Attitudes of police managers to different leadership roles in their jobs: An empirical study in Norway

Petter Gottschalk
BI Norwegian Business School

Rune Glomseth
Norwegian Police University College

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Petter Gottschalk
BI Norwegian Business School
Nydalsveien 37
N-0442 Oslo, Norway
petter.gottschalk@bi.no

Rune Glomseth
Norwegian Police University College
Slemdalsveien
N-0300 Oslo, Norway
rune.glomseth@phs.no

Abstract

Background for this study is the increased complexity in policing that has become more knowledge-based and more professional in the last decade. Aim of this paper is to present empirical results from a study of attitudes of police managers to different leadership roles in their jobs in two police districts in Norway. A questionnaire was developed and administered among police managers in two police districts in Norway. Participants in leadership programs were selected for this survey research. Follo police district and Hedmark police district had a total of 130 participants in these programs with 60 managers from Follo and 70 managers from Hedmark. The survey research was carried out in March and April 2010. The personnel leader role was found to be most important, followed by the resource allocator role. Responding police managers reported that the felt least competent in the liaison role.

Biography

Petter Gottschalk is professor of information systems and knowledge management in the Department of Leadership and Organizational Behavior in BI Norwegian Business School. He has published extensively on organized crime, white-collar crime, policing and law enforcement. He earned his MBA in Germany, MSc in the USA, and DBA in the UK. He has been the Chief Executive Officer of ABB Data Cables, Norwegian Computing Center and Norwegian Information Technology.

Rune Glomseth is police superintendent and assistant professor at the Norwegian Police University College. He can be reached at rune.glomseth@phs.no

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Introduction

Policing has become more complex, more knowledge-based, and more professional in the last decade (Sewell, 2008). These challenges are felt across the world - a fact recognized by a growing national and international sharing of practice and personnel. Policing in the 21st century is a potpourri of sectors, levels, systems, and models that coexist in a dynamic spiral of continual interaction. Policing is a social process and as such it spans both public and private sectors (Bratton & Malinowski, 2008; Dean & Gottschalk, 2007).

Policing is the most apparent aspect of the criminal justice system, and a well-regarded police service is a prerequisite for the positive perception of law enforcement and justice (Dean & Gottschalk, 2007; Gottschalk, 2010; Schafer, 2009; UNODC 2006). Leadership is one of those obvious elements required for integrity and accountability in policing, but how to generate and maintain professional leadership is a difficult question (Prenzler, 2009: 175):

> One point to note is that when it comes to ethical policing, inspiring good conduct by example is unlikely to be sufficient. Good leaders need to be good managers, with a detailed knowledge of the workings of their organization, facilitating and driving the successful pursuit of organizational goals.

One approach to identifying good leaders is to study the job of a police manager that consists of several parallel roles. The purpose of this paper is to present empirical results from a study of leadership roles in two police districts in Norway. This is the first survey of its kind of Norwegian police managers.

The problem for police leaders is to decide where to pay attention and spend their time during a working day, working week and working year. Rather than just letting things happen, they should have an explicit focus on leadership roles that occupy their attention and time. Therefore, this research is important, since it enables explicit focus on leadership roles.

Police Leadership

At a certain point in time, a police manager may perceive one role as more important than other leadership roles. Yet, the manager may spend most of his or her time on less important roles, and the manager may perceive himself or herself as more qualified for some roles than other roles. Mintzberg (1994) found that it is a peculiarity of the management literature that the best-known writers all seem to emphasize one particular part of the manager's job to the exclusion of the others. However, taken together leadership roles cover all the parts, but even that may not describe the whole task of managing. Examples of leadership roles include personnel leader, resource allocator, spokesman, entrepreneur, liaison, and monitor.

Thus, leadership of police departments, large and small, consists of several parallel leadership roles. Sewell (2008) found that some of the most important lessons learned in police management are that command hurts, change is difficult to implement and often not desired, politics are everywhere, and the police chief is a public figure.

