

# Misconceptions of management.

Theory and practice in Dutch police organisations

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In recent years, the relationship between managers and professionals has become an important topic in discussions concerning the quality of public administration. The discussion has continued to centre on the question of whether the quality of the operational processes has suffered because of a lack of supervision and direction. The manager, whether in education, medical care or the police, can thus quickly become arrogant. The urge to make matters measurable and to formulate them in terms of concrete performance has been a source of particular criticism. These tendencies are assumed to attenuate professional reality, causing professionals to engage in erroneous or at least suboptimal behaviour. This could subsequently violate professional integrity and responsibility (Van den Brink et al. 2005).

In theory, there are three ways to direct professionals and operational processes. In this paper, we refer to them as administrative mechanisms. In the first mechanism, rules and regulations play a central role: desired behaviours are defined in terms of rules and regulations intended to influence operational processes. In the second mechanism, performance plays a central role: agreements are made regarding the desired results. In the third mechanism, people play a central role: the efforts and quality of committed people form the path along which the quality of operational processes can be enhanced. The central question of this paper involves whether it is best to manage according to rules, achievements or people. Each of these mechanisms has unique dynamics, advantages and disadvantages.

## 1. Police and performance

In this paper, we concentrate on performance as an administrative mechanism. In particular, we focus on the extent to which this form of management is appropriate for the police force in the Netherlands. Performance and performance contracts have obviously been the subject of considerable *discussion* within the police force in recent years. This (altered) language is associated with the rise of the New Public Management, an approach that has gained considerable influence in the Netherlands and elsewhere since the 1990s. This approach arose in part because of dissatisfaction with classic governmental functioning, which was considered inefficient and not very receptive to the wishes of citizens. Instead, it was thought that the government should function more according to principles borrowed from the market and the corporate world, with contracting, privatisation and the formation of quasi-markets as the fundamental assumptions (Osborne & Gaebler 1992). This form of administration centres on assessing the needs and complaints of citizens, who are seen as customers of the government. Such processes eliminated the need for political facilitation; the role of politics is restricted to the formulation of objectives. The decisive factor in this approach is the establishment of agreements with operational agencies regarding the level and quality of the expected efforts. ‘You are expected to achieve the following goals for this price, in this period and under these conditions, you are expected to achieve the following goals’, forms the core

of this model. The intent is to make agreements regarding the ‘what’, leaving considerable (or complete) freedom regarding the ‘how’.

This approach is associated with the desire to make the functioning of governmental organisations as measurable as possible. Performance agreements should be made in quantitative terms. This accomplishes several goals. First, it ensures that agreements with operational agencies are clear and unambiguous. Second, it makes the output and quality of the organisations as transparent as possible. Third, concrete figures provide direction, focus and motivation to operational bodies. In addition to its important advantages, this administrative model is also associated with a number of disadvantages, which are primarily related to the requirement of ‘measurability’. It is not possible to measure everything that is involved in public matters. Many important aspects are impossible to express in quantitative terms without considerable disclaimers, if they are measurable at all. Attention often focuses on details that are measurable, regardless of whether these details really matter. The focus on measurement can also easily generate perverse effects: behaviours that formally contribute to the realisation of performance agreements, while failing to do so in practice.

The New Public Management approach gained wide acceptance in the 1990s. It was also introduced into the world of the Dutch police. A number of motives were involved, the first of which was a desire to make the police more results-oriented. The assumption was that police functioning was too often determined by personal interests or routines and too little by the demands of the public. The second motive was a need on the part of corps management to gain a firmer grip on the functioning of its own employees. It was assumed that the character of the police as a frontline organisation (as manifest in the distance between management cops and street cops) made the police organisation relatively immune to direction from above. This is reflected in the well-known remark of the former Rotterdam police chief Hessing that any resemblance between policy and operations was purely coincidental (cited in Jochoms et al., 2006, p.35).

In the late 1990s, a third motive appeared, a desire for more centralised direction of police operations. The national government initially chose to impose national policy themes that would be elaborated annually into detailed prescriptions for corps-level policy plans. This was decidedly unsuccessful. A policy-cycle evaluation showed that this approach had generated an extensive flow of paperwork that caused problems but had no effect (In ’t Veld 2001). In 2002, tried Ministers a new tactic; unilateral mandates would be replaced by agreements with corps managers and police chiefs regarding the performance to be delivered. At the same time, a desire for more intensive enforcement was recognised in the field of police work. This provided the context within which national performance agreements between the national government and local police corps were established, despite opposition and scepticism. In big cities this development was also related to attempts to renew local policies (Tops 2007).

