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Enhancing Police Integrity

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NCJ 209269

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Measuring police corruption has proven to be a difficult task for researchers. A recent study applied a new approach—rather than focusing on corruption, researchers measured the *integrity* of police officers and their organizations. The tools and techniques the researchers developed for the study can be used by police executives to find out how well officers understand their agency's rules on misconduct as well as their opinions about the seriousness of the different types of misconduct, the appropriate discipline for the misconduct, and their willingness to report the behavior.

What did the researchers find?

An agency's culture of integrity, as defined by clearly understood and implemented policies and rules, may be more important in shaping the ethics of police officers than hiring the "right" people. The cooperation of line officers is essential in detecting breaches of integrity, but concern for the personal welfare of their colleagues discourages many officers from reporting misconduct. Weakening the silencing effect of this concern is vital to enhancing integrity within an agency.

Officers learn to evaluate the seriousness of various types of misconduct by observing their department's behavior in detecting and disciplining it. If unwritten policy conflicts with written policy, the resulting confusion undermines an agency's overall integrity-enhancing efforts.

Through officers' anonymous responses to hypothetical scenarios about misconduct, managers can measure the level of integrity within the department and pinpoint problems involving misconduct. Researchers identified five steps police executives can take to enhance line officer cooperation in reporting misconduct.

What were the study's limitations?

The survey sample overselected municipal police agencies, excluded agencies from the Western and Midwestern parts of the Nation, and included no State police agencies, only one sheriff's agency, and only one county agency.

Carl B. Klockars, Sanja Kutnjak Ivkovich, and Maria R. Haberfeld

Enhancing Police Integrity

About the Authors

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To establish and maintain officer integrity, police administrators may want to look well beyond recruiting persons of good character. By establishing certain integrity-enhancing policies and rules in their agencies, they may be able to imbue their organizations with a culture or environment of integrity (see "How the Researchers Defined Police Integrity" for a discussion of the components of a culture of integrity).

This research is based on responses given by 3,235 officers from 30 law enforcement agencies across the Nation to questions about hypothetical scenarios related to misconduct. Their responses helped the researchers identify and describe those characteristics of a police agency culture that encourage employees to resist or tolerate certain types of misconduct.[1]

The officers were asked to respond anonymously to several questions about the hypothetical scenarios. Analysis of their responses indicated their understanding of agency rules on misconduct, their views about the seriousness of different types of misconduct, their knowledge and opinions

about potential disciplinary measures, and their willingness to report prohibited behavior (see "Measuring Police Integrity").[2]

Managers who use the questions and scenarios and then analyze the responses should be able to answer the following key questions and take action to develop appropriate integrity-enhancing measures:

- **Do officers in this agency know the rules?**
  Action: If they do, fine. Where they don't, teach them.

- **How strongly do they support those rules?**
  Action: If they support them, fine. Where they don't, teach them why they should.

- **Do they know what disciplinary threat this agency makes for violation of those rules?**
  Action: If they do, fine. Where they don't, teach them.

- **Do they think the discipline is fair?**
  Action: If they do, fine. Where they don't, adjust discipline or correct their perceptions.

Do officers know the rules?

Although the three agencies of integrity invested considerable resources in developing rules to guide officer conduct, many officers were not clear on some areas of official policy. For example, in all three departments, more than 10 percent of officers were not certain whether a supervisor who exploited his authority for personal gain would be in violation of official policy. Similarly, nearly 15 percent of officers in two of the agencies of integrity and almost one-third of officers in the third were not aware that a coverup by a police officer of another officer's DUI and minor accident would violate official policy.

In two of the agencies, more than 10 percent of officers did not know that it would be a violation of official policy to fail to arrest a friend on a felony warrant and instead warn him of the warrant's existence. In the third, accepting half-price meals and other small gifts was prohibited on paper but permitted in practice. Contradictions such as this may promote confusion and make it difficult for officers to determine proper policy in other, more consequential areas.

■ **How willing are they to report the misconduct?** Action: If they are willing, fine. Where they are not, find ways of getting them to do so.

The researchers ranked the 30 responding agencies according to their environments of integrity and chose three highly ranked agencies for indepth evaluation and field observations.[3] These were designated "agencies of integrity."

