MASTER THESIS [ABSTRACT]

DETERMINANTS OF ROLE CONFLICT AND ROLE AMBIGUITY OF OPERATIONAL EXPERT COMMUNITY POLICING OFFICERS

An evaluative study of the role of OE CPO in the eastern regional unit of the National Police

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Preface

This study was commissioned by the eastern regional unit of the National Police. Due to the fact that the findings of this study might affect and disturb policy implications, the complete version will remain confidential for the period of one year. Therefore, not all findings of this study are reported in this abstract. The confidentiality period was agreed upon by the researcher, both UT supervisors and the examination board of the Faculty of Behavioral, Management and Social Sciences (BMS).

I would like to thank my supervisors of both the UT and the National Police for their never ending support and help. I would also like to thank Okke Stam for the cooperation during this study.

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1 – Introduction

The Dutch police organization has seen significant changes over the last years. The establishment of the National Police was the biggest reorganization of a public institution ever in the Netherlands. Since January 1st 2013, the Dutch police has become one national organization, instead of twenty-five regional organizations. Relatively small robust base teams give purpose to the tasks of policing in the Netherlands. Multiple base team are present within a broader district, and multiple districts form one regional unit. The base teams are purposively set up in a small way in order to align the priorities for the respective geographical area efficiently. The police has a large set of responsibilities, but the main approach to policing is based on the community. This form of policing is called community policing.

There are different role that work in a way through the approach of community policing. A substantive amount of officers work most of their time on the streets within their community, this role is called the senior community policing officer. These officers are supported by Operational Specialists (OS-A), Operational Expert Community Policing Officers (OE CPO) and assistants. Chapter two elaborates on the organization of the National Police and its roles. This study mainly focuses on the role of the OE CPO. In general, the main task of the OE CPO is to support the Senior CPO with their work, engage in networking with relevant actors, and to deal with public safety issues through a more analytical approach. Within each robust base team there is a high degree of policy freedom regarding the role of OE CPO. Every base team is able to shape this role in the way they want. There are only some boundaries who are established on a national scale.

This study was commissioned by the eastern regional unit of the National Police. This unit has no clear overview of the backgrounds of all OE CPO's, the approach to their work and to what extent problems are present. Based upon previous research, the proposition is made that OE CPO's experience serious amounts of role conflict and role ambiguity. Both factors are strongly associated with negative outcomes. The goal of this study is threefold. The first goal of this study is to provide the National Police with a descriptive overview of the role of the OE CPO in the eastern regional unit. The second goal is to measure the amount of perceived role ambiguity and role conflict of operational expert community policing officers within the eastern regional unit of the National Police. As stated before, previous research suggest that the ambiguities and conflicts (with other roles) of the role of OE CPO leads to strife within base teams. The third goal is to identify which factors explain possible differences of the amount of perceived role ambiguity and role conflict among OE CPO's of the eastern regional unit.

In order to provide the National Police with a descriptive overview of the role of the OE CPO some sub questions have been formulated;

1) *How do personal backgrounds of OE CPO's differ in terms of years of experience as an OE CPO, years of service with the (National) Police and previous roles?*

2) *To what extent have initiatives with regards to education and training been organized within the base teams?*

3) *What additional tasks are being conducted by OE CPO's and to what extent is this in line with the demands of the role as stated in the LFNP?*

4) *How are tasks between multiple OE CPO's within one robust base team divided?*

To give purpose to the remaining two goals of this study, the following main research question has been formulated:

"To what extent do Operational Expert Community Policing Officers in the eastern regional unit of the National Police perceive role conflict and role ambiguity, and what factors explain these perceptions?"

2 – Role Conflict Theory

The concept of role conflict has been studied extensively over the last decades. The study conducted by Kahn et al. (1964) aimed to explore the extent of role- conflict and ambiguity in an industrial setting, and tried to identify which situations are typically characterized by a high degree of role- conflict and ambiguity (Kahn, Wolfe, & Quinn, 1964). According to Kahn et al., (1964) role conflict can be conceptualized in two ways; 'in terms of the opposition of sent role pressures (objective), and in terms of the opposition of role forces (subjective) (Kahn e.a., 1964, p. 2:12). But they point out that the former creates the latter, and therefore they are primarily interested in the former. This form of 'sent role conflict' is defined by Kahn et al. as [...] ''the simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult or render impossible compliance with the other'' (Kahn e.a., 1964, p. 2:11). These 'pressures' can occur in many ways within an organization, for example that the wishes of someone's superior are conflicting with those of his subordinates (Kahn e.a., 1964).

