The Psychological Competence of Police Officers in Confidential Cooperation with Citizens

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ABSTRACT

This research studied the psychological aspects of citizens' assistance to law enforcement agencies on a confidential basis. The comprehensive observance of the psychological norms of cooperation is determined by the professional ethics of police officers, the necessity of nondisclosure of investigation secrets by citizens, and the security of the latter without compromising their constitutional freedoms. The research developed means of optimizing police-citizen cooperation, analyzed comprehensively the problems related to the psychological specificity of citizen involvement in confidential cooperation with special investigative agencies, the moral and legal aspects related to the operational methods in the activity of law enforcement agencies, and the psychological and pedagogical training of operational subdivision employees that work with persons who assist in preventing, stopping, solving, and investigating crimes on the confidential basis. By developing the communication and psychological competence of police officers, it is possible to provide for effective investigation that results in public security.

Introduction

The possibility of voluntary citizen cooperation with law enforcement agencies largely depends on the development of the civil and legal culture, which is the foundation of social responsibility. A. Lawton, Z. Van der Wal & L. Huberts (2015) conducted a global study of legal culture, including police ethics, over the past 25 years.

Some studies (Lindberg & Rantatalo, 2014) evaluate the psychological and communication competence of police officers so highly that they compare it to that of doctors. However, other studies (Meine & Dunn, 2013) ask whether it is worth emphasizing ethics and thus further complicating the already complicated professional activity of police officers.

Most modern literature that concerns the professional and communication ethics of police officers emphasize the theory of ethics, which is incapable of

benefiting investigative operations without previous psychological training of police officers and training of skills of cooperation with citizens.

For instance, L. May (1996) argues that professionalism (including that of police officers) is a sphere of constant compromises, which faces a number of problems due to its ethical content, regardless of the sphere of its application. These include the rapidly changing knowledge (caused by the postindustrial information-based environment), partnership, social media that aim to inform the society even at the cost of disclosing investigative information, and the existence in the professional sphere, associated with benefit of the doubt, which leaves police officers no margin for error. Social responsibility predetermines a set of unconditional obligations that the police officers have to observe regardless of the difficulty of their professional actions related to voluntary cooperation.

J. Weber and S. Glyptis (2000) noted that the modeled situation of psychological communication with citizens who voluntarily agreed to cooperate with police officers develops moral motivation in police officer trainees, which becomes the foundation of their worldview and thus best fits the framework of the communication competence of police officers.

However, understanding the essence of moral influence can be very useful (Van Montfort, Beck & Twijnstra, 2013). This aspect was studied in business administration, but it is also an integral part of police management.

Another large part of sources competent in the issues of professional ethics of police officers refers to the results of experiments that were conducted in professional institutions (Bäck, 2015).

For instance, Belgian researchers De Schrijver A. and Maesschalck J. (2015) argue that the effect of police officer socialization and their subsequent employment is extremely undervalued. According to Belgian studies, nowadays police recruits barely pay any attention to communication competence, which may have a negative effect on further investigative operations and harm the investigation. Furthermore, the abovementioned researchers argue that even if police academies train skills of psychological competence, these skills are barely used due to the flawed practical aspect of psychological training: modeling in police educational institutions rarely include real obstacles for communication. However, Scottish researchers disagree with this position (Fenwick, 2015).

Thus, there is a problem of differentiated artificial communication situation, in which the prospective police officer should train skills of psychological competence (that were studied theoretically beforehand) in a real situation as part of investigative operations.

According to C. O'Leary (2009), the convictions of a police officer during his or her development as a personality form in him or her worldview values that can then help to solve moral and ethical dilemmas in communication with citizens that agreed to cooperate with the police. Furthermore, according to another researcher (Jones, 2015), police officers should also develop professional qualities during work.

However, the flaw of studies in this subject is that they do not cover the transitional stage of personality development in a police officer with regard to professional ethics, which includes the time of internship of a police officer or his or her first job. The communication competence with regard to citizens (who

agreed to cooperate on a confidential basis) is a factor that can "set the moral and ethical compass" of a police officer (including in communication with citizens who agreed to cooperate on a confidential basis).

The practical value of this research is that it bridges the gaps that prevent the thorough investigation of the professional competence of police officers in communication aimed at cooperation with citizens.

Purpose

To develop recommendations for improving the psychological competence of police officers that cooperate with citizens on a confidential basis.

Objectives

To distinguish the stages of development of professional and communication competence of police officers who are able to cooperate with citizens on a confidential basis for the benefit of the investigation. To outline the set of essential characteristics of the police officer's profile, which enables discovering communicational professionalism. To develop recommendations for improving the psychological competence of police officers in communication with citizens who agreed to aid the investigation on a confidential basis.

