the concerned integrity violations occur within their unit.

Police officers show the most understanding towards the use of organizational resources and working hours for private means (f*raud and theft*); resp. 52 percent and 30 percent of the police officers find this behaviour acceptable. And 20 percent of the police officers endorse minimal effort and commitment of colleagues *(waste and abuse of organizational resources).*

Furthermore we see that police officers find it (sometimes) acceptable that gifts worth over a value of 25 Euro are accepted within their unit *(conflict of interests through gifts).*

Also the occurrence at the working place of favouritism of family and friends *(corruption)*, lying *(abuse and manipulation of information)* and off-duty business *(conflict of interest through jobs)* is treated leniently by more than ten percent of the police officers.

These results make clear that relatively many police officers don't find it problematic when private and organizational interests are entangled.

More strict are the opinions regarding the acceptability of nepotism/favouritism within the organization *(corruption),* declaration fraud *(fraud and theft),* arranging private discounts on services/goods on-duty *(conflict of interests through gifts), discrimination and sexual harassment*, false sick reporting and careless use of organizational resources (*waste and abuse)*; less then ten percent of the police officers find it acceptable if these integrity violations occur within their unit.

These results are in line with Klockars' international research on integrity perceptions of police officers, carried out by Punch et al. for the Dutch police force (see Haberfeld et al., 1999; Huberts et al. 2000; Klockars et al., 2000; Punch et al., 2001). It shows that Dutch police officers judge integrity violations that combine an abuse of duty plus direct personal profit negatively. The judgement of police officers appeared to be milder regarding conflict of interests through gifts and jobs.

From Integrity Research to Integrity Policy; Police Officers' Perceptions Reviewed

Our survey mapped out the *perceptions* of Dutch police officers on integrity and integrity violations. Our results do *not* tell us the *actual extent* of unethical behaviour or misconduct in the Dutch police force. So, what to do with these results? What does it mean in respect to police integrity and to guarantee integrity in the police organization? How can these insights contribute to improve integrity at the working place? Which lessons can be drawn for the benefit of the management and how to translate employee's views into a policy approach of integrity violations in the police force? In this section we make a first step from integrity research towards integrity policy.

By combining the perceptions of employees on the extent on the one hand and their views on the acceptability of unethical behaviour on the other hand, integrity problems can be categorized, indicating the seriousness of integrity violations. We distinguish four types of integrity problems: *urgent problems*, *recurring problems*, *specific problems* and *non-problems* (see Table 4). This typology of integrity problems does not only hold true for the police organization, it can be useful for other organizations as well.

Table 4 typology of integrity problems	great extent: perception> 20%	small extent: perception < 20%
unacceptable < 10%	1 urgent problem	3 specific problem
acceptable > 10%	2 recurring problem	4 non-problem

Note: For the dimension 'perceived extent' an integrity violation is of 'great extent' when more than 20 percent of the police officers perceive that violation (sometimes, relatively often, often) occurring within their unit and of 'small extent' when less than 20 percent of the police officers perceive that violation (sometimes, relatively often, often) occurring. For the dimension 'acceptability' holds that an integrity violation is 'unacceptable' when less than 10 percent of the police officers finds the occurrence of that violation (sometimes, most of the time, always) acceptable and 'acceptable' when more than 10 percent of the police officers finds the occurrence of that violation (sometimes, most of the time, always) acceptable. Where the dividing line should be set, varies between countries and depends on decisions made by the management.

Urgent problems (1) are integrity violations which occur often in the eyes of police officers and which are not accepted by most police officers.

Recurring problems (2) also are integrity violations which are perceived often, but many police officers do find it acceptable when these violations occur within their unit.

Specific problems (3) concern integrity violations which occur less often as perceived by police officers, while their occurrence is considered unacceptable.

Finally there are integrity violations which hardly occur and are acceptable according to police officers. These violations are no problem for police officers; they are *non-problems (4).*

Using this typology, the following picture of integrity problems in the Dutch police force arise.

Urgent problems in the Dutch police force are integrity violations like favouritism/nepotism within the organization, false sick reporting and careless use of organizational resources.

Recurring problems concern the use of working hours and organizational resources for private purposes, activities which possibly conflict with organizational interests (off-duty business), lying and minimal effort and commitment.

Specific problems are declaration fraud, arranging private discounts on-duty and furthermore discrimination and sexual harassment.

Non-problems finally include favouritism of family and friends and accepting more expensive gifts.

Every type of integrity problem asks for its own policy. The management of the organization can use the views of the employees as a starting point for the development or evaluation of integrity policies. If we do so, an approach to integrity problems follows, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 a policy approach for integrity problems	*great extent*	*small extent*
unacceptable	**urgent problem;** **prevention and repression, priority to rules/instructions and reprimands**	**specific problem;** **optimise monitoring**
acceptable	**recurring problem;** **prevention and awareness, guidelines and code of conduct**	**non-problem;** **unaltered** **policy**

Urgent problems require priority in management. In addition to prevention, its policy should include clear rules and repressive measures. Employees will support a harsh approach because they don't accept the (frequent) occurrence of these matters. (We will not go further into the matter, for specific measures related to this context see for instance Van Reenen, 1997 and

Kaptein, 1998).

Recurring problems demand a different approach. You could say that employees are not conscious of having done any wrong. Policy should aim at awareness of employees that organizational integrity is at stake. Guidelines and a code of conduct are first steps in curbing this type of unethical behaviour.

For *specific problems* it seems sufficient to monitor the occurrence of these integrity violations. Employees find these matters problematic, not because they think they occur frequently within the working environment, but because they don't accept them. So, it is important to make sure that this kind of unethical behaviour doesn't gather volume.

Finally, if the management shares the employees' view concerning *non-problems*, a (new) policy isn't necessary as yet.

Of course the management does not always share the views of their employees with regard to the supposed extent or acceptability of integrity violations. The management of an organization might estimate the extent of misconduct differently, for example because it has better insight in deviant behaviour in external relations or as a result of investigations of Internal Affairs Bureaus. Furthermore, the management of an organization could judge the acceptability differently or take the position of zero-tolerance. Nevertheless, gaining insight into employees' views and perceptions is always crucial for implementing a policy, especially when it comes to integrity. Successful policies have to take into account what employees experience.

Conclusion

In this paper the views of Dutch police officers on deviant behaviour at the working place were

paramount. The perceptions of police officers in the Dutch police force on the extent and acceptability of integrity violations were discussed, based on data taken from surveys, called Integrity Thermometers. Integrity violations cover a wide spectrum; corruption (with gain for oneself, family or friends), fraud and theft, conflict of private and public interest (through gifts and assets, jobs and activities), improper use of violence towards citizens and suspects, improper (investigative) methods of policing, abuse and manipulation of information, discrimination and sexual harassment, waste and abuse of organizational resources and private time misconduct. The research findings do not reflect the actual extent of these different types of unethical behaviour in the Dutch police force, but they make clear how employees think and feel about these matters. By combining the perceptions employees have: on the one hand the extent, and on the other hand the acceptability of unethical behaviour at the working place, we developed a classification of integrity problems indicating the seriousness of integrity violations. Four types of integrity problems can be distinguished: urgent problems, recurring problems, specific problems and non-problems. We argued that every type of integrity problem asks for its own policy. The employees' perceptions are important to take into account when integrity policies are developed or evaluated. Those policies can either build on existing support of employees or they will have to include strategies to create and extend that support.

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