



## Variations in Police Leadership: Experiential Ambiguity

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### Abstract

This study is focused upon leadership styles, i.e. potential; "lassiez-fair"; "resigned"; and "negative" others, expressed by leaders in the Swedish Police force. The occupational mapping of leadership styles was based upon material derived from interviews with and observations of police leaders as well as from collected questionnaire data. The styles were characterized as "experienced-based" categories (EPCs) with measureable attributes related to the Job Match Talent (JMT). In order to associate the EPCs with the JMT scales, nominal regression analyses were performed. A control group of nine selected police leaders was used as a reference category for the regression. The results showed that 12 (out of 30) JMT scales significantly predicted the EPCs. There were 7 unique predictors. In general, multiple influences on different EPCs by a JMT scale had the same direction, but with one exception. Trust in others decreased the odds ratio for Negative-other, while the odds ratios were increased for two other EPCs being influenced by this category. While Focus on order, Optimism and Vision decreased odds ratios for a certain EPC, Winning instinct had the opposite effect. The present results are discussed in relation to leadership and effective policing within the Swedish Police force.

**Key words:** Police; Leadership; Lassiez-fair; Resignation; Negative leadership; Resigned dissatisfaction; Potential leadership

**Abbreviation:** JMT: Job Match Talent; EPCs: Experienced Based Categories

### Introduction

The police work that is performed in a complex social context, politically as well as organizationally, is expected to function in a variety of situations, often difficult [1]. Despite this, police work consists mainly of what may be considered as an ordinary day-to-day occupation [2]. Nevertheless, police work implies also that this ordinary day-to-day occupation aspect may alter in a second

becoming transformed into a critical incident. Beyond this day-to-day schedule, the "ordinary" burglary or violent assault may be part of an organized, even internationally organized, criminal activity. The implication is that, even if the day-to-day encompass duties that appear unvarying, the scope of those duties has become widened. This ever-burgeoning situation leads to the necessity for flexible and complex policing. In order to handle this complexity there is a need for both stable and flexible leadership which have been shown to be crucial for enable worthwhile achievements [3,4]. van Dijk, Hoogewoning & Punch [5] argued that leadership constitutes an essential

factor not only for the police as a law-enforcing organization but also in the terms of how the police are able to develop and meet expectations. Moreover, they implied that it not just concerns the individual leadership but also the level of the institutional leadership capacity.

Despite a surfeit of research on leadership, the concept is vague and unclear [6]. In the middle of last century, Stogdill [7] described leadership as an ability to influence other's behavior in an attempt to achieve goals and to act in relation to a certain activity. However, there is a distinction between leadership and management that pertains to focus. Whereas the former focuses upon people the latter aspires to function and task. Punch [8] implies that in general it is easier to acquire administrative routines and tasks that to accrue the competency of an effective leader. Thus, it is important identify individuals possessing the appropriate leader-attributes based upon the demands and expectancies exerted by the organization. It is argued that, in most cases, leaders may learn to master both functions and tasks; the adaptation to the requirements of leadership skills poses particular demands. In the search for the 'right leaders' suitable definitions of those qualities and skills ought to be postulated followed by analyses of existing leadership profiles.

"For a person who is not aware that he is doing anything wrong has no desire to be put right. You have to catch yourself doing it before you can reform" Lucius Annaeus Seneca c. 4BC-AD65 Roman philosopher.

Just as the Roman philosopher, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, postulated in ancient times, 'first one must identify what is wrong in order to be able to change it'. In order to be able to make changes one must be aware of what one to change towards, which in this case concerns what type of organization, is desired? The Swedish police corps has declared the ambition to be a learning organization with a focus upon the public with decision-making in close proximity to the problem. This focus implies that the organization, seeking visionary leadership, must catalogue the prevailing leadership within the organization in comparison with the desired leadership. Leadership has a distinctive effect on organizational results and achievements with certain leadership attributes that separate well-functioning organizations from less well-functioning organizations [4].

These Attributes Include:

- a. Leaders that invest time in and make effort to lead employees.
- b. Leaders with clear values who act as a role model.

- c. Leaders that generate participation by creating possibilities for employees to lead work.

Tasks and Activities

- a. Leaders that push employees to grow, develop and learn.
- b. Leaders that welcome criticism and feedback as an opportunity to learn.
- c. Leaders that provide recognition and acknowledgement for employees.
- d. Leaders who encourage participation and collaboration between employees.
- e. Leaders with clear and distinct visions and goals towards the future.
- f. Leaders who are innovative and encourage employees to consider problems from new angles.

