

Addressing the baseline or the frontline?

The multiform character of credible police performance

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Introduction

Although crime rates have been falling for a number of years now, recent Dutch studies such as the annual *Integrated Safety Monitor*¹ show that people do not feel safer and have not become more satisfied with police performance². Naturally, this raises the question of what factors affect feelings Dutch citizens have about safety. Moreover, it also raises the question of what makes police performance credible. In this paper we focus on factors that influence the credibility of police performance.

We argue that the credibility of police performance is intimately tied to the specific context in which a performance is assessed. In a vertically-oriented political-administrative context, credibility is highly dependent on ostensibly objective indicators and quantifiable results. In a vertical context, credibility is likely to be assessed, therefore, through tangible performance measurements. By contrast, in day-to-day frontline operations³, the credibility of police performance is strongly affected by a relational dynamic in the interactions between police and parties in their environment. In this more horizontally oriented context, credibility is intimately tied to an ability to empathize with the — sometimes elusive — situational, symbolic, professional and institutional facets of the interaction with others. This horizontal context has become ever more important because media, social groups and ordinary citizens play an increasingly important role in forms of public scrutiny that fall outside the formal political-administrative realm.

The vertical and horizontal contexts differ substantially in the way performance is assessed. Moreover, often they represent incongruent or even contradictory

¹ *Integrale veiligheidsmonitor* in Dutch, published by the Central Bureau for Statistics Netherlands, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and the Ministry of Justice

² Central Bureau for Statistics (2009) *Integrated Safety Monitor 2008*

³ (e.g. Green, 1997; Schellenberg, 2000; Lamb et al., 2002; Hartman and Tops, 2005, 2007)

performance requirements. Both are realities the police has to cope with and both seem to be fueled by discomfort about performance in the public sector and a general decline of trust in public institutions – as seen in many countries (Hay, 2007; Stoker, 2006). As stated, earlier Dutch views on the performance of the police force are not completely favourable (e.g. Maas, 2002). Something that seems at least partly related to the role of the media as a source of scrutiny and critique, socializing a critical audience (Maas, 2002: 631/632). Another more positive driver for performance assessment has been the move toward more ‘customer’-oriented services in the Netherlands, inspired by New Public Management approaches to public service delivery (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2001). Many public organizations, such as municipalities but also police forces, have ‘toppled’ their organizations to accommodate the logic of ‘customers’ instead of the compartmentalized logic of public organizations (Breeman et al., 2008). With increased attention on customer satisfaction often comes an increased desire to measure performance.

While the vertical reality of baseline performance measurement has received substantial attention in the literature, the requirements that flow from the horizontal reality of frontline interactions seem to have received less attention. First, the main contribution of this paper lies in the empirically based insight it tries to offer in the performance requirements that flow from frontline interactions. Four types of facets will be distinguished. Secondly, we argue that an overload of different and often competing accountability claims lurks. The consequence is that keeping up a credible performance can easily become a troublesome, if not ill-fated, affair when both baseline and frontline requirements are attempted to be met simultaneously. Finally, we argue that, rather than simply running to meet all these differing external requirements, the overall credibility of police performance might be better served with an attempt to balance the mounting pressure from these requirements with an unambiguous internal conception that can be communicated about what ‘exemplary police work’ entails. If the police, as an institution, can envisage and communicate a coherent sense of professional conduct and can develop a clear sense of professional pride, the external pressures might be somewhat mitigated.

1.1 Structure of this contribution

This paper is structured as follows: section two describes and characterizes the vertical political-administrative context in which police performance is formally assessed. Sections three and four are then devoted to the more elusive horizontal context in which performance is assessed in everyday situations. In section five we compare and measure the differences between both contexts and try to assess their combined impact on the overall credibility of police performance. Section six concludes with some reflections on the ways in which the ‘external

requirements to perform' might be balanced with a clear and communicable sense of professional pride.

1.2. Background of this contribution and methodology

This paper largely results from a study into the everyday interactions and communications of two Dutch police forces with various groups of actors in their immediate environment⁴. The study in question was not specifically carried out to assess the performance of these forces, but intended to compare styles of communication the two police forces tended to draw on in interactions with their environment. However, the data gathered offers us insight into the multi-faceted way in which police performance is assessed in everyday situations.

The data presented here is based on 40 qualitative, open-ended interviews with people who had been in contact with the police in the previous 12 months. In particular, we interviewed local shopkeepers, other professionals or representatives of other organizations and ordinary citizens. The interview data were gathered in several towns and cities within the two police regions under study. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. In this contribution, numerous quotes by respondents have been included in section four — the empirical core of the paper — to illustrate and highlight factors that affect the credibility of police performance in day-to-day frontline interactions. From the empirical material, we subsequently conceptualized key facets within the relational dynamic between police and our respondents that affect the way in which the credibility of police performance is assessed. This was done by systematically analyzing the transcribed interviews with the help of qualitative data analysis software. We ultimately identified at least four types of facets within this relational dynamic which we labeled: situational, symbolic, institutional and professional. All are explored in detail in section three.