One of the most prominent studies on both role conflict and role ambiguity was conducted by Rizzo et al (1970). Both concepts were measured by using a novel scale. The concept of role conflict was measured by 8 items on a five-point Likert-scale. Among many others, Bedeian and Armenakis (1981) used the scale developed by Rizzo et al. (1970) for the purpose of their study. Their study found that both role- conflict and ambiguity were associated with high levels of job-induced tension (Bedeian & Armenakis, 1981). Their study also found that both concepts are directly related to low levels of job satisfaction. According to Bedeian and Armenakis (1981), role- conflict and ambiguity are of even greater importance than expected, on both direct and indirect effects of job attitudes. The consequences of role conflict as mentioned above were all negative. Ortqvist and Wincent's (2006) study is one of the few to emphasize a positive consequence of role conflict. According to them, role conflict may lead to a higher level of creativity when people try to resolve differences in their expectations (Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006).

In the previous parts the main characteristics of role conflict, previous research, and effects of role conflict were discussed. The concluding part of this paragraph will focus on some conceptualizations of role conflict and how role conflict will be conceptualized for the purpose of the present study. Katz and Kahn (1978) define role conflict as followed; ''Role conflict occurs when there is incompatibility between the expected set of behaviors perceived by the focal person and those perceived by role senders'' (Katz & Kahn, 1978). According to Kabiri, Hughes and Schweber (2012, p. 1), role conflict occurs ''when a person faces different and incompatible expectations regarding a particular social status which they occupy''. Schulz (2013) used the

definition of role conflict as presented by Ortqvist and Wincent (2006) in their study. They conceptualize role conflict as a situation which ''occurs when various individuals hold different role expectations and impose pressures towards different kinds of behavior'' (Schulz, 2013, p. 468). For the purpose of this study the following conceptualization formulated by Peterson et al. (1995) will be used;

> Role conflict is incompatibility between the expectations of parties or between aspects of a single role (Peterson e.a., 1995)

3 – Role Ambiguity Theory

Just as the concept of role conflict, Kahn et al. (1964) distinguish an objective- and a subjective form of role ambiguity; ''objective ambiguity is a condition of the environment and subjective is a perceptual-cognitive state of the person'' (Kahn e.a., 1964, p. 2:15). Just as with the concept of role conflict, the former creates the latter (Kahn e.a., 1964). The concept of (role) ambiguity assumes the availability of a certain amount of information to a person. For instance, a person needs a certain amount of information about the expectations of their role in order to know whether to conform to these expectations (Kahn e.a., 1964). Some of these expectations are the rights, duties and the responsibilities that are inherent to the role. And additionally, a person must know how their activities will sufficiently fulfill these responsibilities (Kahn e.a., 1964). If a person does not know the authority of their role, what accomplishments are expected and how their functioning will be judged, this will ultimately lead to hesitation in decision making (Rizzo e.a., 1970). Rizzo et al. (1970) point out that ''every position in a formal organizational structure should have a specified set of tasks or position responsibilities'' (Rizzo e.a., 1970, p. 151). According to Rizzo et al. (1970) subordinates will try to meet the expectations of their role by trial and error, when these expectations are not clear to them and when they do not know how their functioning will be judged.

Tubre and Collins' (2000) study on role ambiguity found that efforts to reduce role ambiguity could have an impact on job performance, but they note that the perception of role ambiguity and job performance of people influences each other. It may so be, that persons with a high perception of role ambiguity are actually performing better than they perceive (Tubre & Collins, 2000). Tubre and Collins (2000) also point out that people who work more complex jobs are expected to experience more detrimental effects of role ambiguity. This can be explained by the fact that role ambiguity is an inherent component of more complex jobs (Hamner & Tosi, 1974; Schuler, 1975).