Schafer (2008) argued that effective leadership in policing is the process of setting a proper example for other officers by showing how to police in a manner that is fair, service oriented, professional, and within the standards and expectations of the community. Thus, effective leadership involves a set of actions and initiatives to better the agency and the community it serves while also protecting the welfare, well-being, and interests of employees and the citizens they protect.

Mostovicz et al. (2009) argued for a definition of leadership as the ability to act authentically according to one's worldview, either Theta or Lambda. Leadership characteristics of Theta versus Lambda worldviews include motivation, behaviour, goal, and benefit. The typical Theta (Θ) personality seeks affiliation and control as an ultimate life purpose. Because of this, they loom to fit in or contextualize themselves within a desired group and use socially-derived understandings of product characteristics as a basis for their consumption. Lambdas (Λ), on the other hand, seek achievement and uniqueness as an ultimate end goal. As a result, they are more likely to interpret products based on their individual responses to the product, how it helps/prevents them to stand out, and how the product benchmarks against their regular consumptive patterns.Furthermore, a distinction is often made between transformational leadership and transactional leadership (Dion, 2008; Fitzgerald & Schutte, 2010; Gong et al., 2009; Michaelis et al., 2010).

The current study focuses on leadership roles, while many previous studies have focused on leadership styles. Leadership roles emphasize tasks to be carried out, while leadership styles emphasize behavioral modes and approaches in carrying out those tasks. In leadership style research, distinctions can be made between three different kinds of leadership styles (Joseph & Winston, 2005; Reinke, 2004; Russel & Stone, 2002; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2003; Smith et al., 2004; Spears, 2004, 2010; Washington et al., 2006): servant leadership, autocratic leadership, and laissez-faire leadership.

In police departments, Murphy and Drodge (2004) found that the way police officers perceive their treatment by the leader and the organization affect both the quality of their performance and the service they provide to the community. Thus, in a transition from a semi-military to a knowledge-oriented organization in many countries all over the world, the role of the personnel leader might very well be applied with the servant leadership style to succeed.

Leadership Roles

Mintzberg's (1994) role typology is frequently used in studies of managerial work. The advantage of the Mintzberg typology as opposed to other leadership instruments is its ability to be generally unbiased. There is not one role as such that is always better suited in leadership at the expense of other roles. Rather, the appropriate or preferred role depends on the situation. Hence, the contingent approach to management is applied by making role importance dependent on the situation.

In the context of police management, Glomseth et al. (2007) applied six roles from Mintzberg's role typology: personnel leader, resource allocator, spokesman, entrepreneur, liaison and monitor. In this research, the same six roles are applied. The role terminology is commonly in use and is genderless. We will employ the following role descriptions for leadership roles:

1) *Personnel leader*. As a leader, the manager is responsible for supervising, hiring, training, organizing, coordinating, and motivating a cadre of personnel to achieve the goals of the organization. This role is mainly internal to the police unit.

2) *Resource allocator*. The manager must decide how to allocate human, financial and information resources to the different tasks of police work. This role emphasizes planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling tasks, and is mainly internal to the police investigation unit. Administrative tasks are included in this role.

3) *Spokesman*. As a spokesman, the manager extends organizational contacts to areas in the police force outside his or her own unit. This role emphasizes promoting acceptance of the unit and the unit's work within the organization of which they are part. For the manager, it means contact with the rest of the organization. Frequently,

he or she must move across traditional departmental boundaries and become involved in personnel, organizational and financial matters.

4) *Entrepreneur*. The manager identifies police needs and develops solutions that change situations. A major responsibility of the manager is to ensure that rapidly evolving policing methods are understood, planned, implemented, and strategically exploited in the organization.

5) *Liaison*. In this role, the manager communicates with the external environment, and it includes exchanging information with government agencies, private businesses, media and the public. This is an active, external role.