In the meantime, a number of studies have been conducted that investigate the meaning of these agreements (Jochoms, 2006, Hoogenboom, 2006, Van Sluis, 2006). The general view is that the effects have been marginal, in both positive and negative terms. They have made the police less manageable and result-oriented than proponents had hoped, and they have had fewer negative or perverse effects than opponents had feared. Nonetheless, the results of this research raise a number of concerns. The unilateral intensification of enforcement, in which citizens perceive forced productivity as taking priority over the safety problems that they experience, does nothing to enhance the general evaluation of the police (Jochoms, 2006). Other authors refer to possible effects on the professional ethics of the police (Nap, 2007). Police work is based less on measurable goals than on professional behaviour that is guided by a value-laden vision. Police work assumes sustained effort to keep society liveable, and such efforts cannot be measured in a simple way. Efforts to do so ultimately violate the

essence of police work. From this perspective, it is desirable to manage less according to performance as to individuals and their own moral compasses (Denkers, 2001).

## 2. Sources and working method

Although a number of studies have investigated management concepts in the police, they have failed to render any clear conclusions. The primary focus of this article is on the practical implications of this new mentality. Is there evidence that the day-to-day police work has changed under the influence of this approach? Have the new agreements and concepts had tangible effects on the work floor? Alternatively, have community police officers and neighbourhood directors simply continued doing their jobs without being influenced by the actions of management? Before addressing these questions, we will briefly describe our sources and working methods.

In late 2005 the lectureship for Common Safety Studies at the Police Academy launched a research project on the integration of the Dutch police force within society. The reason for this project was a recurring plea for far-reaching centralisation within the police system. According to some, the transformation into a unified police system would eventually become *unavoidable*. Others considered the development *undesirable*, as it would increase the distance between the police and civilians. Such distance would involve risks for a characteristic ambition of the Dutch police: the ambition to be a part of society. Nonetheless, the degree of this social integration is not very clear. The lectureship therefore decided to collaborate with other partners to investigate the social integration of the police in the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> To this end, we have conducted studies in several police corps, partially through interviews and partially through the analysis of documents. The study primarily involved the process of interaction between operational police officers and such external parties as the government, professionals and other institutions, as well as interactions with civilians. We begin by charting how this interaction is currently proceeding and by identifying its strengths and weaknesses. By repeating the study over a number of years, we hope to establish the direction in which the social integration has developed. Although not all of the components of this research project are relevant to the central questions of this article, the project provides a clear glimpse of the day-to-day work of community police officers in the Netherlands. This indirectly allows us to determine the extent to which the management mentality has had practical effects on the work floor of the police.

## 3. Lessons from three regions

This article is limited to information regarding work in three different divisions: the Oud-West division in Amsterdam, the Veldhoven division near Eindhoven and the Gouda-Oost division, which is a component of the Hollands Midden corps. These divisions differ from each other in a number of aspects (see table). This section concentrates on the work of the community officer and provides a brief decryption of several important differences.

### *Amsterdam Oud-West*

Oud-West is a small, densely populated district with more than 30,000 inhabitants. Approximately forty per cent of the residents are of foreign background, and the middle class has a foreign character as well. Current and former psychiatric patients cause problems from

time to time, and a number of squatters are active in the neighbourhood. The police are also confronted with three groups of juvenile troublemakers, one of which is considered rather criminal. In addition, the fact that the community is located in a transitional area between Amsterdam-West and the inner city is associated with a high number of assaults and auto thefts.

Within the Amsterdam-Amstelland corps, there are five wards, each of which is broken down into a number of community teams. The West ward has seven community teams, one of which works in Oud-West. Basic police services are provided by the Oud-West community team. The community is divided into seven neighbourhoods, each of which has its own neighbourhood director. Neighbourhood directors have a special function, as a difference has been imposed between their work and other police work. Routine police tasks (e.g. surveillance or emergency assistance) are carried out by members of the community team. The neighbourhood directors have a specific task. They must maintain contact with all layers of the population, relay relevant signals, confer with the local government and with professionals from social work, education, mosques and other institutions. Their work thus consists largely of forming and maintaining social networks. In this respect, the neighbourhood-director function can be seen as a specialisation within ordinary police work. They are exempt from regular shifts and can devote their attention completely to the community. Neighbourhood directors can largely determine their own tasks and establish their own schedules.

