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Police Leadership 2.0: A comprehensive systematic review of the literature

Abstract

Police are required to operate in complex social, political and organizational environments. Nowadays, challenging times highlight the role that police leaders play in ensuring that the organization is effective in dealing with such environments. The purpose of this paper is to expand the systematic review of literature of Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014) by: (1) including studies after the date considered by the authors; (2) following the PRISMA-P approach to systematic reviews; and (3) include European studies. Based on 7041 records, which ended up in 101 eligible empirical pieces, evidence supports previous findings about what are the characteristics of police leaders and as well as the actions expected by them. This comprehensive systematic review also identifies additional characteristics and actions that are important nowadays in police leadership. Overall, the current study encourages future studies on the thematic, and contributes to practitioners aiming to develop continuous improvement strategies inside the police.

1. Introduction

Police operate in complex social and political environments (Casey & Mitchell, 2007). Police leaders need to have the competences to handle these challenging environments (Borges, 2013). Nowadays, numerous challenges are being posed to police leaders, namely new technologies like body worn cameras (Löfstrand & Backman, 2021; Farrar & Southerland, 2015), reputational crisis like black lives

matter (Washington & Henfield, 2019), and social crisis due to COVID-19 (Maskály et al., 2021). As organizational reforms take place within the police (Powell & Worrall, 2021), it is of special interest to reconduct a systematic review to address the updated profile of police leaders in terms of their competencies and expected actions. But what is leadership? Leadership is one of those concepts that are very hard to define. This article aligns with Broadbeck (2001) which defines leadership is seen as the ability to persuade, inspire, and empower individuals (and groups) to contribute towards the achievement of organizational goals. The current study takes the challenge to update the systematic review conducted by Pearson-Goff & Herrington (2014) by including recent studies and investigation from other geographic areas, namely Europe which was not analyzed so far.

2. Methodology

A systematic literature review is a review of “a clearly formulated question that uses systematic and explicit methods to identify, select, and critically appraise relevant research and to collect and analyze data from the studies that are included in the review” (Moher et al., 2009, p. 264). The current systematic literature review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Moher et al., 2015). The PRISMA approach entails and a four-phase flow diagram, which were used to report our results (see Figure 1).

In line with Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014) systematic review, we consider research from the USA, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. To expand their work, we also consider research from European countries. We ended up with

eligible research from 14 European countries, i.e., Germany, Belgium, Slovenia, Spain, Finland, France, Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Sweden, and Ukraine.

2.1. Search terms

The search action was conducted using the following databases: Emerald, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, SAGE, Ebsco, Springer, and European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL).

Table 1 shows the terms used to search in the databases adopted as in line with Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014) terms. Also aligned with the authors, “truncations were used to search multiple iterations of a particular word stem. Tier one retrieved literature relating to police organizations, as opposed to other public or private sector organizations; tier two aimed to find leadership-related literature. Systematic searches involved pairing each work in tier one with each word in tier two and searching in the title, abstract, and keyword fields.” (page 2).

Table 1. Systematic review search items.

Tier 1: target items	Tier 2: leadership and associated items
Police	Leader*
Policing	Commissioner
Law enforcement	Manag*
	Executive
	Senior
	Administrat*

2.2. Selection criteria

A number of criteria were specified to gather the most relevant studies. In all databases, we only included peer-reviewed articles, published in English, and with a time period between January 2013 and September 2021. Articles also had to fulfil the two criteria defined below.

- Be an empirical article.
- Be published in a peer-reviewed journal. This criterion was used since peer-reviewed journals are considered as most reliable sources of scientific information.

2.3. Study selection

We began by screening the titles of all the retrieved articles for eligibility. Those articles that didn't match with the above-mentioned criteria were eliminated. In the next step, the abstracts were screened for eligibility, and finally the full text of the remaining publications were checked. All articles deemed relevant were further coded as follows: name of authors; title; year; country; source; type of study; document type; research questions; theoretical approach (if any); study methodology; sample (N); mentioned skills; mentioned actions; results and conclusions. This procedure (data extraction) is part of the content-analysis process to make an overview of the characteristics of the articles included in this research.