Örtqvist and Wincent (2006, p. 399) state that role ambiguity is "comprised of uncertainty what actions to take to fulfill the expectations of the role". Grobelna (2001) combines two different conceptualizations of role ambiguity for the purpose of her study. The first part contains elements as used by Grant et al. (2001), the second part elements used by Babin and Boles (1996). The combination of these two conceptualizations will be used as the working definition of role ambiguity for the purpose of this study.

Role ambiguity is a stressful condition due to employees' confusion concerning expectations of what their responsibilities are, and lack of information regarding appropriate actions in a given situation or not understanding the expectations of management (Grobelna, 2001)

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4 - Determinants of Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity

The role of the Operational Expert Community Policing Officer can be described as a hybrid professional role (Meurs & Visch, 2018). A hybrid professional role is a role that is neither professional, nor managerial; it is a combination of both (Noordegraaf & Siderius, 2016). The traditional discrepancy between these two types of roles is becoming less certain. This makes it necessary for individuals working in a hybrid professional role to adapt to the circumstances (Noordegraaf, 2007). According to Noordegraaf (2007), this is especially relevant for roles within the public domain. Since this domain is inherently ambiguous. The OE CPO can act as both a professional, and as a manager. In principle, the OE CPO serves as a community policing officer. But the OE CPO also serves as a manager for the men and woman working as Senior CPO's. Based on previous research some propositions regarding the role of the OE CPO are presented in this paragraph. Some possible determinants of the amount of role conflict and role ambiguity are identified and hypothesized.

Based on the previous work, some possible determinants of role conflict and role ambiguity were identified. The first possible determinant of refers to the approach to the role of OE CPO. Community policing in the Netherlands is based upon geographical segregation between senior CPO's. Previous research indicated that sometimes the same geographical segregation is used by OE CPO's, but there are also indications that OE CPO's work through a thematic approach which is nog geographically segregated. This latter notion might lead to higher levels of role conflict and role ambiguity **(H1 & H2)**.

The background of OE CPO's may vary strongly. Based on Meurs and Kreulen's (2017) study the proposition is made that OE CPO's with a background as a supervisor experience

higher levels of role conflict and role ambiguity **(H3 & H4)**. Experience is another possible determinant of role conflict and role ambiguity. The proposition is made that OE CPO's that work in their current role for three or more years, experience a lesser amount of role conflict and role ambiguity than OE CPO's who work in their current role for two or less years **(H5 & H6)**. The remaining two hypotheses are based upon the proposition that OE CPO's tasked with personnel management experience higher levels of role conflict and role ambiguity than those who are not tasked with the so-called *p-zorg*. Internal memo's state explicitly that personnel management is not a task of the OE CPO. Contrary to this, studies show that this in some cases OE CPO's are tasked with personnel management (Meurs & Visch, 2018; Terpstra, 2016). Based on the determinants identified and the made propositions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1:   The perceived amount of role conflict among OE CPO's working with a thematic approach is higher than OE CPO's that work with another approach.

H2:   The perceived amount of role ambiguity among OE CPO's working with a thematic approach is higher than OE CPO's that work with another approach.

H3:   The perceived amount of role conflict among OE CPO's with a background as a supervisor is higher than OE CPO's with another background.

H4:   The perceived amount of role ambiguity among OE CPO's with a background as a supervisor is higher than OE CPO's with another background.

H5:   The perceived amount of role conflict among OE CPO's with three or more years of experience as an OE CPO is lower than OE CPO's with two or less years of experience.

H6:   The perceived amount of role ambiguity among OE CPO's with three or more years of experience as an OE CPO is lower than OE CPO's with two or less years of experience.

H7:   The perceived amount of role conflict among OE CPO's tasked with personnel management is higher than OE CPO's who are not tasked with personnel management.

H8:   The perceived amount of role ambiguity among OE CPO's tasked with personnel management is higher than OE CPO's who are not tasked with personnel management.