Study findings suggest that an agency's official policy can be undermined by an informal, unwritten version. To avoid this, police managers need to follow the written policy in practice and train officers who are unclear on official policy. Another option, of course, is to change the official policy to fit the practice.

Do officers support the rules?

Although all three departments offered training on the acceptable and unacceptable ways for officers to conduct themselves, researchers found frequent discrepancies between agency values and employee values. They also found minimal instruction on the seriousness of specific types of misconduct.

Officers learned to gauge the seriousness of various types of misconduct by observing their department's diligence in detecting it and disciplining those who engaged in police misconduct. If a department welcomed complaints about misconduct, thoroughly investigated those complaints, and disciplined officers appropriately for the misbehavior, then officers concluded that such misconduct was serious. However, if an agency ignored or

discouraged complaints and failed to investigate or punish officers for such violations, officers learned not to take those violations seriously.

Do officers know what discipline they face for violating the rules?

Discipline plays a central role in conveying the gravity of misconduct by demonstrating what the agency regards as serious. One of the three agencies studied had a strong record of disclosing its disciplinary actions, perhaps because State law[4] requires that the full details of every disciplinary decision, including the internal investigation, be made available upon request.

On the other hand, laws that try to keep disciplinary actions private generally do not succeed. For example, although the disciplinary system in one agency operated under rules supposedly designed to protect personnel decisions from public scrutiny, within hours the media had the full details of any serious disciplinary action. In another, an active underground network spread the details of virtually every high-profile case. Departments that are prohibited from commenting on disciplinary actions

MEASURING POLICE INTEGRITY*

Below are the hypothetical cases of misconduct used in the research. They deal with corrupt behavior as well as common defects in integrity, such as discourtesy to civilians, abuse of arrest discretion, and use of excessive force.

Selected scenarios

Case 1. An officer runs his own private business in which he sells and installs security devices, such as alarms, special locks, etc. He does this work during his off-duty hours.

Case 2. An officer stops a motorist for speeding. The officer agrees to accept a personal gift of half of the amount of the fine in exchange for not issuing a citation.

Case 3. An officer is widely liked in the community, and on holidays, local merchants and restaurant and bar owners show their appreciation for his attention by giving him gifts of food and liquor.

Case 4. An officer discovers a burglary of a jewelry shop. The display cases are smashed and it is obvious that many items have been taken. While searching the shop, he takes a watch worth about two days' pay for that officer. He reports that the watch had been stolen during the burglary.

Case 5. An officer has a private arrangement with a local auto body shop to refer the owners of cars damaged in accidents to the shop. In exchange for each referral, he receives a payment of 5 percent of the repair bill from the shop owner.

Case 6. An officer who happens to be a very good auto mechanic is scheduled to work during coming holidays. A supervisor offers to give him these days off if he agrees to tune up his supervisor's personal car. Evaluate the supervisor's behavior.

Case 7. At 2 a.m., an officer who is on duty is driving his patrol car on a deserted road. He sees a vehicle that has been driven off the road and is stuck in a ditch. He approaches the vehicle and observes that the driver is not hurt but is obviously intoxicated. He also finds that the driver is a police officer. Instead of reporting the accident and offense, he transports the driver to his home.

Case 8. An officer finds a bar on his beat that is still serving drinks a half-hour past its legal closing time. Instead of reporting this violation, the officer agrees to accept a couple of free drinks from the owner.

Case 9. Two officers on foot patrol surprise a man who is attempting to break into an automobile. The man flees. They chase him for about two blocks before apprehending him by tackling him and wrestling him to the ground. After he is under control, both officers punch him a couple of times in the stomach as punishment for fleeing and resisting.

Case 10. An officer finds a wallet in a parking lot. It contains the amount of money equivalent to a full day's pay for that officer. He reports the wallet as lost property, but keeps the money for himself.

Case 11. An officer is aware that there is a felony warrant for a long-time friend of his. Although he sees his friend frequently over a period of more than a week and warns his friend of its existence, he does not arrest him.

Case 12. An officer who was severely beaten by a person resisting arrest has just returned to duty. On patrol, the officer approaches a person standing in a dimly lit alley. Suddenly, the person throws a gym bag at the officer and begins to run away. The officer fatally shoots the person, striking him in the back. It was later determined that the person was unarmed.