3. Findings

3.1. PRISMA flowchart

Considering the selection criteria defined, 7041 articles were identified from the databases (see figure 1). Out of 7041, 519 duplicates were removed which means that 6522 articles were screened. After title / abstract screening, 1391 were eligible for full text screening. There were three reasons for final exclusion: (1) being out of topic; (2) not being empirical articles; and (3) exclude on country, i.e., research that was not developed in Europe, USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. The current systematic review ended up with a total of 101 eligible records. Table 2 displays the breakdown of the 101 studies by country and year of publication. Table 3 shows the breakdown of study methodology.

Figure 1. Review flow according to PRISMA-P criteria

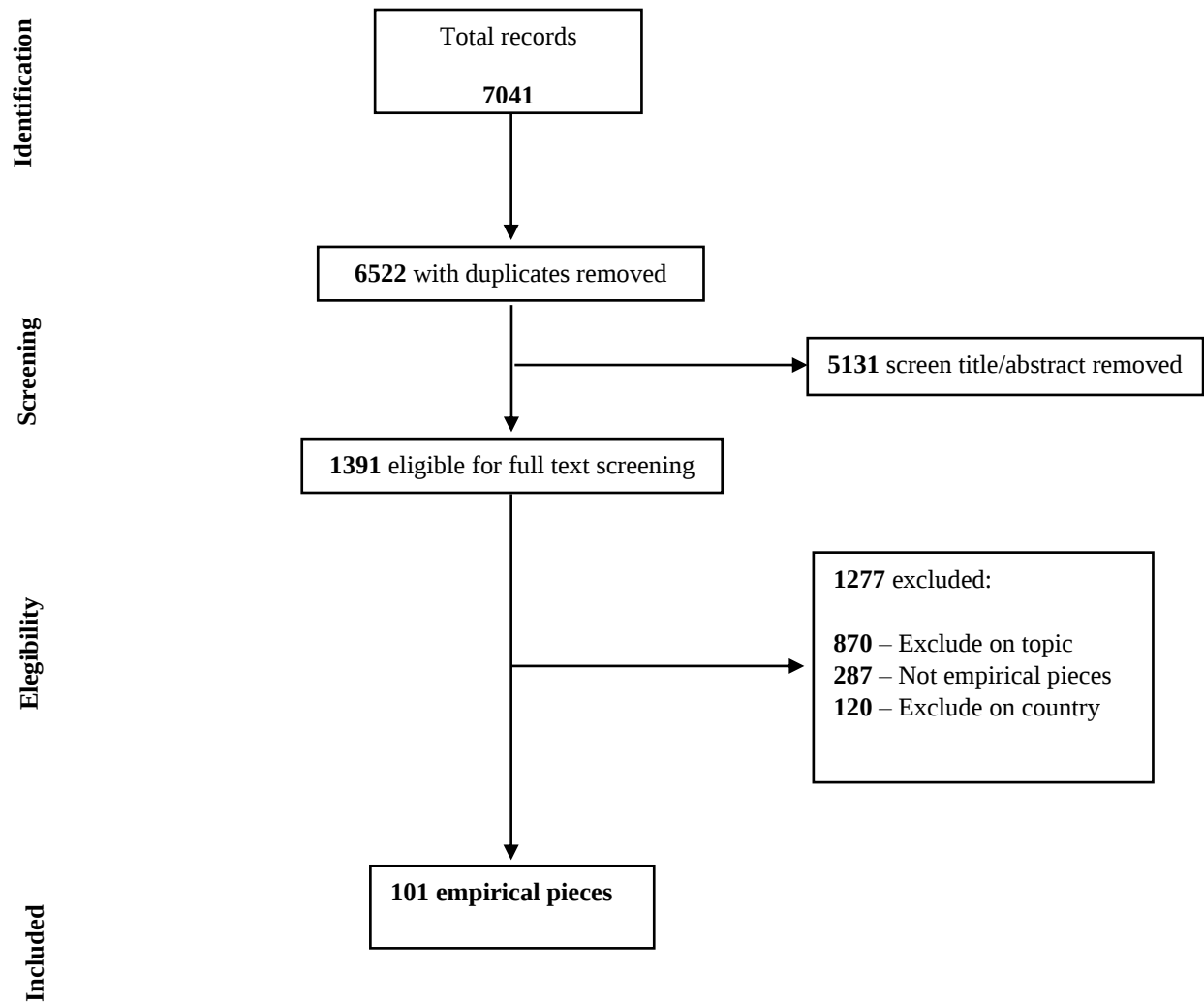


Table 2. Breakdown of studies by country and year of publication

Year of publication	Country				
	USA	Canada	Australia	New Zealand	Europe
2013-2017	29	1	2	0	21
2018-2021	27	4	2	0	27

Note: European countries include: Germany ($n = 3$), Belgium ($n = 3$), Slovenia ($n = 1$), Spain ($n = 3$), Finland ($n = 1$), France ($n = 1$), Netherlands ($n = 7$), United Kingdom ($n = 16$), Ireland ($n = 1$), Italy ($n = 2$), Norway ($n = 2$), Poland ($n = 1$), Sweden ($n = 2$), Ukraine ($n = 1$), multiple countries ($n = 4$).

Table 3. Breakdown of study methodology.

Methodology	Total no. of studies
Survey	66
Interviews	10
Mixed methods	14
Content Analysis	2
Observational study	3
Case study	10
Secondary data Analysis	6

3.2. Selection bias

To assure quality, a sample of articles was independently coded by a second coder. This procedure has been adopted in previous research (e.g., Laar et al., 2017). We selected a randomized sample of fifteen percent of the articles contained in the final database. The second coder evaluated based on the eligibility criteria and assessed the title, abstract and full text of each article. In the next step we used Cohen's kappa coefficient to measure inter-rater agreement. The inter-rater reliability was 0.76, which shows good agreement between the two coders.

3.3.What are the attributes of police leaders?