5 – Methodology

The present study focuses on all OE CPO's who are working within the eastern regional unit (N = 113). Data was collected through an online questionnaire, which was created and distributed using the Qualtrics services. The questionnaire was accessible for two weeks, with one reminder via email after one week. The response rate was 66.4%, resulting in 75 valid responses. The first part of the questionnaire contained questions which focused upon the background of the OE CPO. For instance, their previous role within the police, years of experience, years of experience as an OE CPO, their additional responsibilities and the approach to their work. The second part focused on measuring the dependent variables of role conflict and role ambiguity. Both concepts were measured using Rizzo et al's (1970) scale. With a Cronbach's alpha score of respectively .802 and .747, both instruments proved to be reliable measures. Table 1 shows each item within both measures.

Role Conflict	Role Ambiguity
1. I have to do things that should be done differently.	1. I feel certain about how much authority I have.
2. I receive an assignment without the personnel to complete it.	2. There are clear, planned goals and objectives for my role.
3. I have to break a rule or a policy in order to carry out an assignment.	3. I know that I have divided my time properly.
4. I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.	4. I know what my responsibilities are.
5. I work with two or more groups that operate quite differently.	5. I know what is expected of me.
6. I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not by others.	6. Explanation is clear of what has to be done.
7. I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it.	
8. I work on unnecessary things.	

Table 1

The results of the questionnaire were analyzed by using SPSS. The descriptive results are presented in the following paragraph. The hypotheses were tested using the Independent Samples T-test for the variable of role conflict, and the Mann-Whitney U-test for the variable of role ambiguity. For the sake of confidentiality, the results of the hypotheses are not presented in this summary.

6 – Results

From literature the assumption was derived that there is a certain amount of variation in the backgrounds of OE CPO's. The role of the OE CPO was established a little over five years ago. Figure 2 shows the amount of OE CPO's and how many years of experience they have with their role.
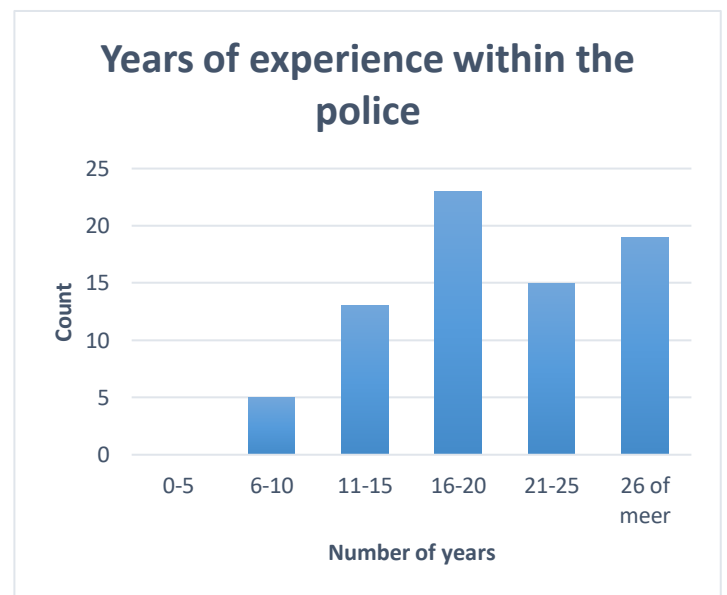