2.0 Performance assessment in a vertical political-administrative context

The Dutch police is organized into 25 regional police forces and one force (KLPD) that provides specialist services nationwide. The regional forces are autonomous and the national force only comes into play when supra-regional tasks are at hand. Each regional Dutch police force has a chief constable who is in charge of the day-to-day running of the force. When it comes to performance assessment, three specific concepts, imbedded in law, stand out in the Dutch police field: authority, administrative management and governance. In a legal sense, they make up the mechanisms by which the police is held accountable for its actions. The forums related to each concept are the principle places where police performance is formally assessed.

⁴ The results of the research for this contribution have been condensed and made anonymous

2.1 Authority

Authority refers to the power to make decisions about the concrete actions of the police: who gives the police specific instructions about the daily operations and who tells them what they should or should not do (see also Suyver, 1994; Huberts, 2004). In the Netherlands, there is a form of authority dualism. The police thus has two 'bosses': first is the mayor when it comes to maintaining public order; second is the public prosecutor when it comes to enforcing the law. The mayor renders account to the City Council for his use of authority over the police. The prosecutor does so indirectly through the Minister of Justice to parliament. Obviously, the concrete daily activities of the police are strongly influenced by the number of available police and the means by which or through which they can do their work. These types of decisions do not fall under the competent authority of either the mayor or the prosecutor, but are part of the administrative management of the police.

2.2 Administrative management

The administrative management of the police is assigned to a so-called police administrator in each police region. This function is fulfilled by the mayor of the largest or most central municipality in a police region. The police administrator — in agreement with the public prosecutor — presides over the organization and its formation, budget, annual accounts and annual report for the regional police force. This makes policymaking and the operational direction of a police region highly dependent on administrative management. From a distance, the Minister of Home Affairs also plays role. For example, the minister is responsible for working conditions and the formulation of accounting and budgeting practices.

2.3 Governance

Governance, finally, relates to being held accountable over the administrative management function. The police administrator renders account over his role to the regional college, formed by all the mayors within a police region, and the chief public prosecutor.

2.4 Complexity and layeredness of the political-administrative context

Together, the concepts of authority, administrative management and governance form a relatively complex and layered system of related forums in which police performance is assessed. This complexity and layering basically originates in different and sometimes contradictory rationales to which the police, as an organization, needs to conform. The duality in authority requires the police to

account for its actions along two different avenues: the mayor and the public prosecutor. At the same time an economic logic forces movement towards an organizational scale for the police that goes beyond most municipal territories.

Administrative management is therefore arranged regionally, and so is the associated accountability. This layered accountability structure arose primarily with the 1993 Police Act. Before that time, the police was *de facto* organized at the municipal level. Larger towns had municipal police forces. National police operated in smaller municipalities. Only with the review of the police system in 1993 did administrative management at the regional level become a necessity. Several authors and institutions see the regionalization of the police system as a difficultly arrived at compromise between the requirements of different scales (e.g. WRR, 1995; de Ridder, 1999).

2.5 Troubles with authority, administrative management and governance

Two problems arise regarding the manner in which authority, administrative management and governance are arranged. First, several authors identify a gap in the current police system with regard to democratic control over the police (see also Rosenthal et al., 1998; Gunther Moor et al., 1998; de Ridder, 1999; Huberts, 2004). With regionalization, exercising democratic control came under pressure. In the sphere of administrative management and governance, the police is ultimately accountable to a forum of officials - the regional college - that lacks democratic legitimacy. The mayors and public prosecutors that make up the regional college are not elected in the Netherlands. The influence of the city council and parliament in the sphere of authority are indirect and limited in nature. Second, the actual accountability practice differs significantly from the formal rules. One reason for this can be found in the close links between authority and management. In practice, both are very much related. Management decisions can seriously affect the capacity and commitment capabilities of the police. Both in the sphere of authority and administrative management, the police administrator has a greater influence than should be expected on the basis of the formal rules. This also holds for the chief constable, who derives his or her influence from his or her professional expertise and position of comprehensive information (see e.g. WRR, 1995). Only the chief constable knows his or her police force through and through. The role of the regional college, in turn, is limited in practice (AR, 2003). It might be the formal, but is not the actual, locus of accountability for implemented or to-be-implemented policy.

2.6 Nature of performance assessment in the political-administrative context

Authority, administrative management, governance and the related forums make up the formal political-administrative context in which police performance is assessed. In a narrow sense, this assessment is anchored in a legal framework that defines what the police can or cannot do. In a broader sense, general principles of 'good governance' also matter, such as the requirements of propriety, integrity, transparency and openness. One can also think of the extent to which actions are embedded in a system of checks and balances that includes the presence of certain (self)reflective or (self)corrective powers.

Overall and in practice, what is striking is a very strong result orientation in the vertical arrangements discussed here: measurable results, to be more specific. Crime figures, security monitors and quantifiable performance targets related to cabinet priorities play a major role in these arrangements. Performance agreements between the minister and police administrators have been a part of the political-administrative performance assessment repertoire for a long time and serve as important incentives for a result-oriented assessment process. Thus, the government wants a 25 percent crime reduction in the period 2008-2011 compared to the 2002 level. This focus on results has effects deep within the police organization.