Neighbourhood directors are aware that it is extremely important that the people in their neighbourhoods know them. They try to make as much contact as possible with the people who live and work in their neighbourhoods. One neighbourhood director relates, 'I try to stay on the streets as much as possible and to have a chat with everyone. I have contacts with certain key figures in the community, and they provide me with confidential information. I also get a lot of information from a few important businesspeople, including the pharmacist, the general physician and the veterinarian. I also feel that it's just as important to establish contacts with groups of kids I see hanging around'. Neighbourhood directors act as 'thermometers in the neighbourhood' for the police. Their information is important for the work of the community team and other police services. They participate in the regular meetings and briefings in the community team: 'I often go to the community-team briefings to relay my information. They hold three briefings each day, so that everyone can know what's happening in the area. By participating, I make sure that my information is appropriated by the whole community team'. On the other hand, the cooperation with other police services appears quite unidirectional. Although they often want to know about various matters, these services tend to be stingy in sharing their own information.

Despite the considerable attention they pay to maintaining contact with the population, the police in Oud West have little structural contact with people of foreign background. Although the community-team chief and the neighbourhood director claim to have good contact with the El Thaweed mosque, this perception was not supported by all of the interviewees. Neighbourhood residents who live near the mosque are much more critical: 'The police never come near the mosque to talk to people. You see police here in the street all day long – in cars, on mopeds, on bicycles – but not one of them goes in there'. Representatives of the mosque acknowledge that their relations with the police have improved. In addition, the neighbourhood councillors have regular contact with the neighbourhood directors. Agreements are made between the district administrators and the neighbourhood directors regarding the approach to problems in the community. In general, the neighbourhood administration is satisfied with their collaboration with the police. The feeling is mutual. Although there are obviously differences that can sometimes lead to irritation, the collaboration usually works well.

According to citizens, professionals and administrators, the police are well aware of the problems in the community. The ward chief leaves the determination of priorities largely to the community-team chiefs, who fill in the ward and corps priorities for their own communities. Because the community team has been quite successful in achieving the targets that are imposed by the corps, it has sufficient room for setting local priorities. For example, although bicycle theft is not listed among the corps priorities, it is a serious problem within Oud-West.

All things considered, the performance agreements and the discussion regarding core tasks apparently have little influence on the work of either the neighbourhood director or those who work in the basic police services. As one neighbourhood director relates ‘Numbers don’t tell me very much. Achieving the targets is also not very important to us. The number of formal reports has even declined.’

### *Veldhoven*

With 43,000 inhabitants and comprising several old villages and newly constructed communities, the growing municipality of Veldhoven is part of the suburban countryside in which few people of foreign background are to be found. The most common problems in this municipality are quarrels between neighbours, violence (particularly domestic), traffic safety and troublemaking youth. The latter issue is a topic of particular concern to older inhabitants. A number of Roma people also cause problems. One informant expressed concern about alcohol and drug use by young people. ‘Because they work during the week, they have a good bit of money. In the weekend, many of them want to get sloshed. They use a lot of pills and other drugs, and they’ve started using cocaine’. Finally, some reports have been made about a group of native Dutch youths with right-wing notions. This description shows that Veldhoven is not devoid of problems, although the situation is not comparable to the problems that confront people in major urban areas.

The corps in Brabant Zuid-Oost has only two levels. It has no wards, but consists of eighteen territorial divisions, one of which is in Veldhoven. This division is guided by the concept of area-based work. Within this division are nine units that perform all police tasks except for investigation, which is carried out at the regional level. The central figure in the unit is the neighbourhood sergeant, who is supported by employees from emergency services, investigation and other supporting services. The nine neighbourhood sergeants spend most of their time working in and for their assigned communities. They perform all police tasks, including taking crime reports and emergency calls, and they call in others when necessary. Two ‘network inspectors’ are also active within the division. Their task is to maintain contact with the local government, businesses and professionals from other institutions. The tasks are divided such that the neighbourhood sergeant is primarily operational and the network inspector functions largely in the area of policy. This arrangement is the exact opposite of the task division in Amsterdam, where operational functions are performed by the community team and networking tasks are performed by neighbourhood directors.<sup>2</sup>