So less than positive leadership may be witnessed within any organization. In two studies focused on the Swedish police as a learning organization, two distinct groups of leaders whose characteristics differed from the positive leadership described above [9] were observed. This lesser than positive leadership was found to be of the 'lassiez-fair' and 'resigned' type. The former may be described according to the following factors [10]:

- a. A 'detached' and absent leadership.
- b. Passive and avoidant type of leadership behavior.
- c. Lack of feedback, interest and engagement from the leader.
- d. Leaders' decisions that are delayed or absent.

From this description, the lassiez-fair leader presents an individual that expresses excessive contemplation, desire for agreeableness, avoidance of problems, and possessing a slow personal work-tempo. The underlying cause of this behavior may vary but personal characteristics as well as organizational structures and culture may be factors contributing to a lassiez-fair leadership [11]. Resigned leadership seems to occur from the discrepancy between the individual's desire to perform and the organization's expectations of the individual's performance. When an individual possess a greater willingness to perform than that which the organization requires, feelings of discomfort will emerge within the individual. To create a balance and abolish these negative emotions, individuals tend to eventually decrease their own qualitative and quantitative performance requirements, resulting in resignation. The resigned leadership may be described according to the following factors (Archer T, 1998):

A type of leadership that presents to a low level of individual efforts.

- a. A type of leadership that makes few attempts at problem-solving.
- b. A type of leadership that expresses passivity in the face of occurring situations.

The resigned leader may be described as individual expressing low levels of optimism, low levels of belief-in-the-future, low inner drive and low intrinsic motivation concurrent with a low level of resilience in stressful situations [11]. As indicated previously [3-5,8-10,11, **Error! Reference source not found.**], leadership is crucial to organizations. The purpose of the present study was to analyze the structure of Swedish police leadership through the application of a well-established recruitment instrument.

## Methods

The occupational mapping of leadership styles was based upon material derived from interviews with and observations of police leaders [9] as well as from collected questionnaire data [13]. The styles were characterized as "experienced-based" categories (EPCs) with measureable attributes related to the Job Match Talent (JMT) [11]. The items responded to and measured were related to personal features, attitudes and experiences of work life. JMT test is based on ten main scales, each presenting three subscales [13].

The five following EPCs were used in the analyses (N=102, including a control group, n=9):

- a. Laissez faire (Lf) [n=14],
- b. Resigned dissatisfaction (Rd), [n=24]
- c. 'Lf & 'Rd' [n=12],
- d. Negative-other (No) [n=9],
- e. Potential leader (Pl) [n=34].

The Negative-other could include styles such as ego-centrated leadership or aggressive leadership. In addition, it should be emphasized that these categories also are known from the literature (resigned dissatisfaction [11], ego-centrated [14], aggressive [16,17]).

## Statistical Procedure

In order to associate the EPCs with the JMT scales, nominal regressions were performed. A control group of nine selected police leaders was used as a reference

category for the regression. Since the sample size was just a little more than a hundred cases (N=102), and the JMT scales amounted to 30, an iterative stepwise procedure was used. That is, firstly the 10 main scales were included in a stepwise model with the EPCs as a dependent variable. In the following iterations, significant main scales were one at a time replaced with significant subscales. Using this procedure, there were no more than ten predictors in the iterative models [18].

## Results

The regression of the EPCs on the JMT scales showed that 12 (out of 30) JMT scales significantly predicted the EPCs. There were 7 unique predictors. The following 5 JMT scales predicted two to three EPCs (where [-,+ ] indicates decreasing or increasing odds ratio, respectively, for belonging to a certain EPC):

- a. Focus on order ([-]Laissez faire, [-]Resigned dissatisfaction, [-]'Lf' & 'Rd'),
- b. Optimism ([-]Resigned dissatisfaction, [-]'Lf' & 'Rd'),
- c. Winning instinct ([+]Negative-other, [+]Potential leader),
- d. Vision ([-]Resigned dissatisfaction, [-]'Lf' & 'Rd', [-]Potential leader),
- e. Trust in others ([+] Resigned dissatisfaction, [+] 'Lf' & 'Rd', [-] Negative-other).

The remaining two scales Displayed consideration, Diplomacy predicted only one EPC ([+ /+] Laissez faire).

In general, multiple influences on different EPCs by a JMT scale had the same direction, but with one exception. Trust in others decreased the odds ratio for Negative-other, while the odds ratios were increased for two other EPCs being influenced by this category. While Focus on order, Optimism and Vision decreased odds ratios for a certain EPC, Winning instinct had the opposite effect. In Table 1 below there is a shifted focus onto EPCs being influenced by different JMT scales. The table provides a description of which scales that had a significant impact on each EPC. Between two to four scales had impact on each EPC, respectively. There was no overlap of predicting JMT scales concerning the conceptually different EPCs Laissez faire and Potential leaders. Only Laissez faire was predicted by Displayed consideration and Diplomacy, in addition to Focus on order. Contrarily, Potential leader was predicted by Winning instinct and Vision. See further in Table 1 for a detailed overview.