The earlier observation that policing has a strong frontline character must be balanced with the observation that administrative work and 'red tape' are also important parts of daily reality (see e.g. van den Brink, 2006); a reality which is strongly fed by the desire to 'know by measuring'. Of course, this is part of a trend that is widespread in public administration.

The stereotype of the bureaucratic hierarchy and its bureaucratic culture of public organizations rarely reflects the reality of contemporary public administration. Thus, Noordegraaf (2000) and 't Hart et al. (2001) write of a widespread culture of public management and public managers in contrast with the old bureaucratic ways. Being target oriented and conducting performance measuring are a few specific concepts that fit this picture. In public administration a clear shift to a business-minded review of administrative actions has been noticeable since the nineteen seventies. Business-like management has led to changing relationships between executive professionals, politicians and administrators. Thus, implementation and policy were separated both in theory and in practice. At the same time, daily operations were increasingly checked and subjected to monitors of all kinds. Systematic performance assessment became a widespread phenomenon in which credibility was closely intertwined with the question of whether actions lead to the desired effects. This trend is also clearly visible in the police field. Cachet and Sluis write: "Major changes have occurred in the way police and the judiciary do their job. Their style of work no longer resembles the paternalistic, if not authoritarian and often repressive

manner of enforcement of the early sixties. Compare the current 'neighborhood manager' with the 'village bobby' of before (2003: 273). The functioning of the police is now subject to constant pressure to perform, to deliver tangible output and contribute to specific, defined social outcomes.

2.7 Schematics of performance assessment in the vertical context

The vertical accountability dimension is sketched schematically in Figure 1 below. Authority, administrative management and governance are all strongly related to questions about the productivity and effectiveness of the police, both in a strict (legal) and a broader sense.

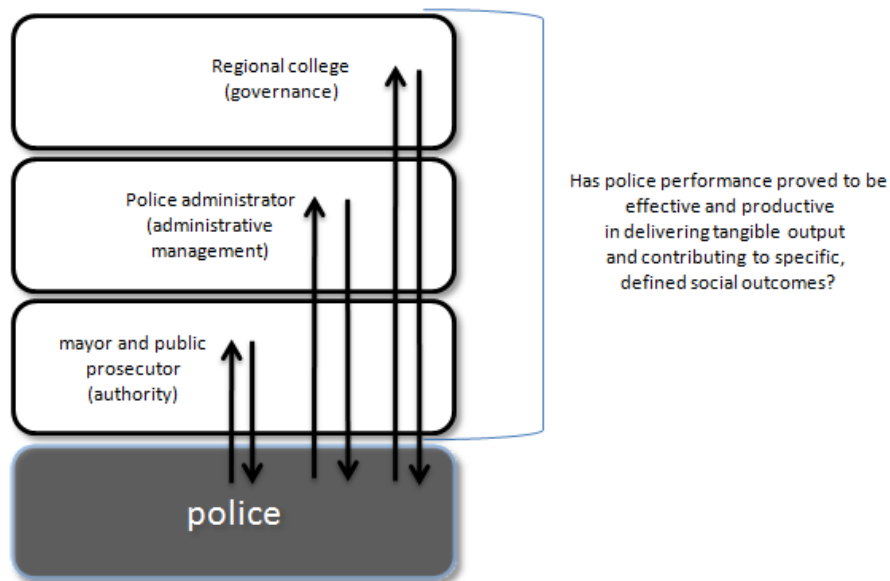


Figure 1: Assessing performance in the vertical political-administrative context

There is no doubt that a focus on measurable performance is relevant to determine whether police performance can be deemed credible. Actual outcomes are an important measure in the political-administrative context because, for example, they help determine whether predetermined targets have been achieved. A baseline measurement basically answers the question of whether the police have been effective and whether they have shown themselves to be productive and have done what was agreed upon. Performance assessment in this context certainly has an instrumental character. The question, however, arises: to what extent is a credible performance in everyday frontline situations determined by this focus on measurability and to what extent other facets play a role?

3.0 Performance assessment in a horizontal frontline context

Assessing performance seems much more diffuse and multiform in a horizontal context than in the political-administrative context. There are several reasons for this. For instance, 'voicing' citizens (see also Hirschman, 1970) view themselves more and more as stakeholders. This is a broad, autonomous social development. Citizens are, however, also seduced to do so more and more by different regional and national Dutch police initiatives such as Burgernet (Citizenet), SMS alert (text-alert) or *hoeveiligismijnwijk.nl* (howsafeismyneighborhood.nl). Not surprisingly, concerned citizens tend to have high expectations in their assessment of police performance. The interdependence and complexity of many social issues also makes permanent negotiation and coordination with other professionals necessary. Thus, van Duivenboden writes that: "... the autonomous impact of individual governmental organizations on the preparation, adoption, implementation and evaluation of policy is ever lower, because the dependence on other organizations has grown" (2004: 13). The police have to deal with other professionals who have their own ways of looking at the world and their own evaluative frameworks.