6) *Monitor*. This role emphasizes scanning of the external environment to keep up with relevant changes, such as politics and economics. The manager identifies new ideas from sources outside his or her organization. To accomplish this task, the manager uses many resources, including professional relationships, media and the public. This is a passive, external role.

These six roles are illustrated in Figure 1. The personnel leader and resource allocator are roles internal to the unit for the unit manager. The spokesman and entrepreneur are roles directed towards the base police organization, while the liaison and monitor roles are external to both the unit and the base organization for the unit manager. The current research is concerned with police leaders' own perceptions of relative leadership importance as an empirical study of what executives think themselves is the present situation as compared to an ideal situation.

Research Design

In Norway, there is only one police force. The organization of the Norwegian Police is largely based on the principle of an integrated police, where all functions of the police are collected in one organization. There are 27 local police districts, each under the command of a Chief of Police. In addition to the police districts, there are five central police institutions in Norway. About 13,000 persons work in the Norwegian Police force in some capacity. About 9,000 are trained police officers, while almost 800 are trained lawyers, and about 3,200 are civilian employees.
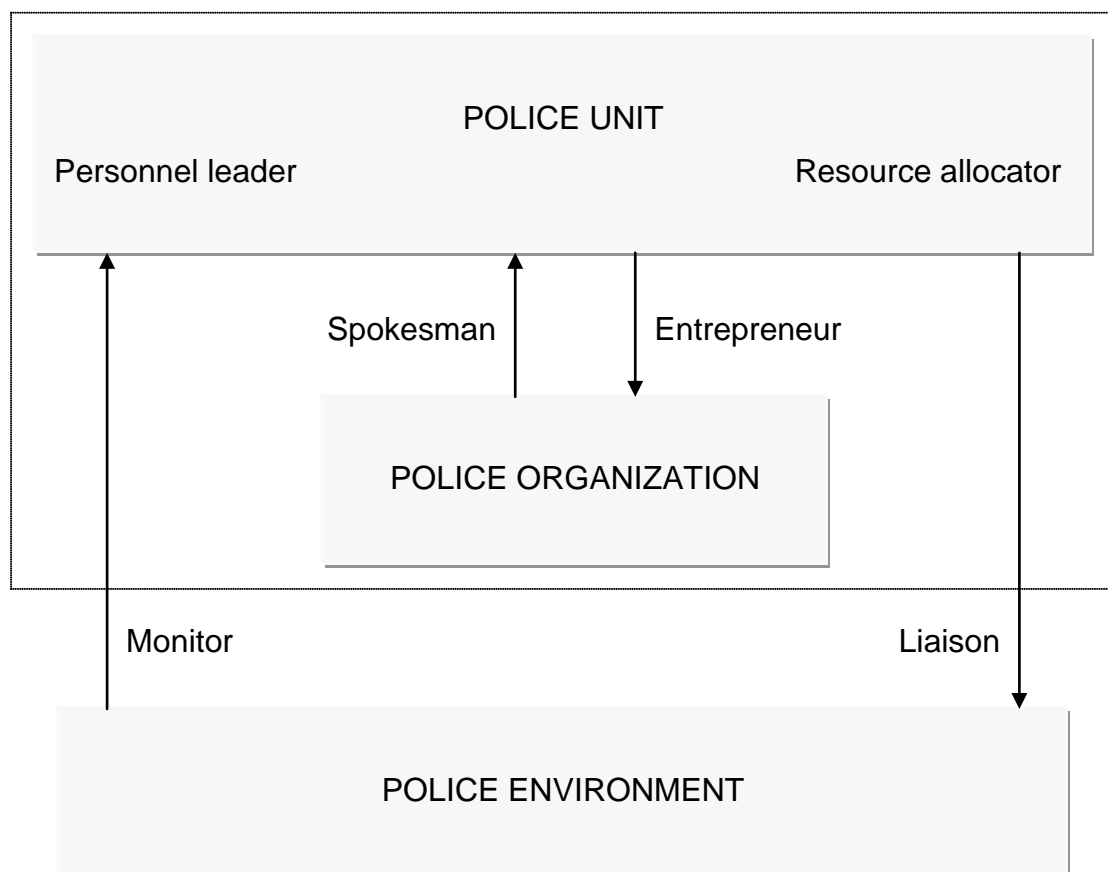
Figure 1