Following the literature review conducted, fourteen (14) key attributes/competencies were identified, which are displayed as follows:

Authoritative. This attribute, which stems from a strong military heritage, refers to the ability to respectfully establish relationships of authority and subordination (Meitl et al., 2020). Different from authoritarian, an authoritative leader supervises and sets norms and limits within a positive climate where communication and empathy prevail (Dinham, 2007).

Communicative. Communication emerges as an extremely important attribute associated to police leadership, being tightly linked with the transformational leader profile (Can et al., 2017; Molines et al., 2020). Internally, communication should be fluid and perceived as effective (Breevaart et al., 2015; Pearson-Goff & Herrington, 2014). The crucial role of feedback stands out. This tool is directly related to better organizational performance (Audenaert et al., 2021). Overall, a good communication flow, where not only leaders but also subordinates make themselves heard, is highly beneficial. It facilitates the sharing of important information and problem solving (Petrou et al., 2016).

Effective (decision-making processes). According to the literature, perceived effective decisions are dependent on the leader's ability to articulate with the members of the organization. Such can be achieved, for instance, by developing active listening techniques. In other words, police leaders must listen to what others have to say (Breevaart et al., 2015; Schaveling et al., 2017; Zheng et al., 2021). Paradoxically, the leader's level of autonomy should be equally high (Farr-Wharton et al., 2021; Shortland et al., 2020).

Investigative. Perceived effective decisions are often based on facts and evidence, which oftentimes provide the ability to foresee critical situations. Through investigation tools, police leaders may more rapidly advance with a prior response to address adversity. That said, analysis and intervention skills are fundamental to the exercise of strategic leadership (Lumsden & Goode, 2018; Mitchell & Lewis, 2017; Movchan & Taranukha, 2018; Telep, 2017).