The actions of the police are also under constant scrutiny by the media. Any failure of public institutions is eagerly exposed in modern media technology. 't Hart (2001) writes of an inquisition democracy. Ellemers (2001), in turn, notes that calamities are increasingly seen as a product of administrative failure before anything else. Often, this leads to looking back and searching for causes, responsibility, and, if possible, scapegoats. Somewhat paradoxically, this makes actions more personal and focuses on the actions of individual officials.

In this context, the rational-legal authority with which the police is normally endowed is no longer obvious. Credibility of actions in any interaction with the public has to be attained and sometimes fought for anew at each incident and every calamity. Not only the media play an important role in this. Ordinary citizens with access to the Internet and simple camera phones also have the opportunity to disseminate the actions of the police to a wide public. These citizens do not hesitate to make their opinions on those actions known loud and clear. They put it on the Web, for example, through *Geenstijl.nl* ("nostyle.nl", a website friendly to critical amateur journalism and blogging) or YouTube. The landscape in which police, media, citizens, government and other stakeholders meet each other has changed dramatically in a relatively short time because of these and other developments. In this modern landscape, new challenges for the police arise in their ability to keep up a credible performance.

3.2 *New challenges in the context of horizontal performance assessment*

The ability to act credibly against such a diffuse background is becoming increasingly important. Partly due to the developments sketched above, a credible performance seems highly connected to the visible demeanor and

attitudes of police officers in everyday work. In this sense, work may actually be characterized as a 'stage performance' (see also Goffman, 1959) that is continually assessed. Police officers are continuously acting in the face of a mixed public on an imaginary stage. The question is what "repertoire", in addition to delivering measurable results in a diffuse everyday context, contributes to appealing, convincing and credible actions. There is no clear and universally valid answer to this question. Each situation is different; each performance has its own dynamic. The performance has as it were, at each instance, a specific audience and its own unique decor. What our research shows, however, is that any action can be seen as an interaction with an audience in which, depending on the nature of the interaction, at least four different facets can affect the credibility of police performance.

4.0 Accounts of (non)credible performances on the frontline

This section forms the empirical heart of this paper. We have selected excerpts from the accounts our respondents gave us about their contact with the police. We have chosen the quotes used here deliberately, as parts of the accounts in which interactions with the police can be typified as precarious. And, they are precarious in multiple ways: sometimes uncertain and uncomfortable, difficult or hard, always delicate. Precarious because, in all of these accounts, a certain tension in the interactions with the police can be felt from which lessons can be learned. In other words, these are accounts in which the credibility of police performance was at stake. The accounts were recorded through the eyes of our interlocutors. Objective truth in the accounts, however, was not the goal. The goal was to generate insight into facets of the communicative interactions between the police and other parties in their environment and to find out what makes police performance credible or not. The accounts reflect everyday actions of the police on the streets, and in neighborhoods, villages and the city. Some accounts are emotionally charged. Other accounts disclose a more distanced stance in the assessment of police performance. We now share parts of some of these accounts.

4.1 Situational facets of a credible performance

A interviewee told us the following: "Yes, I had called that Saturday afternoon. It had smelled strange for ages. I really had the idea that hemp was being grown. The officer that took my call said they would drop by sometime in the near future. The next day, Sunday morning at a quarter past eight, somebody was ringing at our door. We were still in bed. When I opened the door there were two police officers, someone from the utility company and someone from the municipality at the door. If they could come in to check it out. Well hello! You do not first call at my place but straight away at the neighbors' place, of whom I thought were causing it! Or otherwise first send some inconspicuous person from

the municipality, not uniforms. Once they arrived at our floor they indeed noted a strong smell of weed in the air. Then they went on to ring at all the neighbors' doors because it was not immediately clear where it could come from. The whole street was in a fuss. And they added to everyone: 'Yes, the residents at number such and such suffer from a strong weed smell, may we come in?' Not everyone opened up. They left without an answer. I was really afraid for a while after that. Anyone could have assumed that I was the one that had called them." This quote clearly shows a tension between decisive action on the one hand, and an understanding for the more subtle, social consequences of that performance on the other. Although the police, in cooperation with other parties, went on to act on the call in an energetic and determined fashion, the actual action did not take into account the possible consequences to the relationship between the caller and his neighbors of such a highly visible intervention.

Another contact told us the following: *"I could not believe it. I called the police station some days after [the incident]. That's when I heard that they had released the men who broke into my home and had threatened me and my boyfriend, [and they did that] the morning after the incident. The morning after! They had not bothered to let us know. I heard there was no basis for further detention since they had not stolen anything and we were not physically harmed. O.K., but my god, what if they had come back...is it so hard to understand that I might have wanted to know that they were out on the street again that quickly?"* In this excerpt, the police seem to have foregone informing the victims of what action was taken and why. Only after our respondent had called the police herself did she find out.