The neighbourhood sergeants consider it important for community residents to know them. For this reason, they can regularly be seen on foot or on bicycles in the community. A few neighbourhood sergeants write regularly in free local newspapers as a way of keeping the citizens apprised of what is happening in the neighbourhood. One of the neighbourhood sergeants says that he derives his contacts from incident reports, good networks of reliable standing contacts in the community, other professionals and by visiting with local young people, including approachable groups of troublemakers. He also pays regular visits to the meetings of the community platform, which is a form of resident participation organised by

Table 1  
 Characteristics of the three investigated communities

	Oud-West	Gouda-Oost	Veldhoven
Unemployed residents (%)	17	12	7
Residents of non-Western background (%)	29	22	4
Percentage of residents with low education	47	32	26
Average household income in euro	25.000	23.000	27.000
Number of crimes per 1000 inhabitants	1614	92	100
Evaluation of police performance	23	22	24

Explanation of Table 1:

The communities that were investigated clearly differed in terms of the percentage of unemployed residents and the percentage of residents of non-Western foreign background. The differences are somewhat smaller with regard to residents with low education and the average annual household income. With regard to the number of crimes, Oud-West is clearly a high risk area. Finally, it is remarkable that there are no appreciable differences in the evaluation of police performance.

the municipality and in which involved citizens engage in discussions concerning the arrangement and administration of their community. He is not expected to attend every meeting, however, and he participates according to the items on the agenda. He has less contact with the institutional partners – these contacts are made by the network inspectors – and he has occasionally consults with the mayor or city council member.

In this way, neighbourhood sergeants acquire a good overview of the issues in their communities. This information is also used to help organise the work of the division. Each year, the neighbourhood sergeants establish a list of five priorities for their communities. These lists are approved by the division chiefs, who consider the feasibility of the proposals. The details are processed into a general plan of work, paying as much attention as possible to community-specific issues. The mayor formulates the annual plan for the police. This plan specifies priorities for the coming year, and it is discussed in the municipal council. Nearly all of the respondents are of the opinion that the police are aware of the problems in Veldhoven and that they act according to these problems. The coordination between the neighbourhood sergeants and other police employees takes place in the neighbourhood sergeants' meetings and in the daily briefings. An intranet makes it possible to read details of other units. Coordination between the network inspectors and the neighbourhood sergeants is a point in need of attention: agreements are not always observed, and various professionals and

administrators prefer to go to the neighbourhood sergeant than to approach a network inspector.

The police in Veldhoven have no structural contact with the largely Moroccan minority population. This group comprises only a limited proportion of the population. Veldhoven has no mosque, and there are no problems specifically related to this group. Several professionals and one respondent of Moroccan background, however, were of the opinion that a set contact person should be appointed to establish a dialogue between the police and the Moroccan community. Two neighbourhood sergeants do serve as a contact point for the Roma people. These officers have a good overview of the Roma community, and they have set contact points within the community. They are aware of the particular 'rules' that apply to interactions with these people.

The division chief feels that he has sufficient leeway for making his own choices and that the corps supervisors support him in these choices. Another supervisor has the impression that the regional policy provides the direction, but adds, 'That's not necessarily a bad thing. The national and regional priorities are certainly not at odds with those of the Veldhoven Division. There is quite a bit of overlap, which means that the national and regional priorities, as well as those of the Public Prosecution Service, are largely consistent with local priorities'. He estimates that local-level input amounts to about fifteen per cent, and he considers that enough. According to a division chief, the debate about core tasks has hardly any influence on the work of the neighbourhood sergeants and the units. The same applies to the performance contracts. 'Our employees understand that quality is the most important, and that it's not all about production. In my opinion, the problem-oriented approach in Veldhoven is not under pressure'. One neighbourhood sergeant says that, if prevention work proves unsuccessful, it would be due more to capacity problems than to the discussion about core tasks.