Strategic. Inseparable from the previous attribute is the ability to think strategically. According to previous literature, police leaders manifest strategic thinking when (1) they rely on prior knowledge and/or (2) develop up-to-date knowledge that enables to make good and sustained decisions (Eliasson, 2020; Lumsden & Goode, 2018; Movchan & Taranukha, 2018; Viglione, 2019).

Innovative. Openness to what is new is another characteristic of perceived effective police leadership (Davis & Bailey, 2018; Grint et al., 2017; Molines et al., 2020; Whelan, 2016). As Bond-Fortier (2020) mentions, "innovation is needed to reform" (p. 2). To that end, the police leader must foster creative thinking (Loewenberger et al., 2014) and keep up with emerging technological innovations.

Legitimate. Legitimacy is an important attribute that supports the leaders' authority in the organization and in society (Hoggett et al., 2019; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Broadly speaking, the concept of legitimacy is defined as a set of actions that are perceived by others as desirable and appropriate within belief system, norms, and values (Suchman, 1995). Police leaders should be seen as legitimate individuals to make decisions and implement change (Grint et al., 2017).

Ethical. Ethics is perceived in the literature as a strong predictor of police legitimacy. That is because police leaders are required to act with fairness, integrity and honesty, i.e. in line with the organizational values of the Police (Davis & Bailey, 2018; Inzunza et al., 2019; Mitchell & Lewis, 2017). Internally, inclusion is an increasingly valued characteristic (Alderden et al., 2017; Workman-Stark, 2015) and has translated for example into greater integration of female gender members into leadership roles in the organization (Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Veldman, 2017). As a general rule, police leaders' communication with all elements of the hierarchy should be ethical (Dijkstra et al., 2014). Moreover, supervision should be equally ethical and perceived as fair (Bishopp et al., 2016; van Craen & Skogan, 2017). In fact, subordinates exhibit higher levels of satisfaction and better performance when treated fairly (Paoline & Gau, 2020; Reynolds & Helfers, 2018).

Trustworthy. In addition to legitimacy, the ethics of the police leader is directly related to the trustworthiness placed in him/her (Can et al., 2017; Tomažević &

Aristovnik, 2019). The effective police leader is the one who can gain the trust of the community as well as his subordinates who see in their leader an individual with whom they can easily share information (Perez et al., 2017).

Supportive. Caring for subordinates is fundamental, mainly in order to gain trust, increase engagement, and promote organizational cohesion (Biggs et al., 2014; Ingram & Lee, 2015; van Gelderen & Bik, 2016). Given the demands of police duties, the risk, and the physical and psychological consequences associated with them, it is critical that leaders empathize and are proactive in finding solutions for safety and well-being (Emeriau-Farges et al., 2019; Lawrence et al., 2017; Vickovic & Griffin, 2014).

Cooperative. The police leader should be cooperative as this facilitates bridging and developing partnerships with entities outside the organization (Jurek et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2017; O'Neill & McCarthy, 2014). Literature emphasizes partnerships with academia/experts (e.g., Sanders & Langan, 2021) and with elements of the community through participatory citizenship initiatives (e.g., Lee & Zhao, 2016).

Role model. Intrinsically related to a transformational leadership typology, the inspirational leader or role model is a key motivational factor in any organization. By inspiring others with his or her example and charisma, the leader is able to motivate and inspire his or her subordinates, promote group cohesion, and therefore more easily achieve organizational goals (e.g., Álvarez et al., 2014; Batista-Foguet et al., 2021; Cockcroft, 2014; Masal, 2015; McKergow et al., 2016; Molines et al., 2020; Sarver & Miller, 2014).

Emotional Intelligence. Due to the complexity of the police leader's job, which involves solving demanding problems and managing people effectively, it is essential for the police leader to have emotional intelligence to be able to handle what is required. In general terms, the police leader must be able to handle his or her emotions and anticipate

the emotional reactions of subordinates. Likewise, the police officer must be able to identify individual and team needs, improve responsiveness, and therefore improve organizational performance. There is currently a plethora of studies that corroborate the need for an emotionally intelligent police leader (e.g., Arnatt & Beyerlein, 2014; Filstad & Karp, 2020; Inzunza et al., 2019; Murphy, 2015).

