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Reference to this paper in APA (6th):

Filstad, C., Karp, T. & Glomseth, R. (2018). How police leaders learn to lead. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*. doi: 10.1093/police/pay043

This is the final text version of the article, it may contain minor differences from the publisher's pdf version.

How Police Leaders Learn to Lead

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Abstract

This article examines how Norwegian police leaders learn to lead and what constitutes police practices. Twenty-seven police leaders were shadowed during and interviewed about their daily practices of policing. We found that police leaders learn foremost through their experiences by practising leadership within the context of police culture. We therefore argue for a shift from teaching to acknowledging learning through practice instead of learning through practice constituting missed opportunities for learning and being ‘due to chance’. The Norwegian police culture and the Norwegian Police Service not being a learning organization will strongly influence what Norwegian police leaders learn. Consequently, Norwegian police leaders learn management more than they learn leadership. We argue for combining management and leadership in future police leadership practices. We also argue for the importance of enabling police leaders to construct their manoeuvring space, acknowledging the importance of a manoeuvring space in police leaders’ learning to ensure their learning results in changes in established practises.

Introduction

In this paper, we respond to the call for more research on how police leaders learn (Flynn

and Herrington, 2015). Policing has changed due to new types of terrorist threats, new technologies, immigration and new forms of crime (Flynn and Herrington 2015; Martin and Mazerolle, 2015; Herrington and Colvin, 2015; McLeod and Herrington, 2016). These obstacles in policing arguably challenge police leaders' capacities to learn how to ensure leadership during complex solutions and new ways of conducting police work (Flynn and Herrington, 2015; Martin and Mazerolle, 2015; Roberts et al., 2016). Flynn and Herrington (2015) suggested that future police leadership requirements should be a blend of management skills (organising, budgeting, staffing), personal skills (motivating and communicating) and leadership skills (strategizing, analysing and reflecting). Hence, we studied police leaders and how they learn leadership skills in their daily practises, especially where management and leadership might be interchangeable.

To ensure leadership development and learning, the research posits that 70-90 per cent of learning occurs through a network, with peers and in practise (Jennings, 2011; Flynn and Herrington, 2015; Filstad, 2016). Also, a substantial amount of the learning literature argues that learning is situationally, relationally and culturally embedded in social practises at work, such as learning through participation and practise, and should not be limited to learning as an individual and through context-independent acts (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Elkjaer, 2004; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Gherardi, 2006; Hibbert and Cunliffe, 2015; Kempster, 2009; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Nicolini, 2012; Segal, 2011).

Learning through practise needs to address what constitutes the social practises in which police leaders learn and develop their leadership. However, little attention is given in the police system regarding how police leaders operate and how they create and distribute a climate of leadership throughout their organisation (Flynn and Herrington, 2015). Moreover, police leadership is addressed as the ‘property’ of the individual leader, with a focus on his or her traits and characteristics, and leadership development is considered to improve the individual leader more than a leader is considered to improve employees in practise (Bratton and Malinowski, 2008; Eterno and Silverman, 2010, Pearson-Goff and Herrington, 2014; Flynn and Herrington, 2015; Haake, Rantatalo and Lindberg, 2015). Transformational leadership is also well-known within the police literature (Dean and Gottschalk, 2013). While the literature explores the leader–follower relationship, it does not account for the unique context of policing and leadership and leadership practise (Cockcroft, 2014). Hence, further studies are needed – especially exploratory qualitative studies – on what constitutes police leadership practises and how police leaders learn and develop. These studies are called for by Mead (2002), Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2013, 2014), Flynn and Herrington (2015) and Haake et al. (2015).