### *Gouda-Oost*

Gouda-Oost is an urban area with considerable variation among its communities and its approximately 40,000 inhabitants. More than twenty per cent of the population is of foreign background, and half of these are of Moroccan background. One fourth of the population is younger than eighteen years of age. The most important safety concerns in Gouda-Oost are automobile break-ins, violence, burglary and nuisance or criminality by juveniles. All complaints are related to youths, and a considerable proportion of the criminality and nuisance is caused by young Moroccans. One group of about 100 Moroccan boys between the ages of nine and twelve causes a great deal of trouble. This group is nearly unapproachable, even when their parents are involved. In some communities in Gouda-Oost pollution, deterioration and lack of social cohesion play a role as well.

The Gouda-Oost team is responsible for all police work within the five communities of the Gouda-Oost ward, including investigation and emergency assistance. The emphasis in police actions is on presence and the delivery of locally customised services. Each of the five communities has a community officer who, as the bridgehead of the team, provides all police tasks within the community. They also maintain networks with the professionals and key figures in their communities, while serving as 'information brokers' between the police and the surrounding area. Community officers have considerable freedom to arrange their own work, although they are bound by the policies of the team.

A part of the contact with residents, partners and the municipality is carried out through the community officers; another part is carried out through the team supervisors. Neighbourhood officers consult with partners on the operational level, and team supervisors consult with them on the level of policy. Binding agreements are made solely by the team

supervisors. Most of the collaboration with professionals takes place on the level of the community. Within each community, the municipality organises a 'community team' in which involved citizens can engage discussions with the community coordinator, the community consultant from the Gouda Welfare Foundation and the community officer. The community teams form the most important platform for the police regarding contacts with residents. In the opinion of the professionals, the community officer serves as a bridge between them and the police.

Community officers invest in 'knowing and being known', and in good relationships with professionals and active residents; they also invest in contact with the population, particularly Moroccan youths. The community is regularly patrolled by bicycle. According to an employee in basic police services, 'It is a low-threshold way of working, particularly with regard to making contact with young people on the street. The team is quite familiar among the youth'. Community officers take signals from the community and from the community teams into consideration. They also provide information about the community to colleagues within the team, the information desk, the criminal information unit and the regional intelligence service. The police have structural discussions with the Moroccan minority. They hold discussions with the mosque councils, and a special project is directed towards cooperation with the Moroccan community. Gouda-Oost also has a community officer who serves as a contact person for minorities in the community. One important task has yet to be addressed: more use should be made of the informal authorities within the community.

Nearly all of the respondents feel that the police are well aware of the issues. The team chief has sufficient leeway to act upon local issues and deliver customised work. For example, with the approval of the corps supervisors and the Public Prosecution Service in Gouda-Oost, the team pays no attention to the environment, even though it is both a national and a regional priority. There is little tension between national, regional and local priorities. In addition, police policy and the integral security policy in Gouda are well coordinated. The municipality's implementation of the directing role could nonetheless stand improvement. The community officers must play an initiating and directing role much too frequently. The municipality should take more of this responsibility on themselves. According to one community officer, 'The municipality is willing, but incapable; the police are capable, but unwilling'. He feels that it is easier to achieve cooperation on the work floor.

Administrators and professionals state that the discussion about core tasks has had no negative effects on the willingness of the police to cooperate, even though such had been feared at first. The performance contracts have led the police to act more repressively, but this has somewhat strengthened their position of authority. A balance has been reached between repression and a preventive, problem-oriented approach. One community officer shares this opinion: 'Even I have to write tickets. The secret is to relate that to addressing structural problems. This way, the problem-oriented approach and the repressive approach can reinforce each other, and that enhances your position of authority'. An employee in basic police services makes a similar statement: 'I sometimes take more repressive action because of the performance contract. In the past, I hardly ever issued any citations. I try to do it in relation to addressing problems'.

### 3. Comparable working methods

The discussion above shows substantial differences in the social contexts and the security issues that occur in the three regions. The regions also differ with regard to the formal function and role of the region-bound police officials. In Veldhoven, neighbourhood sergeants are primarily involved with operational police work, while network inspectors are primarily

involved with policy. This arrangement is the exact opposite of the task division in Amsterdam Oud-West, where operational functions are performed by the community team and networking tasks are performed by neighbourhood directors. In Gouda, community officers are charged with both operational police work and networking, although the latter is primarily operational, as the team supervisors perform these tasks at the level of policy. Despite these differences, there are many similarities in the work of the community officers within the police system in the Netherlands.