Leadership roles for police managers

The Norwegian police and prosecuting authority follow a parallel track system, where responsibility for combating crime is shared between the Police Directorate and the Public Prosecution, both linked to the Department of Justice. The Chief of Police in each police district has full responsibility for all kinds of policing in the district. A police district has its own headquarter as well as several police stations. All police officers in Norway are trained to be generalists, able to fulfil every aspect of ordinary police work, including criminal investigations, maintaining public order and community policing.

Two police districts were selected for this survey research. They were Follo and Hedmark police districts in the southern part of Norway. Both of these districts have several towns and rural areas, and they have similar geography, demography and crime statistics. In both police districts, executive training programs were carried out in 2008/2009/2010. Participants in these programs were selected for this survey research. Follo police district and Hedmark police district had a total of 130 participants in these programs with 60 managers from Follo and 70 managers from Hedmark.

A questionnaire was developed to measure leadership roles. The questionnaire was first pilot tested on 15 police managers at different leadership levels and from different police districts. Seven of them provided written comments, and some others made comments on the telephone. All comments from the pilot study were considered, and several changes were made to the questionnaire.

The survey research was carried out in March and April 2010. Ninety out of 130 managers responded to the questionnaire, thereby representing a sixty-nine per cent response rate. Most of the respondents had worked in the police for more than twenty-five years. Fourty-eight per cent of the respondents were from Follo, while 52 per cent were from Hedmark police district.

Among the respondents, 50% were first-line managers with patrol officers and investigators as their subordinates, 30% were middle managers with first-line managers as their subordinates, while 20% were top managers with middle managers as their subordinates. In terms of leadership position, 35% had 1 to 5 subordinates, 20% had 6 to 10 subordinates, 22% had 11-20 subordinates, and the remaining 23% had more than 21 subordinates.

Results

Table 1 lists results for leadership roles on a scale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important), 1 (very little time) to 7 (very much time), and 1 (low competence) to 7 (high competence). Personnel leader is reported as the most important role where managers spend most time. Ideally, managers would like to spend even more time on this role. Respondents feel most competent in the role of resource allocator, followed by personnel leader and spokesman.

Table 1

Measurement of leadership roles

Leadership Role	Role Importance	Role Time Actual	Role Time Ideal	Role Competence
Personnel leader	5.9	4.7	5.7	4.9
Resource allocator	5.2	4.7	4.7	4.9
Spokesman	5.2	4.3	5.0	4.6
Entrepreneur	5.1	4.2	4.9	4.5
Monitor	5.0	4.2	5.1	4.5
Liaison	4.9	4.1	4.6	4.4

How is leadership role importance dependent on management position? Results are listed in Table 2. Generally, higher ranked managers find most roles more important than lower ranked managers. Furthermore, leader at all three levels agree that personnel leader is the most important. First-line managers find the role of liaison to be least important, while both middle managers and top managers find the role of monitor to be least important.

From a statistical point of view, significant differences were calculated by means of ANOVA analysis (Hair et al., 2010). Single factor between subjects was applied. Statistically significant differences were found for spokesman and liaison, where top managers find these two roles to be significantly more important than first-line manager. Both spokesman and liaison are outwards-directed roles that are internal and external to the police district respectively.