Figure 1

Figure 2

Only 12 of the respondents have been in their role since the establishment of the role. Most of the OE CPO's have been in their role for either two (N=29) or three (N=19) years. This figure shows that the amount of OE CPO's has especially been growing in the last few years, rather than since the establishment of the role. The figure on the right shows the total years of experience within the Police, also before the nationalization. The figure shows that none of the respondents has 5 or less years of experience within the National Police, and only 5 of the respondents has between 6-10 years of experience. Most of the OE CPO's (N=24) has between 16-20 years of experience within the Police, and 19 of the respondents has over 26 years of experience. Only one of the respondents was not working with the Police before starting in their role as an OE CPO. The respondent stated that he or she started as an OE CPO right after graduating from the Police Academy. The figure below is a representation of the backgrounds of other OE CPO's.
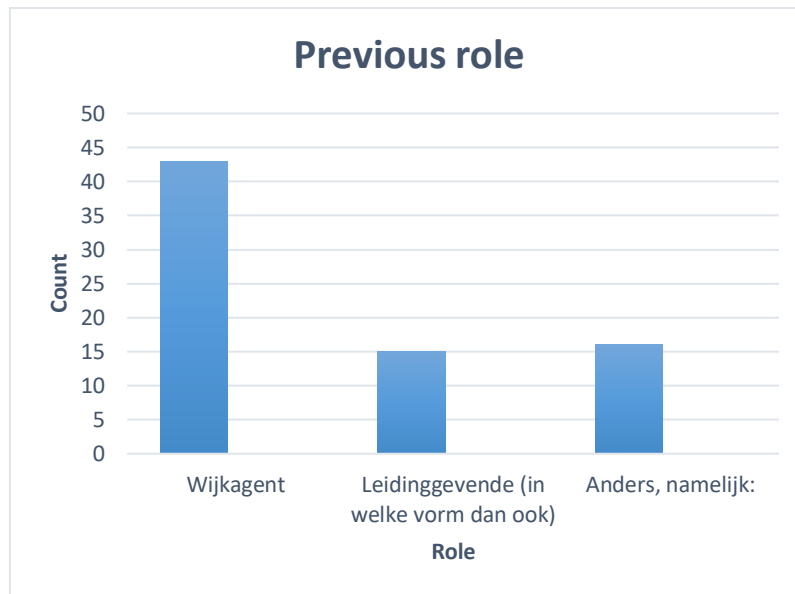
Figure 3

Figure 4 shows that most (N=43) of the OE CPO's were already working within the field of community policing as a regular community policing officer (senior GGP). In the 'old' police organization there was no standardization regarding the names of supervisory roles. Therefore all supervisory roles were counted within the same variable 'leidinggevende'. Only fifteen of the respondents were in a supervisory role before they became an OE CPO. Respondents could use the entry field that comes with the third option. The entries that were made differed in such a way that coding and creating another bar is useless. Some of the entries were 'politiekundige', 'brigadier' and 'basis politiezorg'.

Robust base teams have a certain amount of policy freedom with regards to the role of the OE CPO. However, in the 'LFNP', which was described in chapter 2, there are certain demands to the officer in question and a broad explanation of their tasks and responsibilities. The figure below shows the tasks that OE CPO's perform besides their 'regular' tasks. These possibilities were derived from previous studies, the LFNP and internal memos.
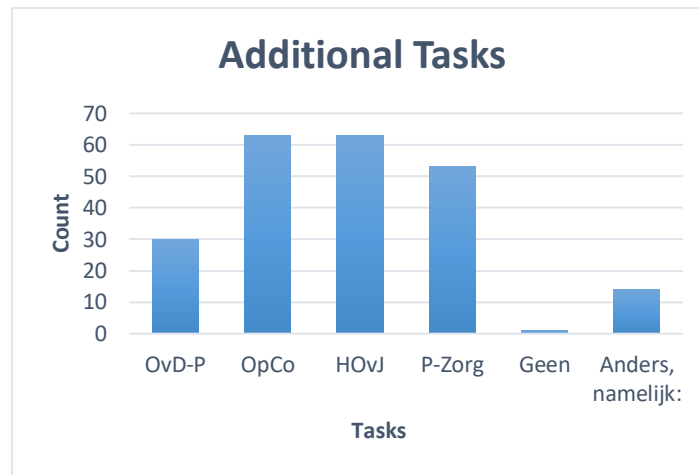
Figure 4

When looking at this figure, it is important to note that respondents could choose more than one option. As we can see, most of the OE CPO's perform tasks as 'Operationeel Coordinator' (N=63) and as 'Hulpofficier van Justitie' (N=63). Also, a vast amount (N=53) performs tasks regarding 'Personeelszorg', or 'Personnel management'. Responsibilities that belong to this task are appraisals, annually evaluations, conversations regarding sick leave of officers and all administrative work that comes with these responsibilities (Terpstra, 2016). The fourth task, 'Officier van Dienst' (OvD-P) is performed by 40% (N=30) of all OE CPO's. In the case of an incident, the OvD-P exercises operational control over involved police officers. In the case some options were missing in the survey, an 'other, namely...' option was made available with an entry field to provide additional information. After adding or deleting duplicate answers to other categories only 14 entries remained. Since there was hardly any consistency among these entries, so no coding took place. Some of the entries contained; 'c-ter' (counter terrorism/radicalization, 'Mobiele Eenheid' (riot police) and 'evenementen' (events).