Methods

The methodological framework of this research included the dialectic, formal logical, historical and legal, comparative and legal, statistical, and systems and structural methods of studying social and legal phenomena.

Results

The innovative aspect of this research is that it investigates the previously understudied transitional stage of development of the ethical and worldview attitudes of police officers, which has a significant impact on public security. In addition, it studied the basic (vocational police education) and final (practical use of professional skills) stages of this process.

The results showed that the psychological profile of a communicatively competent police officer consists of a three-dimensional evaluation of the aspects of communication (psychophysical, psychological, and socio-psychological), the ability to predict the results of communication, and the ability to take the individual approach to citizens who agreed to cooperation on a confidential basis. It is worth noting that despite the nonspecific features of this profile, the ability to represent such a professional image is an indicator of the police officer's communicative advantage during the investigation.

The recommendations for improving the psychological competency of police officers include balancing the theoretical and psychological-practical

professional training. In addition, the internship of investigators should include not only artificially modeled act of communication, but also its version that is adapted to reality. The reformation of practical police education in the field of communication can contribute greatly to the psychological competence of police officers who are interested in acquiring information from citizens.

Discussion

The operational and psychological training should be of applied nature (based on the specificity of the operational subdivision's activity) and be aimed at forming and developing (Klimentieva, 2015):

– professional thinking as a foundation of professional mastery;

– skills of managing the mental state in various conditions related to various types of activity (intellectual, organizational, search);

– skills of volitional regulation of behavior and activity in various conditions (complicated, extreme), given the specificity of the problems solved by the subdivision and the worker;

– investigative operations skills related to various types of role behavior, which are based on complete or partial impersonation due to the need to legendizing their belonging to law enforcement agencies in general or a specific operational subdivision;

– skills of taking into consideration the peculiarities of work with agents and the development of special abilities required for involving them in work and training them professionally and psychologically for performing operational assignments;

– professional skills of taking into consideration the psychological peculiarities of work with objects of operational interest, while using the knowledge in the field of practical psychology, aimed at achieving set goals;

– professional knowledge and practical skills in the diagnostics of false data (ability to detect lies and insincere behavior by various signs) and the development of the ability to detect behavioral manipulation in various categories of citizens, with a view to neutralizing it or using it in the interests of the investigation.

Furthermore, effective communication theoretically includes relevant measurements in a three-dimensional coordinate system (Syromyatnikov, 2005) – at the psychophysiological, psychological, and socio-psychological level. A communicatively competent police officer evaluates all the above levels and can conclude, based on the acquired data, whether or not the person who agreed to cooperate will benefit the investigation. What do these levels include?

Psychophysiological level. The characteristics of the nervous system are studied: strength, dynamic, mobility, lability. The levels of stability, attention switch, speed of thinking, memory span, psychomotor system, and other basic psychophysiological features are assessed.

Psychological level. The regularities of cognition, emotions, and volition of a personality that manifest in activity and behavior are determined. Their diagnostics enables determining accurately the goals, motivation, needs, interests, proneness, abilities, and personality traits. This determination concerns a concrete candidate for involvement in confidential cooperation with internal affairs agencies.

Socio-psychological level. This level is determined by the regularities of mental phenomena caused by the inclusion of an individual in social relationships (social attitudes, stands, adaptation and socialization, communication abilities, and psychological compatibility).

The specificity of communication with persons who agreed to aid the investigation is covered in the research of M. Adorjan and R. Ricciardelli (2015). They describe not only the mechanism of the psychological act with ordinary citizens, but also the aspects of communication with mentally unstable persons, such as rape victims and inmates.

In addition, the specificity of communication with citizens who can aid the investigation includes racial and national tolerance (Nakayama & Martin, 2014).

Based on the above, the practical psycho-diagnostics and involvement of citizens in confidential cooperation with internal affairs agencies requires occupational training. Therefore, investigators should meet a set of socio-ethical and professional requirements.

The professional and ethical norms of cooperation between a police officer and a citizen (Goriaynov, Ovchinsky & Shumilov, 2001) contain a number of principles, including:

– observance of confidentiality (this principle consists in the nondisclosure of results without the personal consent of the person, with which the conversation took place);

– professional secret (information that should be available to only certain investigators);

– avoidance of moral injury (the results of the conversation shall not harm the person involved in cooperation);

– effective conversation (such conversations should be beneficial to the person that has to meet certain requirements to cooperation).