Table 2

Leadership role importance as a function of leadership position

Leadership Role	First-line managers	Middle managers	Top managers
Personnel leader	5.7	5.9	6.3
Resource allocator	5.1	4.9	5.9
Spokesman	4.8	5.3	5.8
Entrepreneur	5.0	5.1	5.6
Monitor	5,2	4.9	5.0
Liaison	4.5	5.0	5.6

Discussion

There is an enormous literature on the topic of police leadership (e.g., Bratton & Malinowski, 2008; Don, 2008; Eterno & Silverman, 2010). Schafer (2009) finds that the importance of police supervisors (formal leaders) in shaping organizational contexts and outcomes in police organizations is generally accepted. Both police districts in the current study have been through turbulent times in terms of frequent organizational changes. This might have influenced managers to become more people oriented in the personnel leader role. Also, newly promoted leaders seem to have more focus on personnel management than their predecessors. As Norwegian Police develops from a semi-military organization to a knowledge organization, more attention is paid to leadership and knowledge management as well as police integrity and accountability (UNODC, 2006; OPI, 2007; Fijnaut and Huberts, 2002; Cossette, 2004; OSJI, 2005).

It is interesting to note that respondents select the personnel leader role as most important while they selected the resource allocator role as the top regarding their own competence. A possible explanation is that traditional police management has been concerned with decision-making where the police manager makes decisions about who should do what and when. This is very much in line with the resource allocator role. More recently, police officers in Norway have experienced empowerment, causing police managers to shift their main focus away from resource allocation over to personnel leadership. This recent shift from resource allocation to personnel leadership is also in line with the more recent thinking of transformational leadership rather than transactional leadership in modern organizations. Based on Table 2, it is interesting to note that first-line manager do not find the liaison role very important. This seems strange, as it is typically first-line police leaders who are front figures in the media in all kinds of crime cases. Furthermore, middle managers place little emphasis on developments in society as monitors, which are similar to top managers, but

different to first-line managers. While first-line managers put relatively more importance in the monitor role versus the liaison role, i.e. that input from the environment is more important than output to the environment, middle managers seem to have slightly different focus.

There are several avenues for future research. First, the link between the research and specific study needs to be described in further detail. For instance, Theta and Lambda leadership needs to be further described. How do these leadership concepts specifically relate to the subject matter of the article and the specific study? There is a need to provide more than just a definition of each. Next, there is a need to develop a theory, hypotheses, and also use stronger statistical techniques rather than averages only. Relationships among variables involved need to be tested, using more advanced techniques. Future research might want to define dependent and independent variables and test the impact of the latter on the dependent variables. In analyzing and solving problems, research and practice look at cause-effect relations. Some causes of problems have significant impact on the outcome and others not. To solve problems we focus on the significant variables. Future research has to identify those significant variables.

Conclusion

Respondents in this survey research indicated that the personnel leader to be the leadership role most important, and also the role where most time is spent, where most time should be spent, and where the manager feels most competent. At the other end we find the liaison role where responding managers did report that they spend little time and have little competence. The purpose of this paper was to present results from a survey of police managers in Norway on leadership roles. A questionnaire was developed and administered among police managers in two police districts in Norway. Six leadership roles were defined and measured in terms of

their role importance, actual role time, ideal role time, and managers' role competence. Respondents emphasized the role of personnel leader where the manager is responsible for supervising, hiring, training, organizing, coordinating, and motivating a cadre of personnel to achieve the goals of the organization.

An important implication for practice from this study is the necessary shift from resource allocation to personnel leadership. This shift needs to find its reality in the actual time spent on the role. Furthermore, police managers need to develop their competence in personnel leadership as transformational leadership becomes more important than transactional leadership in law enforcement organizations.

Both leadership scholars and practitioners may find some useful insights from this study. First, consistency is needed between relative leadership role importance and leadership competence. You need to be most competent in the most important leadership role. Next, there is a link between time spent in a role and role importance, although it is not necessarily true that most time should be spent in the most important role, as the role may require more quality rather than more quantity in terms of elapsed time. Finally, the contingent approach to management is important, where the dependent factor is whether the leadership position is at the first-line, in the middle or at the top of an organization.

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