Our aim is therefore to investigate – through focusing on what police leaders do – how police leaders learn through their practises. We find that the Norwegian Police Service (NPS) enhances our knowledge of leadership learning due to (at least) two reasons. First, the NPS has been criticised for their efforts and leadership during the 22

July 2011 terror attacks (Vanebo, Bjørkelo and Aaserud, 2015). Consequently, in 2015, the Norwegian police reform was politically established to ensure standardised knowledge-based police services and to develop the NPS into a learning organisation. The emphasis is on the importance of developing leadership and changing the leadership culture (The Norwegian Police Directorate, 2016). Second, the NPS consists of two opposed perspectives regarding what constitutes good leadership (Johannessen, 2015). One is the bureaucratic practise, relying on an instrumental rationale in which leadership is about governing and administrating through control, predictability and stability. The other is leadership through operative work and understanding groups in practise, with all of the leadership's dynamics and relations (Johannessen, 2015). How Norwegian police leaders change established leadership practises, meet new requirements in reform work and balance the bureaucratic and operative practises is therefore addressed in this paper to understand how police leaders learn to lead.

Twenty-seven police leaders were shadowed and interviewed to explore how they learn; what constitutes their learning practises; the culture, contexts, conditions and structures in which they learn; and what they learn (pertaining to knowing how to perform in a leadership role). Our approach is according to a situated, cultural and practise-based approach to learning, in which learning is embedded, context-dependent, situational and relational in social practises at work, as opposed to (and supplementing) learning as an individual activity (Gherardi, 2006; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Raelin, 2011).

Hence, our approach is about exploring the situation and its context-dependency (what tasks to solve and how) to contribute more knowledge regarding the processes of police leaders, their leadership practises and how leaders learn from experience and practise. Empirically, this paper focuses on how people act in organisational contexts, and the theoretical focus is on understanding the relationship between the actions people take in social practises and the structures of these practises and what constitutes them.

Learning how to lead in policing

The police culture is interleaved and strongly influences the dos and don'ts of leadership practise (Alvesson, 2013; Hatch, 2001), leadership and culture being 'two sides of the same coin' (Schein 2010:3). Hence, police culture provides the goals, values, norms and a common understanding of what constitutes good leadership and good police work. Police culture has gained substantial attention in police literature. Early piece of police culture literature (Skolnick, 1966; Van Maanen, 1973, Fielding 1984) revolved around a single, uniform police culture with a strong identification with the police mission and personality of police. Later, Reuss-Ianni (1993) found that police culture was not uniform; it was divided between street cops and management cops, which represented two distinct police cultures with their own codes of conduct (for street cops, this included how to relate to their leaders). Farkas and Manning (1997) argued for police cultures consisting of three levels: lower-level participants, middle management and top command. Later

contributions go even further, discussing the complexity of police culture being affected by a changing society (Chan, 1997), but this later literature still discusses the importance of commitment, identifying with the police mission and noting that police work is highly valued (Christensen and Crank, 2001; Paoline, 2004; Cockcroft, 2013).

Crank (2017) also found a high score when employees evaluated their nearest leader, while he found the opposite concerning employees' attitudes and perceptions of top management. As police leaders mostly work their way up internally from recruits to top management (Roberts et al. 2016), this might influence police culture and the concept of leaders being '*foremost among equals*' (Karp, Filstad and Glomseth, 2018).

Cockcroft and Beattie (2009) suggested that police culture is challenged by new reforms, governments and systems that put pressure on results and efficiency (2010), which means that police culture has survived the changes of the last 2–3 decades.

Leadership has also been subjected to substantial focus in police research, both conceptual and practical. There has been a focus on leaders' traits and skills, as well as leaders' styles, including the transformational and power-influenced approaches popular during recent decades (Allison and Crego, 2008; Cockcroft, 2013). The fact that leaders commonly embody a normative connotation associated with the certain skills and qualities necessary to exercise leadership has therefore been argued in police literature (Campbell and Kodz, 2011; Moggré, den Boer and Fyfe, 2017), but there is little evidence of the effectiveness of this concept (Neyround, 2011; Schaefer, 2008, 2009). Instead,

police literature reproduces general leadership literature, with too many studies on how leaders must behave and the direct influence they have while neglecting the importance of social interactions and the context-dependency and complexity of leadership (Pearson-Goff and Herrington, 2013; Alvesson, 2017; Pfeffer, 2015). Hence, in accordance with a practise-based approach to police leadership, the separation of leadership from the police context is problematic (Day, 2014; Carroll, 2016; Raelin, 2016).

Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey (2007) argued that modern policing organisations need to recognise the leader as an enabler for learning and innovation rather than as a top-down bureaucratic leader. Herrington and Colvin (2015) therefore championed the need of police leadership with the flexibility of deploying different types of leadership, such as shared leadership, context-dependent leadership and leadership that is not controlled by one superior leader. Their focus on leadership capability has become known as a collective understanding after reviewing police leadership in the UK, the USA (College of Policing, 2015; The President's Taskforce on 21st Century Policing) and Australia, but the question of how police leaders develop leadership capability remains unanswered (Herrington and Colvin, 2015).

Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2013) found leadership in practise through five activities in their literature review of police leadership: problem-solving, creating a shared vision, engendering organisational commitment, caring for subordinates and driving and managing change. We found these activities to be general, but they still serve

as relevant starting points in accounting for leadership practises and in investigating the cultural complexity and embedded 'here and now' of leadership (Edwards, 2013; Mabey, 2012; Sutherland, 2015). Our aim is to gain new knowledge on police leaders' practises to understand how police leaders learn about leadership. Hence, our study is not restricted to the individual leader and his or her leadership style, traits, efficiency, knowledge or quality, as these individual characteristics are argued to being insufficient to understand leadership (Casey and Mitchell, 2007; Fleming, 2008; Meaklin and Sims, 2011; Pearson-Goff and Herrington, 2013).

Police culture needs to be addressed in terms of what constitutes police practises and in terms of being a learning organisation. How police leaders learn and how the organisation learns would be contra-dependent. Flynn and Herrington (2015) found that learning organisations rest on a shared approach to leadership and a common commitment to ongoing organisational learning, arguing that policing needs to move from leadership development to developing as a learning organisation. A few studies have investigated the police as a learning organisation. Van Maanen (1973) found that policemen are socialised to actions and beliefs of accepted and established police practises, with the consequences of established practises not being learned by new recruits entering the police force, thus causing the practices to remain stable. Concerning leaders, Gaston and King (1995) found that police leaders learned from managerial practises other than their own; that is, learning from other police leaders. Mead (2002) argued that learning through

knowledge sharing between police leaders is what really matters for them to understand and improve their own unique practises as leaders. Doornbos, Simons and Denessen (2008) found that Dutch police officers' values of learning at work were related to collegial feedback and work pressure. Schafer (2009) argued that promising learning methods included reflective learning and action learning, as well as learning from peers and leaders. Meaklim and Simms (2011) found that learning from one's peers and from other relevant disciplines helped leaders reflect the reality of their work situation.

Crank and Giacomazzi (2009) studied a sheriff's office as a learning organisation in Idaho, U.S., presenting a comprehensive perspective through narratives in how environmental actors viewed the sheriff's office programs. Janssens, Smet, Onghena and Kyndt's (2017) study of Belgium police inspectors found information, feedback, reflection and coaching to be good predictors for learning. Filstad and Gottschalk (2010, 2011, 2013), Wathne (2012) and Gottschalk, Holgersson and Karlsen (2009) studied the Norwegian police. Norwegian police leaders espoused values that lacked a vision and strategy for learning. Some local practises were well-functioning learning practises, but sharing knowledge across organisational boundaries was scant. Also, the willingness of leadership to question dominant values and norms, and thus promote experimental learning, varied greatly. Instead, the higher the level of leadership, the more the leaders perceived the police to be a learning organisation.

Investigating how police leaders learn leadership means addressing the

complexity of policing, including where the police leadership learns and how the police organisation learns. This needs to be understood as contra-dependent. Learning leadership is about the specific contexts, social practises and relationships, as well as what tasks to solve, all of which affect how leadership needs to be performed. Leadership is also dominated by informal learning and the leaders' tacit understanding of how to perform, where the complexity also is related to formal and informal power and legitimacy (Davies and Easterby-Smith, 1984; McCall, 1998; Cunliffe, 2002; Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003; Armstrong and Mahmud, 2008; Cunliffe, 2009; Kempster, 2009 Antonacopoulou and Bento, 2016). Hence, our choice to investigate leadership, not management, is due to this complexity. We therefore use inductive methods to explore whether the practises of police leaders can be characterised as leadership or management. This is in accordance with Herrington and Colvin's (2015) and Flynn and Herrington's (2015) arguments, which stated that performing leadership is about developing leaders' capabilities to perform typical management tasks through organising, budgeting, staffing and leadership tasks, as well as strategic, analytical and reflective tasks. This is because the complexity of policing calls for integrating the two, not choosing either management or leadership in place of the other.