Still another contact told us about a street where some young troublemakers had their hangout-place: *"You have no idea what it means if you do not feel safe on your own street. My mother is in her eighties and has difficulty walking. She has to pass that place to get to her house and every time they call something she is scared. I felt abandoned. I became extremely angry at the police station, but there, they did not seem not to understand why I was angry at them. I was only told that they could not send someone along all the time and that there was no legal basis for further action. Nobody said 'Oh! That is so unfortunate for your mother, we understand"*. In this excerpt, the police officers apparently wanted to explain why the police acts in the way they do: to what framework actions are bound, and that it cannot be expected that the police comes immediately if there is no acute threat. Much less attention seems to have gone to the personal tragedy of this man and his mother: the helplessness and frustration which were expressed as anger. Although the substantive, rational reaction of the police officers could have been very correct, in the eyes of our interviewee the response was inadequate.

4.2 *Reflections on the situational facets of a credible performance*

These and other stories from our research show that people's judgments about their experiences with the police - and thus a credible performance - were more than once related to a personal assessment of the police officers in the situations in question. The attitude and behavior of police officers are sometimes of great importance. These are situations in which actions are not only assessed on the basis of hard facts, legalities and factual operations, but also on the basis of empathy: Did the action feel right and instill confidence? Was the situation empathized with and assessed in a fitting way? Did it take into account the sometimes elusive requirements arising from the specific context in which the action took place? Effectiveness is sometimes less important than appropriateness. An action is often only credible if it fits a particular situation. An eye on the situational context in which an action takes place is, therefore, of great importance.

Every interaction has its own dynamics; one that is sometimes difficult to capture via preconceived rules or scripts. To be credible, it is often important that the interaction be evaluated based on the particular situation and its 'requirements of the moment'. It is important to estimate the posture and intonation that are most appropriate in such a situation. In the above quoted accounts, the credibility of the action was determined by the manner in which a balance was found in a tension between the situational or social 'requirements of the moment' and other types of requirements for the work performed. One example is obtaining a certain result or enforcing the rules. The accounts reflect not so much a logic of 'appropriateness as rule-bound behavior' but are typical examples of policing on the frontline as described by Green (1997), Schellenberg (2000), Lamb et al. (2002) or Hartman and Tops (2005 and 2007). Situations where, besides a focus on goal achievement, a practical attitude and handling of human needs are important. Situations, also, where the personal professionalism of police officers can be of great influence.

4.3 *Professional facets of a credible performance*

In addition to accounts in which requirements of the moment and personal demeanor played a key role in the credibility of actions, other types of accounts highlighted different facets of a credible performance. These were accounts in which the interaction between different professionals stood central, such as the interaction between police and journalists. A journalist told us the following: *"There was a sick old man with a complaint about the police. It was a remarkable and rare event and if it was true, my editor wanted to get it in the newspaper quickly. Before I could report on it, however, I had to call the police to hear what their story was. The man could be a whiner. I wanted to know what kind of man it was. Could they tell me something about him? It was just before the weekend and the Public Relations Department [said they] could not find it out*

before Monday. Understandable. After the weekend I was immediately called [by the PR Dept.]. I was told that the police would go on to talk with this man and, prior to that, they could give me no comment. For me as a journalist, this means that more days pass, whilst I was under pressure to publish. The information officer called me back later that week. Almost a week had passed after my contact with this man. They had talked to him.. It was a good talk according to the police and they had no further comment. Did I just have to wait a week for that? If they did not want to say anything, they did not have to let me wait for this all this while, right? Just to be sure I called that man again. The police had indeed visited, but according to him, the issue was not resolved. I went on to publish. Then the police called; they were not happy with the story and held me personally responsible for it. Now they revealed, suddenly, that the man had done all sorts of things. In my eyes, things that were not directly relevant to his complaint, but it threw a different light on the case. It did affect the power of his story. If I had known, I would not have published. Why did you not tell this before, I asked? All this time, I just wanted to know what kind of man this was. 'Yes, they said, then you would have immediately published it' Old news is no news. The pressure to find events worthy to publish is high for journalists. But what is newsworthy? The quote above seems to shed some light on this topic. First of all, there was, at least in the eyes of the journalist and his editor, an interesting incident: an event outside the category of everyday events and the normal and as such had attention value. Something that would stand out and could attract readers' attention. Secondly, the quote above shows an incident in which an individual felt misunderstood in his complaint. He still felt misunderstood after repeated interactions with the police. That this was a complaint against the police is obviously salient. The police is a special kind of government organization. The police should enforce the law, and a complaint about the performance of the law enforcer itself gives the story extra meaning. Thirdly, the complainant was an elderly sick man, which made the news value of the incident even more acute because it made the story more shocking, or at least made it easier for the public to empathize with. That the police initially released few details in its communication could have unintentionally strengthened the image and the framing of this incident for the journalist as a contrast between a powerless individual and a nonresponsive government.

That the man later turned out not to be of impeccable behavior appeared to damage the personal credibility of the man and made the incident less newsworthy in the eyes of the journalist, perhaps because this fit less within the implicit framing of the incident. The police appeared to have had little insight into the elements that made the incident newsworthy and the pressure to which the journalist was exposed to publish quickly. Precisely the lack of a speedy reply increased the journalist's resentment over an incident in which the police themselves were in the spotlight. That the news could have an influence on the

public's perception of the police seems to have been a reason for the journalist to ask them several times for explanations and comment. The journalist said that in his or her eyes⁵ after publication, the police viewed the publication as a breach of personal trust. Their appraisal of the situation was not shared by the journalist himself. Had he or she not obviously tried to meet all professional requirements and hear both sides?

