

POLICE OFFICERS PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES

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Background

- RECPOOL - **R**ecruitment, **E**ducation and **C**areers in the **P**olice
– a European longitudinal study
- A questionnaire at four phases, the beginning and end of the basic training program and after 3 and 6 years as professional police officers.
- Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Spain (Catalonia), Belgium and Scotland.
- The questionnaire that the police students answered, is based on an original Norwegian survey that was developed for investigating vocational education training programs of different kind, in the so-called StudData-project.
- Police officers perceptions of competences in relation to their future career is in focus for this study.

Aim

The overall aim of this study is, based on a frame factor theory perspective, are to describe and analyze if and how the perception of different competence dimensions relevant to police profession changed and developed over time, from the beginning to the end of the police education and training program.

- How do police officers understand the results of the assessment of different competences relevant to the police profession from the Phase 1 and Phase 2 survey?
- To what extent have the police education and training program contributed to the development of different competences relevant to the police profession?
- Are the perceived competence dimensions, specific knowledge, practical skills and reflexivity different during the police education and training program in relation to how they are perceived in the police profession?

Participants

- A strategic and a random selection
- 36 Swedish professional police officers who began their police education and training program in January 2011 (Phase1) and completed there program in January 2013 (Phase 2) and work as police officers since 2,5 – 3 years
- Strategic selection
- 18 women and 18 men
- 6 female and 6 male participants from the each educational location in Sweden (Växjö, Sörentorp & Umeå)
- Random sample from each selected groups

Method and implementation

- Mixed methods
- Interviews with a initial quantitative data collection (survey)
- IBM SPSS Statistics 24, software for statistical calculations
- NVivo 11, computer programs for processing of interview data
- Overall question on the relationship education – profession
- Presentation of study results from Phase 1 and Phase 2
- Interview on the results and the reasons for the trend between the beginning and end of the police education and training program

TABLE 1 Items related to competence dimensions

Competence dimensions	Item	
Specific knowledge	1a	Occupation-specific knowledge
	1b	Understanding of rules and regulations
Practical skills	2a	Ability to work independently
	2b	Ability to take initiative
	2c	Ability to lead others
Reflexivity	3a	Tolerance, ability to appreciate different points of view
	3b	Ability to make ethical judgement
	3c	Ability to empathize with the situation of others
	3d	Values and attitudes

The relationship education - profession

Themes and quotations from the interviews

- **Great basic training**

I am very pleased with the training and think it corresponds well to the expectations of the profession, the training provided a good base to stand on, laws, practical skills such as weapons, driving etc. (Interview 14).

- **Relevant content**

Most of it is relevant, the training provided a good base to stand on (Interview 17).

I think that most of the things I studied during the training are relevant, I have had use for them (Interview 26).

The relationship education - profession cont.

Themes and quotations from the interviews

- **Theory vs. Practice**

Yes, but it is more that you learn the practical ability while working as a police officer, it is very theoretical in school (Interview 13)

- **Does not reflect reality**

There are a lot of things in the police training that you put a lot of time into, that you never experience later on. It is not always anchored in reality, in my opinion (Interview 33).

- **Individual vs. Group**

I do not know how much they could see regarding individual skills. Practical implementations take place in groups, rarely individually, but this is also what police work actually looks like, you're usually in a patrol, so you understand the point of it (Interview 29).

Table 2 Mean for each item at Phase 1 and Phase 2

Competence dimensions	Item		Phase 1	Phase 2
			M	M
Specific knowledge	1a	Occupation-specific knowledge	4,38	4,33
	1b	Understanding of rules and regulations	4,54	4,34
Practical skills	2a	Ability to work independently	4,05	3,79
	2b	Ability to take initiative	4,53	4,45
	2c	Ability to lead others	3,97	3,66
Reflexivity	3a	Tolerance, ability to appreciate different points of view	4,62	4,18
	3b	Ability to make ethical judgement	4,62	4,11
	3c	Ability to empathize with the situation of others	4,69	4,26
	3d	Values and attitudes	4, 41	4,12

Specific knowledge

Themes and quotations from the interviews

- **The profession as black or white**

Perhaps, in the beginning of the training program there is the notion of the profession being black or white, but this picture becomes more gray over time. Initially, one thought that perhaps there is a key for what it is to be a police officer and what is expected (Interview 17).

- **The image of the profession**

Probably can't really explain this, but perhaps it was that in the beginning of training I didn't really know what the profession requires (Interview 1).

I had not had any prior experience of the police, so I thought that everything was important (Interview 14).

Specific knowledge cont.