Derived from literature research and informal talks with employees among several ranks of the National Police, two options on how responsibilities of OE CPO's within a robust base team can be divided were identified. A district consists of multiple robust base teams. These base teams have a certain geographical boundary on which the responsibility is divided. Regular, senior community policing officers always have such a demarcated area for which they hold the responsibility. Therefore, it is a possibility that tasks among OE CPO's within a base team are divided in the same way. However, since there is a variety of possible tasks for OE CPO's. It might also be possible that tasks among OE CPO's are divided as such, in which geographical boundaries not play a role. A combination of both ways was also deemed possible and was thus the third option in the survey question. Figure 6 shows the results of this question.
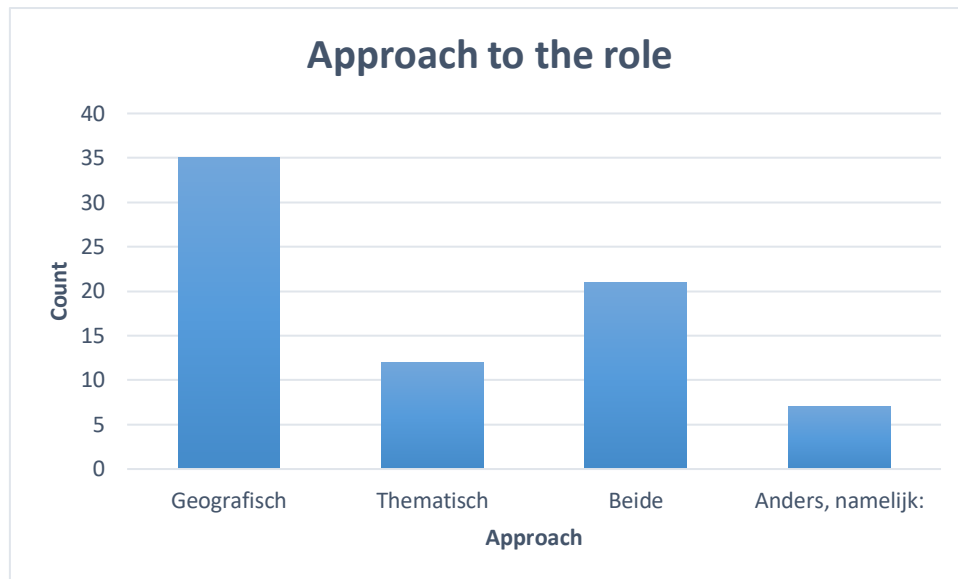
Figure 5

Figure 6 shows that a geographical approach (N=35) of responsibilities is most common with a percentage of 46.7%. The thematic approach (N=12) consists of only 16.0%. A combination of both approaches is present according 28.0% (N=21) of the respondents. The 'other, namely' option did not provide notable new insights.

7 - Conclusion & Discussion

The findings show that OE CPO's differ in terms of background, their approach and their experience. They are often quite experienced police officers, with a background as a community policing officer of as a supervisor. It is interesting to see that only one respondent has a background as a *Politiekundige*. Most of OE CPO's of the eastern regional unit are performing additional tasks like duties as an Operational Coordinator, Assistant Public Prosecutor and Officer on Duty. That is not a surprising find, since these responsibilities are stated as responsibilities of the OE CPO in police documents (Nationale Politie, 2015) and previous studies (Terpstra, 2016). It is however, remarkable that such a large number (N = 53) of OE CPO's perform duties regarding personnel management. This is in contradiction with the boundaries and preset tasks as described by the National Police. Personnel Management is supposed to be a task performed by the Team Chief or the regular Operational Expert. But as Meurs and Visch (2018) stated, within base teams of another regional unit the same unclarity appears to be present.

Because the thesis remains confidential for a period of one year, no results regarding the amount of role conflict and role ambiguity are provided. In addition to this, the outcomes of the statistical tests of the hypotheses are also not reported in this abstract.

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