First, all community officers have a great deal of contact with citizens. One of our Amsterdam respondents tries to be on the street as much as possible. He also visits the local bars and restaurants regularly. This yields quite a bit of information about the surroundings, as well as about the customers. Certain criminals like to meet in bars and restaurants. This police officer also holds regular office hours, visits neighbourhood evenings and sometimes writes articles for the neighbourhood newspaper. He is certainly not the only one. According to one supervisor, several neighbourhood directors stay in touch with citizens in this way. Nonetheless, he is concerned that this contact remains largely restricted to the native Dutch population. He would like the officers to try harder to improve their contact with residents of foreign background.

The neighbourhood officers in Veldhoven also use a variety of means to keep in touch with the residents of their communities. One of them states that there are various methods to learn what is going on among the residents. While he does use reports from the emergency control centre, he is just as likely to chat with the neighbours. He has a number of reliable contacts in the neighbourhood, but he also calls upon professionals in youth services or welfare agencies. He regularly pays calls on the groups of loitering youth, but he also participates in the community platforms that meet every two months. Contacts with residents are also important for the work of the community officers in Gouda-Oost. According to one, 'I make a conscious choice to be seen in uniform on the street. That makes me approachable, and many young people know me. I know all of the troublemakers personally; I know where they live and where they go to school. This gives me a picture of the problems and I hear the stories from the neighbourhood. On the street, I look for contact with problem groups. Everyone can see that. In this way, I want to let the residents know that I'm not afraid of confrontation'. The community officers in Gouda-Oost maintain contacts with the Moroccan minority, and an extra community officer has been appointed as a contact official.

A second similarity is that the community officers exchange a great deal of information and make agreements with professionals from other institutions. For example, one of the community officers in Oud-West comes into frequent contact with the security coordinators from the district. A colleague participates in the semi-annual security conference, in which the chair of the district council and the councillor in charge of security participate, in addition to the security coordinator. When necessary, he can contact the district chair directly. These contacts are primarily intended to provide public officials with accurate information and to ensure that civil servants keep to their agreements. The exchange of information appears to be specific to the position of neighbourhood director, as the emergency-assistance officers emphasise that they hardly ever have any contact with government officials or other professionals. The working method in Veldhoven is somewhat different. As noted, the neighbourhood sergeants in this area do not provide the contact with other professionals; this is the task of the two network inspectors. One of the inspectors says that he frequently consults with professionals from social work, youth services, home health care and child protection. He also participates in the case meetings that take place every six weeks. The same is true of the other network inspector, although he is primarily involved with partners on the 'hard' side. He has regularly scheduled consultation with businesses located in the industrial area and with the Chamber of Commerce. This is part of the reason that Veldhoven was able

to become the first municipality in the Netherlands to earn the safe-business certificate. The neighbourhood sergeants are also active in this respect. For example, one of the sergeants relates that youth services have recently become more emphatically involved in fighting nuisance, while the other has developed his own network with the social work system and other parties.

#### 4. Management from above?

A third similarity is that community officers are relatively free to arrange their own work. To some extent, the work was consciously organised in this way. The neighbourhood director in Amsterdam has a specific bundle of tasks that are clearly different from ordinary police work (see above). Although he regularly consults with the chief of the community team and participates in the briefings of the community team, he is largely free to arrange his own activities. This special arrangement sometimes raises questions. For example, according to one of the neighbourhood directors, 'Neighbourhood directors are involved in all facets of police work, but they are completely free to set their own schedules. They also have offices in their homes, extra cost reimbursements and mobile telephones with extensive capabilities. This makes some of their colleagues jealous'. On the other hand, neighbourhood directors are expected to devote themselves completely to their neighbourhoods. Their work does not stop at 5:00 in the evening. When problems are threatening, they can even be called out of bed. Although the police in Veldhoven use neighbourhood sergeants instead of neighbourhood directors, they also have a great deal of autonomy. Neighbourhood sergeants are responsible for all of the tasks of local police work, ranging from taking reports to offering emergency assistance or providing surveillance and enforcement. Nonetheless, they are free to define the results that they wish to achieve. Each neighbourhood sergeant makes a plan of work that specifies what the residents of the community can expect from him or her. One result is that the local police have sufficient leeway for making their own choices, and this is supported by the corps supervisors. Although the annual plan that is established by the police must be approved by the municipality, this has never caused problems in practice. Even the plans that neighbourhood sergeants make for their own communities are usually approved.