Resilient. A crucial attribute, not only associated with leadership profiles but at all hierarchical levels of a police organization, resilience is characterized by the ability to overcome and recover from adversity (Filstad & Karp, 2020). Research specifically focused on the study of resilience as a core attribute of the police (e.g., Farrar, 2017; Vogelvang et al., 2014).

3.4. What are the expected actions of police leaders?

From the literature review, nine activities were identified which effective police leaders engage in. In line with Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014), we recognized the five following actions: creating shared vision; engendering organizational commitment; care for subordinates; driving and managing change; and problem solving.

‘Creating shared vision’ relates to strategies aiming the development and sharing a common vision within the organization. These involve, in major part, communication strategies that help create a sense of purpose for followers (Can et al., 2017; Maskaly et al., 2017; Sarver & Miller, 2014). Related to this was the need for ‘engendering organizational commitment’. Giving support, voice and feedback to subordinates is key to enhance commitment (Rogiest et al., 2015; McKergow & Miller, 2016; Van Gelderen & Bik, 2016).

‘Care for subordinates’ is also an action of effective police leaders, and concerns taking responsibility for subordinates’ well-being, security and providing them with

opportunities for development (Imgram & Lee, 2015; Tomažević & Aristovnik, 2019; Grassi et al., 2018).

Police leaders should be also effective in ‘driving and managing change’. (Workman-Stark, 2015). Lastly, the final action is ‘problem solving’. This action involves collaborative and proactive styles of problem solving (Eitle et al., 2014; Johnson, 2015; Vito & Vito, 2015) to address “complex, interdependent and unforeseen problems” (Pearson-Goff and Herrington, 2014, pp. 5).

Different from Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014), this literature review identified the following actions: data analytics; enhance police interactions with external entities; dealing with leadership adversities; and creating effective action plans.

‘Data analytics’ has been valued for helping make good and sustained decisions. Under the police environment, literature focuses on the support that experts can provide in problem solving processes (Lumsden & Goode, 2018; Movchan & Taranukha, 2018; Telep, 2017). Another important action that has been increasingly valued is the capacity to ‘enhance police interactions with external entities’. These involve community members, governmental and intergovernmental entities. Ultimately, these relations help improve the effectiveness of police leaders and their staff (Sanders & Langan, 2021; O’Neill & McCarthy, 2014; Masal, 2015).

Broadly related to all police members should be the capacity to deal with work adversities. Specifically, ‘dealing with leadership adversities’ is an action of effective police leaders. Literature highlights the need to develop training sessions in resilience (Vogelvang et al., 2014; Farrar, 2017; Ivković, 2015).

Lastly, effective police leaders should ‘create effective action plans’. Related with ‘data analytics’ and ‘problem solving’, this action involves thorough processes that enable the anticipation of problems and effective resolutions (Viglione, 2019; Lone et al., 2017).

3.5. Leadership and rank

In line with Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014), we noted some differences between ranks when it comes to leaders' competences and actions (see table 4 and 5). In other words, competencies and actions differ across different levels at the organization. For instance, senior leadership and middle managers should excel in decision-making, strategic thinking, being ethical and innovative. Executive leaders are more expected to be cooperative. In terms of actions, middle managers should focus on caring for subordinates, while senior leaders excel at creating effective action plans, and driving and managing change. Executive leaders should enhance police interactions with external entities.

Table 4. Breakdown of leader characteristics by sample.