Case 13. In responding with her male partner to a fight in a bar, a young female officer receives a black eye from one of the male combatants. The man is arrested, handcuffed, and as he is led into the cells, the male member of the team punches him very hard in the kidney area saying, "Hurts, doesn't it."

Case 14. An officer stops a motorist for speeding. As the officer approaches the vehicle, the driver yells, "What the hell are you stopping me for?" The officer replies, "Because today is 'Arrest an Asshole Day.'"

Case 15. An officer arrests two drug dealers involved in a street fight. One has a large quantity of heroin on his person. In order to charge them both with serious offenses, the officer falsely reports that the heroin was found on both men.

Case 16. A sergeant, without intervening, watches officers under his supervision repeatedly strike and kick a man arrested for child abuse. The man has previous child abuse arrests. Evaluate the sergeant's behavior.

MEASURING POLICE INTEGRITY (CONTINUED)

Case scenario assessment questions

Please answer the following questions about each scenario:

1. How serious do **you** consider this behavior to be?

Not at all serious				Very serious
1	2	3	4	5

2. How serious do **most police officers in your agency** consider this behavior to be?

Not at all serious				Very serious
1	2	3	4	5

3. Would this behavior be regarded as a violation of official policy in your agency?

Definitely not				Definitely yes
1	2	3	4	5

4. If an officer in your agency engaged in this behavior and was discovered doing so, what if any discipline do **you** think **should** follow?

1. None
2. Verbal reprimand
3. Written reprimand
4. Period of suspension without pay
5. Demotion in rank
6. Dismissal

5. If an officer in your agency engaged in this behavior and was discovered doing so, what if any discipline do **you** think **would** follow?

1. None
2. Verbal reprimand
3. Written reprimand
4. Period of suspension without pay
5. Demotion in rank
6. Dismissal

6. Do you think **you** would report a fellow police officer who engaged in this behavior?

Definitely not				Definitely yes
1	2	3	4	5

7. Do you think **most police officers in your agency** would report a fellow police officer who engaged in this behavior?

Definitely not				Definitely yes
1	2	3	4	5

*Adapted from "Measuring Police Integrity," ©Klockars, Kutnjak Ivkovic, and Haberfeld, 1998. Reprinted with permission.

or that refuse to do so, considering them to be protected personnel matters, may create suspicions outside and inside the agency and thereby compromise police integrity.

In all three agencies, most officers agreed on the expected and appropriate discipline, particularly for serious offenses, and the researchers found that after the discipline was handed down, most officers had correctly interpreted their agency's disciplinary threat. Most of the official violations on record, however, were less serious. How do officers form their opinions of the expected and appropriate discipline for less serious offenses—those the department rarely or never addresses?

The answer to that question lies in two processes found to be at work in these agencies—how departments accept and investigate complaints of misconduct and the severity with which they address less serious misconduct.

Receiving citizen complaints. All three departments welcomed citizen complaints, often went to great lengths to receive them, and seriously reviewed and investigated them. Officers reported that their agencies gave undue attention to trivial complaints, but none believed that their department would allow a complaint of officer misconduct to be ignored or go unpunished if sustained. The seriousness with which the three departments responded to minor violations left no doubt in officers' minds that their departments would not hesitate to take severe disciplinary action in response to serious violations.

Disciplining less serious misconduct. The survey of 30 police agencies revealed a consensus on the relative rank ordering of the seriousness of various forms of misconduct. This consensus implies that even when no actual incidents are available as examples, officers understand that: (1) more serious offenses will be disciplined more harshly; and (2) less serious misconduct also will be disciplined accordingly.

Lessons learned. The researchers identified two practices that they believe enhance integrity. The first is to consistently address relatively minor offenses with the appropriate discipline. From this, officers may infer that major offenses, too, are likely to be disciplined.

The second recommended practice is to disclose the disciplinary process and resulting discipline to public scrutiny. Sunshine laws may be a potent deterrent to both individual and organizational inclinations to conceal misconduct.[5]

Do officers think discipline is fair?

Disciplinary severity in 2 of the 3 agencies was among the highest of the 30 agencies surveyed, yet most officers in these agencies thought the prescribed discipline was fair (even though the actual discipline imposed differed somewhat from what was expected). The degree of discipline each organization could impose sometimes was limited by court decisions that overturned or reduced disciplinary

decisions on appeal. Administrators must carefully balance passion for integrity with concern for morale, since every appeal that reverses or reduces a disciplinary decision potentially alters officers' views about what is expected of them.