Methods

We conducted an inductive and exploratory study targeting 27 Norwegian police leaders. They were leaders at level 1 (police directors, leading one out of 12 police districts in Norway), level 2 (leading a police station or being part of a police station's leader teams) and level 3 (following the leadership level after the police director and leader of the police station), representing all police districts in Norway. Thirty-five per cent of the study participants were women, the average age was 45+ years and all participated in short, part-time leadership courses at the Norwegian Police University College and additional leadership courses. The majority held leadership positions that were not directly involved in active operations but had previous experience leading police operations. They all had personnel responsibility for their employees.

The qualitative method used was a day of shadowing (8 a.m.–4 p.m.) each participant in 2016. Each day of shadowing ended with an (1–1 ½ hour) in-depth interview, for which we used an interview guide. The shadowing was open-ended, and we took notes during all the activities we observed without making interpretations. No specific days were chosen, so each day's events occurred by chance. In the interview, the participants could compare a particular day to other days. We transcribed all the interviews and notes from shadowing and imported the data into the qualitative analysis tool, Nvivo. We then analysed our data using reflexive methodology, which is a qualitative method appropriate for leadership research (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2004).

Reflexive methodology involves shifting between different perspectives and levels of analysis for (i) raw data, (ii) interpretations and (iii) context analysis. Our openness in the interpretation of and inductions regarding the possible findings does not necessarily follow a logical progression (Czarniawska, 2007). That is why we relied on open and axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 2008) for the categories we found. Possible categories were compared, considering their relevance and relationships to other categories. Did the category appear frequently in the data? Did it have implications for theories? Could it be used to gain new knowledge regarding how police leaders learn, the characteristics of their practises and the police context, what they learned, how they learned and with whom they learned and in relation to what kinds of activities (i.e. problem solving, decision-making, etc.)? Did it open the possibility of variation in the analysis? We cannot expect a complete understanding of the actions, situations and behaviours related to learning leadership; instead, we aimed to capture various learning processes related to acting and doing by shedding light on police leaders' practises (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011).

Results and Discussions

What constitutes police leadership practises?

The NPS is characterised as bureaucratic, hierarchical, controlled, measured, structured, rigid and order-based, with a strong sense of loyalty to the lines of command, commitment to the police mission and commitment to confidentiality. Simultaneously, police work is

unpredictable, hands-on, action-oriented and based on problem-solving to prevent crimes and prepare for the unknown. The same police education (and law enforcement) provide a common language and common values and norms within uniform and homogenous policing, where leaders are recruited internally from the best among equal police officers (Robert et al., 2016; Karp et al., 2018).

We found that policing is not the only unpredictable element; politics are also difficult to predict (different priorities among political parties and governments deciding upon police reforms and priorities). Bureaucratic decisions can be delayed and budgets are made regarding resources one year at a time, which is described as ‘political jumping’ by police leaders. Political and/or top-managed decisions on police priorities are often being disconnected from their everyday. They refer to these priorities as the ‘deliveries’ they need to make; deliveries do not necessarily make sense to them and often are more about what is politically decided than whether it provides good policing and leadership.

Loyalty is important to police officers, and so is the creation of manoeuvring space to balance top–down decisions and unique individual practises. Mead (2002) claimed that improving one’s own practise is the most important thing for police leaders. We found this to be true in our studies, too, as a question of manoeuvring space to create the balance between bureaucratic practises and operative practises, which includes the creation of a balance between the instrumental rationale of control and stability and dynamic and relational operational leadership (Johannessen, 2015). Managers’ manoeuvring space can

be understood as discretionary and dependent on constraints, such as routines, rules and formal systems, in combination with plausible alternatives involving the absence of those constraints (Hambrick, 2007). Some of participants explained,

You must have the ability to create a manoeuvring space and you have to be a bit strategic and stuff like that as a leader I think. I have to try to take on necessary manoeuvring space for us to succeed with the police reform and make it ours. (I17)

The manoeuvring space is perhaps too large, many find it too small, it is very limited concerning budgets, but everything else is wide open. As a police leader, you have wide authority to change both culture and structure... But it's also in our culture not to.