| Experience Based Category (EBC)* Predictor |                              | B     | p    | OR** [Exp(B)] |
|--|------------------------------|-------|------|---------------|
| <b>'Laissez faire (Lf)</b>                 | (a3) Focus on order          | -.234 | .003 | .791          |
|  | (i1) Displayed consideration | .204  | .019 | 1.226         |
|  | (i2) Diplomacy               | .296  | .022 | 1.344         |
| <b>Resigned dissatisfaction (Rd)</b>       | (a3) Focus on order          | -.164 | .017 | .849          |
|  | (b2) Optimism                | -.425 | .002 | .654          |
|  | (f2) Vision                  | -.601 | .000 | .548          |
|  | (h3) Trust in others         | .197  | .015 | 1.218         |
| <b>"Lf' &amp; 'Rd'</b>                     | (a3) Focus on order          | -.177 | .015 | .838          |
|  | (b2) Optimism                | -.518 | .001 | .596          |
|  | (f2) Vision                  | -.680 | .000 | .507          |
|  | (h3) Trust in others         | .205  | .014 | 1.228         |
| <b>Neegative, other</b>                    | (f1) Winning instinct        | .206  | .047 | 1.229         |
|  | (h3) Trust in others         | -.265 | .042 | .767          |
| <b>'Potential leader</b>                   | (f1) Winning instinct        | .144  | .041 | 1.154         |
|  | (f2) Vision                  | -.191 | .014 | .826          |

Table 1: Significant parameter estimates from a stepwise nominal regression of 'Experienced Based Categories' (EBCs) on seven JMT scales for police leader aspirants (N=102).

The prediction of EPCs by the regression model was good. On average 84.3% of the EPCs were correctly classified by the model. Moreover, the pseudo R-squares were high (Cox & Snell=.91, Nagelkerke=.94, McFadden=.72).

## Discussion

Tops & Spelier [19] have argued that the police force presents a front line organization and that working in the frontline implies that "the initiative to act is taken not in the center or at the top of the organization but at its base or on the periphery (p. 176). The authors argue also that Police officers are not "mechanical executors" (p. 177) but rather the active configurators of police work and that "police work is created in the direct contacts with the outside world" (p. 177). Since decisions regarding the course of proximal action are reached in an instant and the complexity of the tasks renders it difficult to consult distal management, the implication is that the role of a police officer includes a large degree of independence [19]. Taken together, the consensus from the present

result indicates demanding conditions placed upon the police leader.

These results disclose the positive leadership existing within the Swedish Police. Nevertheless, as in other organizations, less positive aspects were in existence also. Two of the less were lassiez-fair leadership and resigned leadership. The former implies a failure to provide constructive feed-back [20], lack of initiative and decision-making [21], and lack of support [22] which exert negative influence on employees in the form of increased stress, dissatisfaction [10], work-related conflicts and bullying [23]. The detrimental influence of these leader types on employees and organization is well-documented [24,25,26].

The second form of less desired leadership, 'resigned dissatisfaction' [11], is associated with resignation and has not been studied as thoroughly as lassiez-fair leadership. Nevertheless, the association between resignation and forceful governance through roles and conformity has generated towards formal roles that are

perceived as both bureaucratic and redundant, often termed “red-tape”. In practice, this position entails much paperwork, a plethora of decisions by various management groups at different levels of the organization with roles affecting employees through hindrance/aggravation that are essentially counterproductive. This concatenation of factors has generated resignation among employees within public organizations [27].

The resigned leadership may not induce as many negative effects upon the individual employee as the laissez-fair leadership but the effects upon the organization are direct and might be even more extensive. When a resigned leader neglects taking the initiative or carrying out changes in management it may lead to reduced organizational development and productivity. Leaders showing both laissez-fair and resignation types of leadership cause effects upon employees and organization that are generally calamitous. Among those participating in this study, another group of less positive leaders emerged. These were leaders who were denoted as “negative others” and may be described as self-centered and maintained a capricious leadership based on personal advantages, for example taking every opportunity to climb the career ladder. This type of leadership lacks focus upon the two central issues, employees and organization. Leaders with these characteristics have no place in any organization and never within the police corps where the core focus is upon the benefits for society rather than the leader as an individual [14,16,17].

In order to be effective and flexible there is need for an organization to be structured in a manner that supports both the development of its employees who concurrently acquire the ability to harvest the knowledge and experiences that is constructed within the organization. In these circumstances, leadership is crucial. Understanding the different components of leadership forms that are present within an organization allows us to reinforce the practicable, alter structures impinging upon resignation, build support for a consistent leadership and, in some cases, redeploy and find other assignments for those with less desirable forms of leadership attributes.

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