The results of the conversation should be reported with regard to the training of internal affairs investigators, taking the individual approach; the interpretation of the conversation should not form undesirable attitudes, which could have a negative effect on the citizen.

The individual conversation is a psychological form of survey, which, unlike the standard interview, is based on the principles of equal communication between the investigator and the citizen. Depending on the goals of this method, the conversation can be introductory, experimental or preventive.

Legal consciousness as a form of public consciousness is developed on a real foundation as a reflection in the human consciousness of existing legal

phenomena. It is a relatively independent phenomenon with its own special place and specific functions in the social structure.

The work of citizens who assist investigation agencies is based on socially useful and valuable labor. The exceptional significance, importance, and expedience of such labor consists in acquiring, often in extremely difficult conditions that sometimes pose risk to health and life, information that is crucial for timely prevention and solution of crimes, neutralizing dangerous criminals, and guaranteeing the security and defensive capacity of the state. This labor, as any other type associated with danger and risk, requires legal and social protection, which was duly enshrined in law.

Therefore, the investigator should focus on the peculiarities of human psychology, while using methods of observation and visual diagnostics.

The elementary communicational stereotypes (Derkach, 1996) are verbal stereotypes, i.e. phrases (or parts of phrases or sequences of phrases) uttered as a whole.

The second level of communicational stereotypes forms the etiquette, including speech etiquette. In this case, the uttered whole is not a separate phrase, but a combination of verbal and nonverbal behavior, correlated to this or that situation and standard for it. Etiquette seemingly can be related either to the behavior of a specific individual or communication in a dyad or group. However, strictly speaking, etiquette is impossible beyond the latter: a "unilateral" etiquette behavior means that etiquette implies "zero reaction" from other members of communication in this or that specific situation.

The third and highest level of communicational stereotypes is the reproduction of the act of communication as a whole in a recurring situation. This includes two main cases. Firstly, the reproduced act of communication may be dictated by customs or traditions – be part of the foundation of the national culture of this ethnic group or subculture of a certain group within the ethnos. At that, the stereotype can be functionally justified (for instance, have magical meaning) or purely traditional.

In terms of psychology, contact (Prygunov, 2000) between persons is developed across three stages:

1) mutual assessment;

2) mutual interest;

3) isolation in the form of a dyad.

Studies of problems of investigative operations have already made attempts to research investigations using systems analysis. For instance, D.V. Grebelsky (1988) used this method and concluded that the system of investigative frameworks of internal affairs agencies include an independent subsystem, which they called an informational framework.

Thus, the security system of secret cooperation includes four elements: subject of management, object of management, relations between them, and the relations of the subject and object of management with the external environment.

Citizens who agreed to aid investigation agencies are under governmental protection, while the government guarantees the protection of their rights and freedoms. Therefore, the above system enables providing safe conditions for the

aid of confidential assistants of internal affairs agencies in fighting crime and preventing the declassification of confidants. According to researchers (Vanebo, Bjørkelo & Aaserud, 2015; West & Berman, 2015), this is only a question of effective management.

When solving any problem that may arise during the investigative work with the assistants, the correct clarification and application of cooperation norms is of decisive importance.

According to D.V. Grebelsky (1988), such development, which facilitates the elaboration of the scientific foundation of investigations, is relevant for both the theory and practice of investigation.

The facts obtained during the investigative work can be used as proof if they are checked in accordance with criminal procedures. This type of evidence (information, facts) pass two stages before being recognized as proof: investigative activity and criminal procedures. The problem lies not in the source of facts, but in the observance of the proving procedure established in criminal law.

Despite the need to keep such circumstance secret, it is impossible to guarantee absolute secrecy of relatively typical organizational and tactical actions over a long time period. In general, direct danger to the participants of investigative work is posed only by uncontrolled disclosure. The subject and restrictions of the discussion of issues related to the investigation in open press were determined. The essential approach to its coverage in mass media is not to breach the legally set restrictions on information and not to publish any information about the results of such work besides court rulings or those required to inform the population of the investigation or apprehension.

In particular, direct or indirect disclosure of the content of regulatory institutional acts is prohibited.

The methodological foundation of effective interpersonal contact and the achievement of the set goal is the logical plan of the conversation. Furthermore, the ability of a police officer to predict the act of communication is part of his or her psychological competence.

Implications and Recommendations

The improvement of the empirical aspect of the professional activity of police officers, which takes place in peculiar conditions of interpersonal communication.

This research results in the catalyzed improvement of police education in the field of communication. The advantage of the offered method is its modernized nature, which implies better adaptation to the current specificity of communication.

The materials of this research can be used in the field of occupational police training, as well as in psychology, communication, and sociology.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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