Sample	Characteristics													
	Authoritative	Communicative	Trustworthy	Cooperative	Decision making	Ethical	Innovative	Role Model	Emotional Intelligence	Investigative	Legitimate	Strategic Thinking	Resilient	Supportive
Constable up to Senior Sergeant/Lieutenant						1	1					1		
Middle managers: Captain/Major up to Chief Inspector		1	1		2	2	2							
Senior leaders: Superintendents/Colonel up to Commander					1	1	1					1		1
Executive leaders: Commissioner/Chief /Sheriff		1	1	2		1	1	1						
Mixed Sample: Multiple ranks – no delineation	2	13	7	13	10	30	9	8	7	9	7	10	5	14

Table 5. Breakdown of leader actions by sample.

Sample	Actions								
	Creating shared vision	Engendering organizational commitment	Care for subordinates	Driving and managing change	Problem solving	Data analytics	Enhance police interactions with external entities	Dealing with leadership adversities	Creating effective action plans
Constable up to Senior Sergeant/Lieutenant				2	1				
Middle managers: Captain/Major up to Chief Inspector		1	3	1	1				1
Senior leaders: Superintendents/Colonel up to Commander	1		2	1	1				
Executive leaders: Commissioner/Chief/Sheriff	1	1	1		1		1		
Mixed Sample: Multiple ranks – no delineation	5	20	25	14	20	8	7	7	3

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Findings from the current systematic literature review, which rely on 101 empirical pieces, show that there are fourteen attributes and nine actions that characterize effective police leaders, although effectiveness is not objective, which is indeed one of the limitations of the literature. Overall, the study suggests that, while there is some consensus with the previous literature review conducted by Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014), there are additional characteristics that have emerged due to the challenges faced nowadays by the police.

The new attributes identified include: authoritative; emotional intelligence; investigative; strategic thinking; and resilient. Moreover, four new actions emerged as important for police leadership: data analytics; enhance police interactions with external entities; dealing with leadership adversities; and creating effective action plans.

Nonetheless, we should highlight the key characteristics that were identified by both literature reviews. These have been, for a considerable time, pivotal in police leadership: ethical; trustworthy; legitimate; role model; communicative; effective (in decision-making processes); and thinking ability. Also, the following actions: creating shared vision; engendering organizational commitment; care for subordinates; driving and managing change; and problem solving.

Overall, the current study has numerous contributions. From an academic standpoint, this literature review followed a PRISMA-P approach and considered European studies which are aspects that lacked in the systematic literature review performed by Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014). In line with these authors, we evaluated all leadership levels of the organization which is an aspect that remains largely neglected in leadership research. Indeed, there is still a tendency to view police leaders as an homogeneous group. Moreover, most police studies continue being focused on

subordinate opinion, therefore this study contributes to the police leadership topic that has been understudied. From a practitioner standpoint, our findings demonstrate considerable consensus with ‘leadership competency frameworks’. For instance, the recent *Canadian Police Knowledge Network Report* (Botschner et al., 2020), which identify competencies required in police leadership. Our proposal concerning the police leader characteristics and actions also converge with the US Department of Interior Police Competency Model (US DOI, 2020) which identifies some emerging competencies in upper levels of GS police officers that express those in our framework (e.g. “creative thinking” with “innovative” or “partnering” with “Enhance police interactions with external entities”). Likewise, having opted to describe elements as attributes and actions is also in line with the design of the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (Brekelmans et al., 2005) competency framework which also opts to state competencies with a focus on the required actions (e.g. “Develop a common view on the core tasks of the police in EU co-operation”) thus making them more actionable.

The study is not without limitations. First, although being a small limitation, the second coder could analyze a higher percentage of articles. Second, the current systematic literature review did not include literature from some key geographies. In a way, the current study considered a small sample of articles, given the eligibility criteria. Nonetheless, we included literature from Europe which was not examined earlier.

Future studies could perform a systematic literature review “leadership 3.0” on the topic considering other geographies like Africa or Latin America where cultural idiosyncrasies may shape extant leadership 2.0 findings. In addition, and given the lack of studies, a competency-based approach to police leadership could be further developed in future studies by following a cross-sectional, longitudinal or experimental approaches. Namely,

the impact of competencies on performance and effectiveness at individual, team, and organizational levels.

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