4.4 *Reflections on the professional facets of a credible performance*

The quote above was about the interaction between a journalist and the police. It could also have been about interactions with other professional groups. The police have to deal with many other professionals on whom they also depend⁶. These professionals use their own assessment frameworks to assess situations and interactions. Their work is subject to specific written or unwritten rules that are inherent to their profession. Professional interactions are reciprocal and repetitive in nature. In the professional domain, credibility is therefore a matter of intertwined responsibilities. Credibility of actions lies in the extent to which awareness is shown of the considerations underlying the actions of other professionals in such interactions; to acknowledge the (sometimes limited) scope other professionals have to manoeuvre. Credibility lies in the ability to forge lasting relationships and operate in these circumstances, although each professional in the end has his or her own responsibilities. A nod to the inherent requirements for the work and professional concerns of other professionals in the police field is, therefore, at least as important as a sense of 'the requirements of the moment'.

4.5 *Institutional facets of a credible performance*

A third category of accounts deals with the embedding of actions in a broader institutional setting. Here, once again, are a few excerpts from the stories of our conversation partners. *"It all goes so slow. As business owners we have regular contact with the police. We talk at least two times per year and more frequently, if necessary. The municipality and other parties are also present then. That is good. But the stage thereafter, huh – after the agreements and the good intentions? There should be more decisive action, and I do not understand why it all should take so long. You'll see that after some time the same discussions repeated themselves again, whilst they were already discussed at length. In front of my door, I still have the same problem."*

⁵ To better protect the identity of this particular journalist, we do not disclose gender.

⁶ In this particular quote, dependence during the news gathering seems to be on the side of the press. In the next phase, the phase of reporting, the police depend on the press, for example, with regard to their choices of framing.

Another interlocutor said the following: *"Who is to do what? The municipality? The police? Should those kids not be in school? They sit there the whole day making a mess; I don't get why their parents don't step in. Anything goes. That can't be our reality. I can keep on calling, and then the police immediately comes. It will be quiet for a while but then the whole story will start again."*

In these and other accounts, references are being made of complex social issues, mostly 'wicked problems'. The aforementioned conversation partners indicated that their contact with the police was generally good. Where visible actions of the police are concerned, the stories are mostly positive. However, the continuing impact of police action is limited. The picture that rises especially from the accounts that entrepreneurs of small businesses gave us is that the visible actions of the police against the problem causers in itself are insufficient to relieve concerns and sometimes frustrations about safety issues. The first thing that was unclear to the entrepreneurs was "who has the ball and jurisdiction about what" in dealing with the problems experienced by them. Dealing with the 'wicked problems' almost always calls for the coordinated deployment of a large number of different parties: parties that all need to contribute to the solution of a problem from their own professional background and according to their own responsibilities. They, in a manner of speaking, have to solve the 'puzzle' together. With regard to many issues where nuisances and safety play a role, this is evident. The police has a clear role, but cannot solve the problem alone, and often cannot be primarily responsible. Seen from the outside, that institutional arena is often opaque.

4.6 Reflections on the institutional facets of a credible performance

Especially the accounts of entrepreneurs and shopkeepers show that the institutional arena is often cloudy for outsiders. It is unclear who is to move or shift gears regarding different issues. It is unknown what interests should be weighed against each other. People do not always know which authority can provide a breakthrough or solution, while it is often expected that an identifiable person or actor has responsibility and should take the point position. The credibility of actions in such 'cloudy' institutional contexts is improved by being seen as working together with other parties, even though this can sometimes be difficult. It also means that other professionals and outsiders must be acknowledged with regard to their own capacities and responsibilities to provide solutions for those 'wicked problems'. Credibility in this setting is not only based on a situational ability to act or the recognition of other professional logics. It appears to depend on an ability to create, display and communicate clear links between separate responsibilities. It lies in the externally visible power to create sustainable, workable relationships with other parties.

4.7 *Symbolic facets of a credible performance*

A final and fourth category of accounts refers to the symbolic charge of actions. A conversation partner told us the following. *"We live in a fairly small village. Not that everyone knows each other, but still. Last year my wife was pregnant. Together with our other children she went to the playground near our home. At one point a group of young people, about 16 years [of age], started to make comments to my wife. She had not been in this country for a long time for a long time, does not speak Dutch very well, and she is clearly identifiable as a Muslim because of her clothing. The comments also referred to this. It ultimately went quite out of control. My wife was taunted and even pushed. Things were said to my wife that one, in my culture, as a husband, should not simply let pass. I can't be expected to let them call my wife all sorts of things, right? I went to visit these guys at their homes, just to address the parents. To tell them that this could not stand. I knocked on the door. They did not open [it], but called the police themselves. That's turning everything around! The police listened to me and subsequently I filed a formal complaint. When filing this complaint, I expected that they would immediately go to work on the issue. I was finally told at the station that the police did not see grounds to further prosecute. I asked whether they could not simply give those guys a good scare or let them spend a night in jail so they would have something to think about. At least let them come to the police station, preferably visible in the back of the police car! They did not see any benefit coming out of it. They might be able to send an invitation to talk it through at the station. I sometimes really don't get it in this country. Should I start executing my own justice?"*

In the quote above it is clear that the speaker believed that the responsibility of the police should have gone further than the strict enforcement of the law. Legalities aside, in his view, quite ordinary prevalent social norms were violated and not enforced. According to our interlocutor, as an authoritative institute in a relatively small community, the police should have visibly confronted the boys and parents in question more assertively about the boys' questionable behavior.