We are managed quite strongly within some areas, so then I feel that I don't have any other manoeuvring space that to just obey... but even so I find... I have always thought about why police leaders talk about having such a limited manoeuvring space, that is not my experience.

A shared approach to leadership is not evident in our study. Instead normative leadership theories and models are presented in courses, but with little evidence of implementation in police leadership. Bridging the teaching and learning gap of leadership is not addressed. Instead, leadership courses provided self-confidence and legitimacy among leaders, not methods for or a focus on how to develop leadership in practise. This argument is different from Flynn and Herrington's (2015) argument for shared leadership and a common commitment to organisational learning. Previous studies (Filstad and Gottschalk, 2010, 2011, 2013) show a lack of focus on learning in practise, possibilities for reflections and leadership facilitation of learning and knowledge sharing among their

employees (Filstad, 2016). Several of the participants confirmed the lack of tradition regarding learning beyond formal courses and even restricted knowledge limited to scientific knowledge, not knowledge and knowing in practise. As such, the language related to policing does not use learning and knowledge in its vocabulary; instead, police talk a lot about a manoeuvring space.

Police leadership will need rank authority, command and control for direction and protection, but the increasing complexity of crimes calls for different approaches to leadership (Herrington and Colvin, 2015). The NPS leaders do not acknowledge or address the complexity, but they still rely on one or a few recipes for how to perform as leaders. Our informants talked about the police culture with no tradition of change, even though policing has changed, and we found great variances in how they created a manoeuvring space in leadership. Their exposed values lack a vision for learning (Filstad and Gottschalk, 2013) with little willingness to question dominant values and norms (Watne, 2012).

To understand what constitutes the police leadership practises of our participants, the acknowledgement of the characteristics of police culture is important. The uniformity, homogeneity and the socialisation into established values and norms regarding acceptable policing has been challenged and changed using knowledge-based methods of investigation. Also, previous reform and today's reform both challenge police culture (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009). Still, police culture tends to survive (Lofthus, 2010), and

the success of police reform is highly questioned (Moggré et al., 2017). In the NPS, the questioning of values and norms is scant (Watne, 2012), which might be explained by the police organisation still relying on internal recruitment and the legitimacy of leaders as ‘being one of us’ (Crank, 2015). Also, addressing leadership learning beyond providing leadership courses is limited. In fact, the reports after the 22 July terror attack concluded there was a poor leadership culture without ever exploring police culture; they just relied on a small sample of informants. In line with police culture literature, this is problematic. Grounded in a substantial amount of literature arguing that police culture is interleaved with how leadership is learned in the context of practises, this concept provides the barriers and opportunities for leadership, its codes of conduct, its mission, its identification and its legitimacy regarding good leaders and leadership (i.e. Alvesson, 2013; Farkas and Manning, 1997; Chan, 1997; Cockroft, 2013).

How do police leaders learn?

The participants refer to ‘learning by doing’ and the need for experience as leaders to perform well as leaders and to be safe when developing their own unique way leading.

To set the scene on how they learn, we start with two stories from our time shadowing:

“John” goes on his morning ‘parole’, saying hi to people and stopping to talk with a few of them. He observes and listens without interfering. Afterwards, he makes small talk with a few of them, and upon going back to the office, he stops for short visits to several offices and obtains status updates on both more detailed activities and bigger projects.

Back at John's office, the top leaders have a meeting, which is a combination of an orientation and an opportunity to share frustrations while finding solutions to challenging work regarding how to meet the budget. The meeting has an informal tone, and John listens and gives advice, as all members do, but everyone is also clear about what John thinks. Afterwards, he checks his mail, makes a phone call, complains about too much mail and goes to talk with one of the other leaders. He does that several times instead of using the phone to communicate. Back at his office, the door is open, and his employees often interrupt his work to ask questions and discuss their work with him. He mostly guides them rather than telling them what to do, and he listens and asks questions. He expresses a shared frustration, but he explains that his frustrations should only be shared among the leaders, not the staff. He does not want the staff to be demotivated.