Themes and quotations from the interviews

- **Content and structure**

Most often one studied a subject, and then on to the next lesson which could be something entirely different. It was a bit fragmented. What I lacked in the training was that there was even more of a golden thread (Interview 8).

- **Teaching and examination**

It was almost to the level that, instead of being encouraged and daring to do things it was more that you were almost frightened, you didn't dare to do things, you were afraid of making mistakes (Interview 26).

Practical skills

Themes and quotations from the interviews

- **The image of the profession**

The professional practice shapes - not the training (Interview 1).

I think that just getting out in police work in practice, really gives you get a completely different picture of what it is like to be a police officer (Interview 31).

- **One approach is more correct**

You were never forced to be inventive, there were often set exercises that were to be carried out, yes, like there was a key for what to do. It was not often that there was a flow of creativity (Interview 25).

Practical skills cont.

Themes and quotations from the interviews

- **Teaching designing**

There was not much autonomy in the exercises, most often in groups and we did not do exercises independently in the same way as in the profession (Interview 19).

It's a lot of "no, no don't do this" more than taking own initiative, and we'll see how we solve this as well. It was more like "think about not doing this, this and this" compared to in an initiative-creating environment, perhaps "how can we do this and this and this" (Interview 20).

- **Profession Culture**

You maybe realize that there's a certain hierarchical order of how to work in the police, that there officers and groups, and that you work according to a plan, in which a leader tells you what to do (Interview 7).

Reflexivity

- **Different perceptions**

We were not free-thinking and free-analyzing, we were basically meant to feel and think in a certain way. Otherwise, we were not accepted (Interview 34).

- **Politically correct**

In the beginning, I think, you answer in a way in which you are expected to answer, what is important (Interview 23).

From the start of the training program until now, we are still talking about what is right, what is okay and what is not okay. The fact that there is so much to be politically correct about at the school is a bit entertaining, and that it goes to such a limit, in some way it's a shame and it's wrong to feel and think differently (Interview 18).

Reflexivity cont.

- **The design**

There is a lot of focus on ethics and treating people, and empathy and everything like this during the training program, almost to a point that it felt “well now, this must be enough” (Interview 13).

- **Right or wrong**

Nor can you empathize too much. Because you still need to be professional. It's very important to be empathetic and sympathize with people. But you can't, you still need to be able to relate to it and still work (Interview 32).

Competence dimensions	Item		Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
			M	M	M
Specific knowledge	1a	Occupation-specific knowledge	4,38	4,33	4,42
	1b	Understanding of rules and regulations	4,54	4,34	4,53
Practical skills	2a	Ability to work independently	4,05	3,79	4,08
	2b	Ability to take initiative	4,53	4,45	4,64
	2c	Ability to lead others	3,97	3,66	3,72
Reflexivity	3a	Tolerance, ability to appreciate different points of view	4,62	4,18	4,53
	3b	Ability to make ethical judgement	4,62	4,11	4,47
	3c	Ability to empathize with the situation of others	4,69	4,26	4,36
	3d	Values and attitudes	4, 41	4,12	4,67

Item		The importance for the work as police officer			The extent to which the program contributed		
		Totalt	Män	Kvinnor	Totalt	Män	Kvinnor
1a	Occupation-specific knowledge	4,42	4,39	4,44	3,56	3,33	3,78
1b	Understanding of rules and regulations	4,53	4,28	4,78	4,14	3,94	4,33
2a	Ability to work independently	4,08	4,17	4,00	2,83	2,72	2,94
2b	Ability to take initiative	4,64	4,56	4,72	3,00	3,11	2,89
2c	Ability to lead others	3,72	3,50	3,94	2,56	2,33	2,78
3a	Tolerance, ability to appreciate different points of view	4,53	4,39	4,67	3,47	3,33	3,61
3b	Ability to make ethical judgement	4,47	4,56	4,39	3,61	3,50	3,72
3c	Ability to empathize with the situation of others	4,36	4,44	4,28	3,42	3,44	3,39
3d	Values and attitudes	4,67	4,61	4,72	3,64	3,56	3,72

Conclusions

- Great basic training/education with a for the profession relevant content
- Unclear what the profession requires and what is expected of a police officer
 - in the beginning they believed that everything was important
- The education program provides a simplified picture of the profession
- Professional practice shapes not education and training, through field studies, etc.
- The education is perceived too theoretical and not enough anchored in reality
 - more practice in the education and training program
 - the practical you learn in the profession (internship)
- The teaching was fragmented and divided, lacking a clear red thread
- All are shaped in the same template, a way is more proper, politically correct
- Too much teaching and examination in groups
- No one fails, reduces motivation
- Education context vs. professional context

Thank you for your attention!