Community officers have a great deal of autonomy, not only in relation to the local government, but within the police system as well. With regard to the concerns underlying this investigation, we posed explicit questions regarding the relationship with supervisors and managers. We wished to know whether the performance agreements set by the Minister and the top police officials were having any major effects on the work floor. We asked the same question with regard to the covenants that the police have made with other parties. We were unable to establish any definitive answer. In response to the question of the possible effects of the covenants, one supervisor in Amsterdam replied that they are simply on paper. 'Their value is symbolic; their role is primarily in the media'. One of the neighbourhood directors in Oud-West openly admits that he has no interest in numbers. He is also unaware of the exact demographic data regarding his community. This is apparently even more applicable to emergency-services officers. One of the officers remarked that such things were of little interest to him. 'I don't concern myself with covenants. I know that there are certain spearheads, like street robbery, noise nuisance or domestic violence. Otherwise, those policy plans don't interest me at all. They often keep stating the same things, or they turn them into another document by cutting and pasting. What does it matter? The task of emergency services is to apply bandages, and that has to be done well'. This officer is not bothered by the debate about core tasks. That discussion has had little influence on his work. 'Maybe we should issue more citations. I just don't know. It doesn't bother me if I don't meet the set

quota. I issue a citation if I observe a violation. I don't go out looking for violations in order to meet my quota. I do observe the priorities that we establish in the community team, but I don't pay much attention to municipal or national policy lines. They aren't flexible enough, and they don't address local problems. It seems to me that a small-scale approach often works better. The lines are shorter, and you can quickly share the relevant information with each other'. Other officers also make it clear that they do not bother with the policies that are established in the head office. According to one neighbourhood director, 'A great deal of my work is directed by the contacts that emerge from the street. This leads to a wide variation in performance. Some actions occur only once, others quite frequently. Sometimes, I keep a low profile, and other times, I make a point of acting as the police. I use my own judgment to determine the approach. In this regard, I operate autonomously'.

In Veldhoven, there is also little evidence of strong direction by management. One neighbourhood sergeant describes the composition of his work as follows: 'We currently follow the guideline that sixty per cent of my time should go to the community, and forty per cent should be devoted to other matters. I personally do not care about numbers and policies. I don't want to become a bean counter. Mostly, I want to go into the community'. This neighbourhood sergeant is quite pleased with his division chief. 'He is more of a feelings person than a boss. He provides a framework and then gives us free rein. We have formal consultations several times each year. We discuss the annual plan in these sessions. In between, the contacts are informal'. Although the core tasks of the police are debated in Veldhoven, this debate has no visible effects. The effects of the capacity shortage are much stronger. One of this sergeant's colleagues has a different interpretation. He is of the opinion that the debate about core tasks has no negative effects, as the priorities that are established within the debate are largely consistent with those of his own division. 'The regional priorities do determine the direction, but that isn't a problem, as the regional and local priorities work well together. In practice, that causes hardly any problems in Veldhoven'. Only one officer is more critical in this regard. As a network inspector, he is concerned about the question of what the police in Veldhoven should do. He feels impeded by the obligation to work with 'three boxes'. 'Box 1 comprises the guidelines that arise from the national covenants. Box 2 contains the regional policy lines, and Box 3 comprises matters of a local nature. Only ten per cent of our time is spent addressing Box 3'. This officer also describes a relationship between establishing covenants and the increasing call for enforcement. 'I think that the emphasis on core tasks like investigation or enforcement is accompanied by a certain amount of idle reflection. It is increasingly coming down to the question of who has been picked up by whom. I expect that the distance from the citizens will also increase in the future. Partly because of the work with boxes and partly because of the capacity shortage, community officers are receiving too little leeway for tailoring their own activities to the specific problems of their areas'

## 5. Conclusion

Although the information presented above is drawn from only a few areas, we feel that, based on the results from other studies by the lectureship for Common Safety Studies at the Police Academy (Van den Brink 2007), it provides a reliable picture of day-to-day police work. We don't have the impression that the management ideology has had far-reaching consequences on the work floor. The opposite seems more likely to us – this ideology acts as a smokescreen, a way of thinking or speaking that actually obscures what is involved in the practice of the Dutch police. Further research must determine whether this impression is correct. In anticipation of such research, we would like to raise two questions. Assuming that our

impression is accurate, what could explain the difference between words and actions? Assuming that there is an explanation, how should we consider this difference in normative terms?