In all three agencies, officers observed inconsistencies in discipline.

How willing are officers to report misconduct?

The survey results suggest that, more than any other factor, concern for the welfare of their peers led officers to refrain from reporting the misconduct of other officers.

Officers shielded a colleague willingly if the misconduct occurred for what they perceived to be good reasons, such as sleeping on duty because a sick spouse or child prevented an officer from getting enough sleep. On the other hand, officers reluctantly concealed misconduct they perceived to be irresponsible, chronic, or exploitative, such as sleeping on duty because of excessive partying or off-duty employment. Only when another officer's exploitation of their support became unbearable,

chronic, or put their own position at risk, would officers alert a supervisor to the misconduct. Even then, they sought to conceal their identities.

Although this concern for colleagues can explain officers not reporting serious misconduct, this was not the case in the three agencies studied. The researchers believe that the relative success these agencies had in encouraging officers to come forward derived from five strategies used to weaken officers' tendency not to report misconduct:

■ They made it explicit that they would discipline either an officer's failure to report a colleague's misconduct or a supervisor's failure to discipline an errant officer.

■ They fired any officer caught lying during a misconduct investigation, no matter how minor the offense under investigation. This action was highly valued because of its dampening effect on officers' willingness to conceal a peer's misconduct.

■ One agency rewarded officers who reported their colleagues' misconduct and, to avoid repercussions and possible antagonism from fellow officers, kept these rewards secret.

■ They allowed anonymous and confidential reporting.

■ Because the loyalty and support that officers come to expect from one another can be a source of the failure to report misconduct, the agencies sought to prevent the bond among officers from becoming too strong. To do this, two agencies regularly rotated new supervisors between service areas, patrol districts, and patrol teams. One agency also introduced racial, ethnic, gender, educational, political, cultural, religious, and generational diversity into the department.

How can police managers enhance integrity?

An organization cannot safely presume that all employees possess moral courage and good character. Nor can it presume that all of those individuals who do possess these qualities will be strong enough to resist the temptation to break or bend the rules or to disregard the bonds that form between peers.

With this in mind, the researchers identified several factors they believe foster integrity within a police department.

Integrity is driven by an organization's culture. To encourage officer adherence to rules of conduct, law enforcement agencies may find adopting the view that integrity is an organizational or occupational responsibility is more effective than emphasizing personal ethics or morality. The researchers believe that this places direct responsibility for officer integrity on police administrators, obligating them to create and sustain an organizational culture of integrity.

The rules governing misconduct should be specified and officers trained in their application. The researchers also believe that an effective way to educate both the police and the public is to disclose the entire disciplinary process to maximum public scrutiny.

How police managers detect, investigate, and discipline misconduct will show officers how serious they consider the misconduct to be. In choosing levels of discipline, police administrators should understand the educational consequences of their disciplinary acts.

Administrators should *expressly* require all officers to report misconduct.
This will reduce the likelihood that they will keep silent about their peers' misconduct. Managers must clearly state that any officer who lies during the course of an internal investigation will be fired. A guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality as well as rewards to officers who come forward to report the misconduct of their peers may cause more of them to do so. By encouraging diversity within the force, rotating assignments, and changing officer assignments following their promotions, managers can discourage the bonds that lead to officers covering up misconduct.

Notes

[1] The types of misconduct identified by the researchers are discussed in "Measuring Police Integrity," above. Also see Klockars, C.B., S. Kutnjak Ivkovich, W.E. Harver, and M.R. Haberfeld, *The Measurement of Police Integrity,* NIJ Research in Brief, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, May 2000, NCJ 181465.

[2] For a detailed discussion of the study's methodology, see Klockars et al., *The Measurement of Police Integrity*: 4–5.

[3] Field observations included identifying how the three agencies defined, detected, investigated, and disciplined misconduct and examining how the agencies addressed officers' reluctance to report other officers' misconduct.

[4] This refers to Florida's Government-in-the-Sunshine law. For more information, see www.myfloridalegal.com/sunshine.

[5] Sunshine laws tend to give greater access to public records. Some States prohibit or precisely describe what can be released and when it can be released.

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