"Sarah" is interrupted by a phone call and is obviously stressed by having to address this case again, as it involves several actors, including the media. She explains that this is the police's responsibility, and they have to figure this out among themselves. However, in the media, the police are presented as the "bad guys". She makes several phone calls and sends an email, and it takes some time before she is connected with the right person. Meanwhile, she receives a call from reception telling her that a group of people are here to meet her, though they do not have an appointment. She says she is busy, which she is, and attends a planned meeting. During the meeting, she checks her phone constantly and is distracted. Afterwards, she talks to her leader and asks for his advice on what to do, knowing that the people in reception are still waiting.

These stories are representative of our data. Police leaders are hands-on, action-driven, relationally focused and involved. The time they spend 'walking around' is necessary to create trust by being visible as good role models, meeting the expectations of superiors of the staff and, not least of all, meeting their own expectations. It is often about the

legitimacy of knowing and understanding what is going on. Sarah had to deal with pressurised matters outside of her control, such as when the public influenced how she performed in the meeting with her staff.

It is through success and failure and trial and error that police leaders learn leadership. As a result of previous experience, police leaders are more confident about how to perform – which fights to become involved with and which to avoid – allowing them to be more focused on challenges related to relational and personal assignments rather than just focusing on operational work while being surer of themselves as leaders, and so on. Our contribution is, therefore, in performing leadership roles and in describing how police leaders learn and what they learn. John and Sarah’s stories are followed up with our interview questions.

We found that learning how to perform as leaders, the ‘doing’ of leadership, has much to do with police leaders’ understanding of learning and knowing, which again affects police leaders’ mastery and perceived expectations, social and cultural relationships with employees and peers and role modelling and performance as leaders.

Learning

Learning through experience in social practises at work is not planned for, and there is little evidence or reflection about how experiences result in developing people’s role as leaders. Some of the participants explained,

You know, I've learnt from others – through others and through being managed by others... having skilled managers who I've looked up to, who I've learnt from, and I've had a formal education too... so you learn a little by yourself, a little from each other and a little from colleagues.

Getting to the point where I am today as a manager has involved gaining experience, and it's been experience-based. It's a matter of trial and error. It's about having confidence in your role. It's about feeling more secure.

While I've learnt through experiential learning and all that – that's not so well expressed – you know, you learn from all the things you've done.

We found that leaders being available to their employees and informally bonding with peers and fellow leaders is important to get an overview of how to consequently perform as leaders. The best practises of police leaders include open office doors, attending employee meetings to show their support, giving their employees responsibilities for decisions and ownership of the solutions, protecting and motivating them for reform work and focusing on their employees' best interests. Leaders claim they are safer in their roles due to extensive experience in leadership. We found the leaders to be quite confident, experienced and calm. We also found a number of examples of humour, informal relationships and jokes, as well as persistence, clarity and decision-making in collaboration with employees. Using humour, for instance, provides opportunities for reflections that could be more challenging without the humour; thus, humour provides an important atmosphere for informal learning through knowledge sharing. Learning, especially learning from peers and colleagues, is not facilitated. On the contrary, several of the police leaders expressed concerns about not being good at learning from each other

or even being able to discuss daily practises. Instead, they find some time to reflect on their own leadership practises by participating in leadership courses or other facilitated learning activities outside their leadership context.

Courses

Police leaders find that courses provide them the appropriate language, enable them to understand the processes better and, last but not least, raise their awareness of their leadership roles. Some of them explained,

I know the theory...that has given me some confidence. However, I haven't picked up the books afterwards. I have read the literature and taken my exams.

To use my education has sometimes been quite difficult. Have I really learned anything? This is often not apparent, even though you know you have more baggage.

How I lead today is based on formal leadership education, but for the most part, it's experience-based and comes from learning from other leaders.