It is still too soon to provide a true explanation for the difference between policy ideology and professional action by the police (Hendriks & Tops 2005). Further research is required but according to the preceding information, we can mention several factors that could play a role in this regard. The first factor involves the nature of professional action. All complaints about bureaucratisation aside, working for the police remains highly physical in nature. Arresting citizens, patrolling on the street, offering emergency assistance or working with the riot control unit is ultimately physical. It is therefore conceivable that only part of this type of work can be captured in a protocol. The core tasks of police work are difficult to establish in countable units. Although the enforcement of the public order or the promotion of security can be seen as the specific 'products' of the police organisation, such claims remain hollow statements, as they are not very tangible products. A second factor lies in the way in which the police organisation functions. Officers have indeed a great deal of discretion (Lipsky 1980). They can and must decide on their own actions on the scene, and act accordingly. Once they are back at the office, they must fill in records, but the exact details of what they actually did can seldom be discerned from the supervisors or the system. In less friendly terms, it could also be said that neighbourhood directors and neighbourhood sergeants have abundant opportunity to evade any directives that are imposed upon them by management.

A third possible factor is that the threshold in many cases has traditionally not been very high; the agreed-upon achievements could be met with relative ease. A fourth factor could be the attitude adopted by police supervisors. This attitude is ambivalent in the sense that these supervisors speak the language of management to external (or higher) audiences, while with internal (or lower) audiences, they simply allow ordinary police officers to do their work. This ambivalence can arise from the fact that many supervisors started from below and realise that the management ideology is of relatively little use. Another possible factor in this attitude could be that the Dutch police system still comprises 25 different corps, and the management of each corps has a certain interest in maximising their own policy space. We do not think that the process of hybridisation that can be observed in other sectors (e.g. healthcare) is taking place within the police force.<sup>3</sup> Although various values and orientations do exist, they have intermingled rather loosely to date. The police can therefore be accountable in several ways. Furthermore, the presence of more than one accountability regime is not unusual. This situation offers both professionals and managers a certain degree of freedom that they can apply functionally (Hartman & Tops 2005).

Aside from the question of which factors have led to the gap between policy and operations, the gap can be evaluated in several ways. We touch upon three possible reactions. Some people may interpret the existence of a gap as an irresponsible risk. In this view, the community officers are left to their own devices with inadequate supervision. As a result, the function can be fulfilled in ways that are much too personal. Although this could lead to fine police work in some cases, the arrangement could be qualitatively inadequate in other cases, thereby generating dissatisfaction with the work of the police among citizens, businesses and professionals. This view is not entirely unfounded. At any rate, the research that we conducted on the social integration of the Dutch police shows that considerable improvement is needed in various places (Van den Brink 2007, Mertens 2007). On the other hand, we could adopt a different view and point out that heavy emphasis on central direction, management or 'accountability' can violate the quality of police work. Precisely because enforcing the public order or promoting security cannot be expressed in business terms, the establishment of targets or efficiency from above could amount to a dangerous illusion. The third view holds

that police organisations could stand to be bound to a number of targets, standards or covenants, but these constructions will work only if the officers are able to agree with them. In other words, such standards make sense only if they emerge from within the practice of the profession and not if they are imposed on police employees from above. It is true that the professionalism of the Dutch police has to improve, and the establishment of certain goals could help in this regard. Nonetheless, they will help only if these goals are consistent with the issues in specific areas and if they are shared by the entire corps.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This investigation is directed by Ries Straver and is executed in collaboration with Andersson Elffers Felix in Utrecht.

<sup>2</sup> Complaints have emerged in both locations regarding a shortage of capacity. In Veldhoven, there are formally 14 FTE available, but this is hardly ever achieved in practice. In Amsterdam, they are struggling with a shortage of thirty per cent at the ward level. Although this obviously affects day-to-day police work, we do not address this issue in this article.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of hybridisation refers to a process in which elements from the private and public sphere are mixed up in a new way.