4.8 *Reflections on the symbolic facets of a credible performance*

From the above it follows clearly that expectations about the actions of the police can be mainly symbolic in nature. The police is also representative of general values widely shared in our society. Exceeding these values may not always be criminal or in breach of the law, but in those situations people sometimes expect the police to send out a clear signal.

Obviously, the police does that in practice. There are countless examples where the police, whether or not in the person of the chief constable or through the media, attempt to give a normative signal. In practice it shows that these signals cannot always count on receiving broad support from actors in the political-

administrative context discussed earlier. It is not even unimaginable that the police could get into trouble because of requirements and expectations associated with the vertical dimension of accountability. It quickly appears as if the police are speaking out of turn when political powers and authorities are overlooked in order to give a signal. While in the horizontal dimension of ordinary people a clear signal is expected, in practice this is nevertheless a cautious tack.

4.9 Schematics of credible performance in the horizontal context

All in all, within a horizontal context for performance assessment our research indicates that situational, professional, institutional and symbolic facets influence the credibility of police action. The figure below shows that to every facet specific questions pop up that define whether or not the performance can be deemed credible.

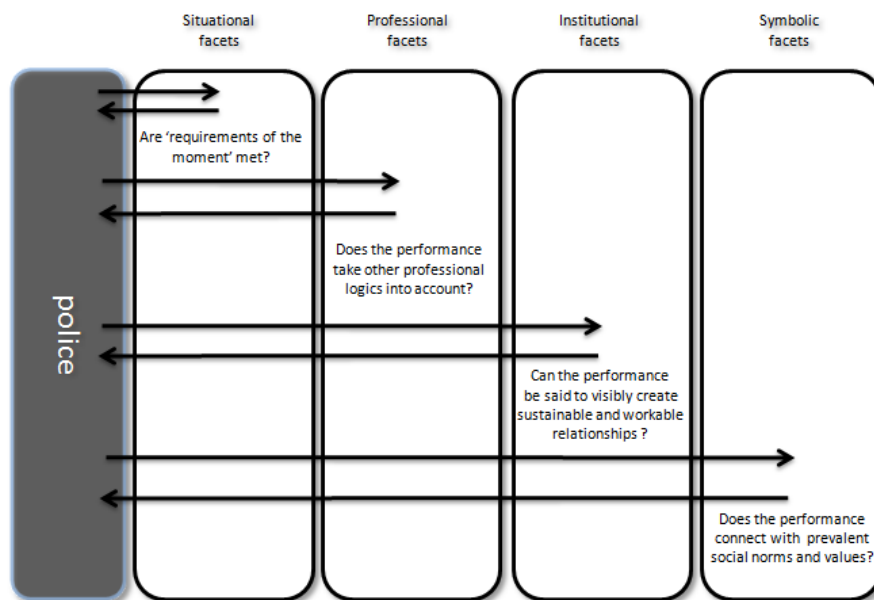


Figure 2: Facets affecting the assessment of credible frontline performance

5.0 Reflections on the multiform character of credible police performance

In the previous sections we have seen that the credibility of police performance is dependent on multiform requirements. On the one hand, we've seen formal-legal requirements in a political-administrative context stressing effectiveness and productivity and 'baseline' performance assessment. On the other, we've seen facets of credible performances in frontline settings. These are requirements that cannot always be understood in terms of measurable outcomes or effectiveness. One question that arises is whether this pluriformity creates a new diabolical dilemma in which conscious choices have to be made with regard to

the expectations that can and will be met first. What specific audiences or stakeholders are pleased? Which requirements in a specific situation are being addressed before others?

In our view, this diabolical dilemma is partly an illusion. In practice, police work cannot actually be separated into a vertically- and horizontally-oriented context; both are part of the same reality. The distinction we have made is conceptual in nature. Both contexts feed the same question from specific angles: whether police performance can be deemed credible. However, the risk of an accountability overload of the police lurks. When both the vertical and horizontal contexts are taken into account it becomes clear why it is so hard for the police to establish an overall credible performance. Rarely will it be possible to meet all the requirements in all actions and in every instance. Keeping up a credible performance can quickly become a troublesome, if not ill-fated affair. When the assessment 'apparatus' consists of more and more delicate cogs, there is a growing risk that the system will bog down, as is shown in Figure 3. Not in the least because in this particular 'apparatus' the different performance requirements do not necessarily add up.