Knowing

Most of our informants had been taught leadership. The leadership courses, they argue, provided them legitimacy, acknowledgement, solidity, safety and self-confidence in their leadership roles. Often, qualifying for leadership roles is a result of taking courses to move up to the next leadership level. Knowledge, knowing and competence are terms seldom used, and requirements from the Police Directorate of knowledge-based policing and leadership does not address their meanings. Two of participants explained,

I've thought about... how I sit together with lots of people working in the police service for many years with similar mind sets, and we don't participate in discussions where different views are expressed. I think that actually would have been better for the police service.

So, if I can say something else – then I've seen here that when people gain competence, it leads to good developments. However, it's no use if only a couple of people understand it; it must be a group of people who suddenly feel a sense of belonging in the way they speak, such as understanding concepts, ... and then suddenly realizing that what we were discussing at that meeting was right.

These statements in relation to knowledge are more about policing and similar backgrounds among staff than about leadership in particular when police leaders refer to practise. Knowledge-based leadership is perceived to be about leadership theories provided in leadership courses. Attending courses offers the opportunity to reflect on and discuss individual leadership roles in comparison with other leaders in the police force. Police leaders' understanding of knowledge-based leadership is problematic. First, this is because acknowledging how leaders learn in practise is necessary to ensure that leadership development is initiated in the reform culture, which is crucial when it comes to implementing reforms. Second, police reform establishes leadership courses as the main learning activity to ensure the goals of the reform are met because leadership courses teach leaders, but the obtained knowledge needs to be applied in practise to ensure learning is achieved (Cunliffe and Wilson, 2017; Filstad, 2016). Hence, the separation from practise and what constitutes practise therefore establishes how police culture remains unsolved. Instead, reflection as a joint inquiry, and an integrated process of thinking-in-action is needed to ensure learning and knowing in practise to reduce the

teaching and learning gap in leadership (Dewey, 1938; Elkjaer, 2004; Boud, Cressey and Docherty, 2006).

Mastery

Police leaders' mastery of leadership is about setting priorities, being hands-on, meeting system expectations and those of employees and obtaining a feeling of mastery in dilemmas between reform work and everyday practises, conflicting goals, ethics and achievements. Some police leaders explained,

When there are real problems with personnel, conflicts, critical cases...that really involve me as a person and as a leader... those affects costs me the most.

There are many dilemmas. For instance, prioritizing among different needs. One duty is the core police assignments, but we also have other obligations, which are challenging due to resources.

Often it is challenging to find the boundaries between our department and other districts, who is responsible for what, and it is about the integrity of my employees, which others don't necessarily understand.

We find that their mastery is situated and dependent upon the cultural practises in which they perform, which influences their perceptions and understanding of how to perform their unique leadership. The results of culture studies of leaders adjusting to the social and cultural reality in which they perform were therefore confirmed in our study (Alvesson, 2013 and Schein, 2010).

Social relations and role modelling

On all three leadership levels, engaging in small talk, getting to know employees, having good dialogues and being informal seem to form a pattern. So does the importance of being role models through guiding and taking the lead with regards to attitudes, values and behaviours. Some participants explained,

I enjoy it very much when people come in all excited about solving a task, to be part of that satisfaction, that's fantastic. Therefore, I'm often present and talk with those who have been out on operations.

My employees have the most important role. I try to facilitate, so they can do the best job possible. I support them and guide them, so they are engaged in their work. I'm very proud of them and want them to succeed.

We shouldn't just do things. We do things because it is professionally well justified... so I think it's a little about being a good role model... everything from dressing properly, to being nice... that establishes a culture, it shows respect.

Police leaders also see themselves as role models in relation to the public. The police are visible – they are uniformed – and there seems to be pride associated with the uniform and a strong sense of 'us' feeling, as well as police looking out for each other and 'standing together' when the 'storm' comes, according to the literature that describes police cultures with strong commitment, collectivism and identification with the police mission (Christensen and Crank, 2001; Paoline, 2004 and Cockcroft, 2013).