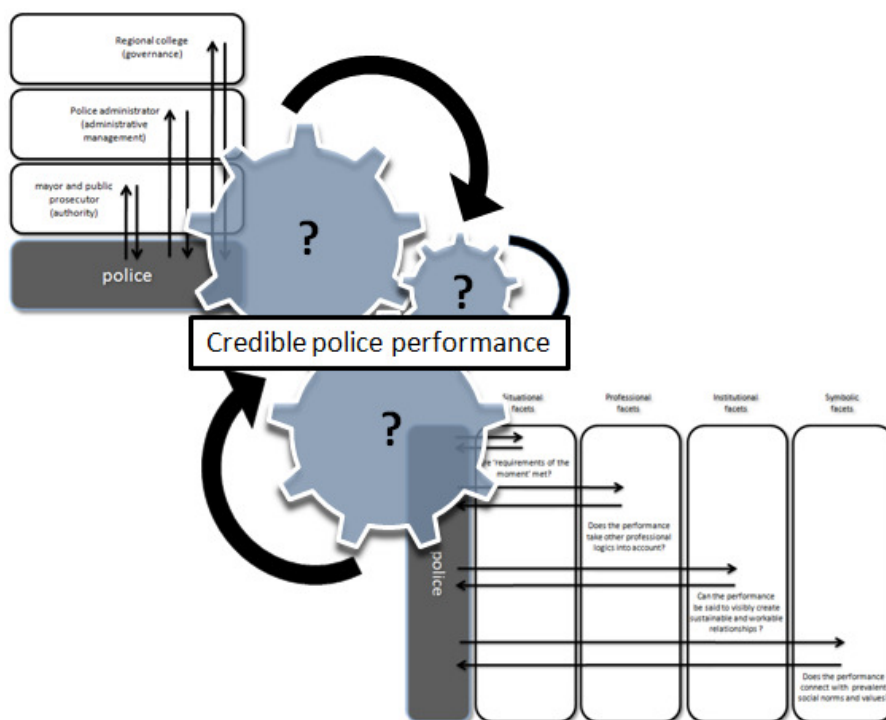


Figure 3: Credible performance under pressure?

Both a vertically-oriented performance assessment and the more horizontally-oriented ways of assessing performance ultimately test the credibility of actions. The different contexts are not so much opposites but reinforce each other in their own way and provide a growing pressure on the police to perform credibly.

This increased pressure is no longer straightforward, but, as a combination of vertical and horizontal requirements, much less tangible and constantly in flux. Sometimes vertical requirements will prevail. Sometimes the horizontal context with all its facets will be dominant in answering the question of whether the action was credible. This ambiguity threatens to create a situation in which the pluriformity of performance assessment itself increases the risk of reduced credibility.

6.0 A way out?

All the divergent requirements we have identified in this paper hinder or even prevent an unambiguous assessment of police performance. The requirements don't even have to be explicitly at odds for the police to find itself in a tight spot. Their sheer multiformity and the combined pressure that the requirements put on the police makes meeting them all a challenge in its own right. As said, the risk of accountability overload lurks. Moreover, these requirements can and will conflict from time to time. It is unlikely that all the requirements could somehow be brought into harmonious balance. They are simply part of a reality the police has to cope with everyday. So ultimately, whether the police can be said to perform admirably is something that is largely left to the eye of many different external beholders.

All requirements are essentially imposed on the police from the outside. In this sense, distinguishing the 'baseline' from the 'frontline' is a false distinction. All requirements are external: whether police administrators or the general public will have to reach a verdict about police performance, or whether other professionals or the regional council will have to do so. It cannot be hoped that all these external requirements will agree with each other and it seems unlikely that the police can change the nature and rationale behind these requirements on their own. However, the police might be able to balance the mounting pressure from these external requirements with an unambiguous internal conception of what 'exemplary police work' entails. If the police, as an institution, can envisage and communicate a coherent sense of professional conduct and can develop a clear sense of professional pride, the external pressures might be somewhat mitigated. When you take pride in what you do, because it is meaningful and valuable, when you try to do the best you can in expert fashion and in an honorable way, when you try to pursue a consistently high quality in your work, you can be justifiably content with the work performed.

Countervailing multiform external pressures to perform with an internal sense of exemplary conduct and professional pride presupposes a number of things. At the micro level, individual policemen and women should be given sufficient vocational training and be given the time to acquire the experience that is indispensable in handling divergent values and situations. Furthermore, the

police, as an institution, should give their members some discretionary powers to make sound decisions in good faith. On the organizational meso level, 'middle management' should mediate between the external environment and the policemen and women on the frontline by stimulating debates and dialogues about professional conduct. Finally, on the macro level, we envisage a leading role for professional police associations to help develop a persuasive vision on the possibilities and impossibilities surrounding police deployment in society at large. An internal sense of exemplary conduct and professional pride can be a guide in police work when the purpose and content of the work is valued in a transparent and frank manner. When other parties recognize the positive sense the police have for their own work and have a sense of what exemplary police work should entail, they are more likely to appreciate the effort instead of the results alone. It is likely that other parties will be more inclined to have confidence in police performance — or at least give them the benefit of the doubt — and will provide them with some discretionary space to maneuver and act professionally.

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