Conclusion

We have investigated how Norwegian police leaders learn and what constitutes their leadership practises, contributing to the literature on what police leaders do. We found a practise-based approach to be fruitful, as it enables us to explore learning as situated, relational- and context-dependent, which matches the police leaders' understanding of learning as doing and enables us to go more into depth regarding what 'doing' actually means. Consequently, we call for a shift from teaching leadership to learning leadership through practise through the NPS acknowledging the dangers of relying on teaching only in the new reform. We thus recommend learning facilitated by networks and communities of practise to ensure learning from colleagues and peers, which will include informal and tacit learning; the provision of role models; learning arenas for reflecting on practises, observations, common practises and evaluations; **and** teaching by providing education, courses, and seminars. This shift from teaching to learning in practise will be crucial for developing a learning organisation that acknowledges a shared understanding of what constitutes leadership in social, cultural and contextual practises for learning and knowledge sharing, with a continuing focus on organisational learning by addressing leadership learning and organisational learning as contra-dependent (Flynn and Herrington, 2015). Learning leadership through practise creates countless learning and reflection opportunities, such as when taking on challenging job assignments, instead of many learning opportunities being missed (Howard and Wellins, 2008; Filstad, 2016).

Policing is simultaneously bureaucratic, hierarchical and system-based, but policing is also unpredictable, hands-on, action-oriented and problem-solving. We find that the police leaders' learning is about creating a manoeuvring space for themselves and their leaders to ensure balance between the two. But still, police culture represents the context of leadership and strongly influences leaders' mastery of their job, their ability to meet expectations and solve dilemmas and their efforts at prioritisation. Hence, the police leaders do not change police culture, but their manoeuvring of space might influence the culture in their own practise. Changing the leadership culture calls for police leaders' ability and proactivity, as well as the possibility of and encouragement to create their own manoeuvring space, as the creation of a manoeuvring space is commonly used by the police leaders and could easily be connected to leadership learning in practise.

Learning leadership as a result of experiences in practise requires reflection, as experiences do not necessarily lead to any forms of change or development. With limited possibilities for reflection, 'bad' leadership might develop. The police leaders' possibilities for reflecting alone or with peers and employees is therefore problematic, especially when facing the complexity of new challenges concerning terrorist threats, crimes and immigration. The variations between our participants considering reflections as part of their learning of leadership is due to, at least beyond the possibilities for reflection in formal courses, their informal relations and network, to enhance their own

knowledge on leadership and policing. We also would argue that it is due to their acknowledgement of possibilities for reflections, which is important for their leadership.

How police leaders learn is linked to what they learn. If we try to find the characteristics of their leadership, we learn that their leadership is influenced by combining expectations from 'the system' and their practises with fellow leaders and employees. They combine typical management (organising, budgeting, staffing) with a substantial focus on the importance of motivating, communicating and being available with leadership to be strategic in creating their own manoeuvring space. Leaders must also be a bit analytical to learn from experience, such as regarding personal tasks, but where the potential is in formalised reflections.

Limitations and call for future studies

There were several limitations to our study. First, we relied on Norwegian police leaders and how they learn, in which we needed to be careful in generalising how police leaders outside Norway learn. However, we found that the NPS is influenced by how policing is organised internationally, often using other Nordic or European countries to compare and discuss new models and reforms. We also suggest that the lack of international police literature about how police leaders learn in practise makes our work relevant internationally. One might argue that how police leaders learn is similar, which is confirmed in the organisational learning literature, but more studies beyond the

Norwegian context of policing are needed to account for what they learn, as what they learn will account for policing being influenced by the history, language and challenges of a particular country. Also, more studies accounting for the global and cultural differences, as well as comparisons and similarities, will provide important knowledge in relation to crimes internationally. Our study is also limited to understanding how Norwegian police leaders learn. All participants attended two leadership courses arranged at the Norwegian Police University College (one year, part time), whereas the NPS had leaders without formal leadership education. How police leaders learn without being influenced by formal leadership courses is therefore not accounted for. Additionally, shadowing and interviewing for only one day and only following 27 police leaders made it challenging to analyse and grasp the whole story, even though we have been careful in our analysis. The same needs to be accounted for, as we only observed some of the employees without interviewing them. New research will also provide us the necessary insight to grasp more variations between districts, typical assignments according to districts and divisions and differences, such as gender and age. Our contributions, therefore, rest on these limitations in our contribution to how Norwegian police leaders learn to lead.

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