The contested community police officer: An ongoing conflict between different institutional logics

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Abstract
This paper concentrates on the ongoing conflict about the role and work of community police officers in the Netherlands. This conflict can be understood as a result of conflicting institutional logics. Although there are important differences between the community officers, there is the logic or perspective used by most of the community officers. This logic puts much emphasis on personal relations, trust-building, direct information, craftsmanship, tacit knowledge, involvement and discretion and experience. However, community officers have also been confronted with two other logics, with more emphasis on crime fighting and managerial control. In addition, there is also a third, more implicit logic, built upon a frame consisting of two opposing images of community officers. On the one hand, many of the current community officers are seen as old-fashioned and outdated. On the other hand, a more positive image of new community police officers is presented, called community officers 2.0. This can be seen as a way to create a new type of community police officers that is more in line with the managerial need for organizational control and with a more limited and instrumental view on community policing.

Keywords
Community policing, institutional logics, change, continuity, police

Since the introduction of community-oriented policing as a major innovation, many authors have noticed that institutionalization of this police model is highly ambiguous and contradictory, and that its implementation often proves to be difficult and hampered by diverse obstacles (for an overview, see Terpstra et al., 2014). For instance, in Denmark, Holmberg found that the practice of ‘proximity policing’ (as it is called there) often differed from its original aims and underlying principles. One of the main factors contributing to these implementation problems has been the vagueness of the concept of community policing, in combination with its often very high ambitions (Holmberg, 2002). Evaluation of the well-known community policing experiments in Chicago showed that a complex of different factors, both inside and outside the police organization, made it hard to implement this policing model (Greene, 2000; Skogan, 1998; Skogan and Hartnett, 1997; Wood et al., 2004).

In the Netherlands, Terpstra (2010) found in his study on community police officers, that the central ambitions of community policing are realized to only a limited extent, despite the fact that these officers are generally highly involved and very motivated to do something about the problems in their communities. One of the main conclusions of Terpstra’s study was that community officers are confronted with high and also conflicting expectations. In his view, it was hardly realistic to expect that individual community police officers would be able to meet all these demands, given their limited capabilities, skills and expertise. Terpstra suggested that it is important not to create an overload of expectations and demands on these officers.
About 10 years later, we repeated this study on community police officers. We carried out observations on the daily practices of community policing at the same locations as in the first study, and in most cases with the same officers (Terpstra, 2019a). One of the main conclusions of this second study was that community police officers in the Netherlands are now confronted with even more conflicting demands and expectations. We found a constant struggle, in some cases more or less hidden from view, about the position and work of community officers in the Netherlands. This conflict partially concerns interpretation of the role and identity of community police officers, and how their tasks and activities should be carried out.

In this article, we try to understand this ongoing conflict regarding community officers as resulting from contradictions between different institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012). We think that the perspective of institutional logics is highly promising as a means of understanding complex situations with actors who are more or less chronically confronted with contradictory expectations and claims about their position and work practices. This perspective may also be relevant to seeing how these contradictions and tensions contribute to both organizational change and stagnation. Instead of giving a systematic and detailed analysis of changes in the position and work of community police officers in the Netherlands, this article concentrates on the relevance of the institutional logics perspective for understanding important contradictions, conflicts and changes in the police.

First, we deal with some of the main elements of the theory of institutional logics, followed by a brief overview of the historical development of community policing in the Netherlands. Next, we present some information about the design and methods of the two studies that we conducted on community officers in the Netherlands, and some of the main conclusions and findings. We then come to the central issue of our analysis: the constant struggle, or values’ can be pursued within a field or domain, and indicate what means are ‘appropriate’. This implies that institutional logics do not operate in isolation. They must be understood in close relation to the relevant institutional actors (and their relations of power) and the structures of governance (Scott et al., 2000).

An example of an empirical study about change in institutional logics is that by Scott et al. (2000). This study deals with ‘profound institutional changes’ in US healthcare over a period of more than 50 years. The authors showed that these developments are highly dependent on not only material circumstances, but also their institutional environment. One of the core elements in the institutional environment consists of institutional logics, which refer to ‘the belief systems and associated practices that predominate in an organizational field’. These institutional logics also specify ‘what goals or values’ can be pursued within a field or domain, and indicate what means are ‘appropriate’. This implies that institutional logics have both a cultural–cognitive and a normative dimension (Scott et al., 2000). Institutional logics do not operate in isolation. They must be understood in close relation to the relevant institutional actors (and their relations of power) and the structures of governance (Scott et al., 2000).

Scott et al. (2000) showed that, over the past 50 years, US healthcare has been dominated by several conflicting logics, each with its own claims and interests. One of the elements about which these institutional logics are in conflict is the interpretation of professionalism and the autonomy and hegemony that professionals should have. Disputes among various institutional logics are not only
important at the organizational level, but may also have a
direct impact on the individual members in everyday orga-
nizational life (Scott, 2014), such as medical doctors or, as
we will see here, community police officers.

**Developments in Dutch community policing**

In the 1960s and 1970s, Dutch police forces had increas-
ingly become isolated from their social context. They often
failed to formulate adequate answers to new social and
cultural developments, such as the rise of youth subcultures
and the general loss of traditional taken-for-granted social
legitimacy, not only of the police, but also of other figures
of authority (Meershoek, 2000; Punch and Van der Vijver,
2008). The introduction of the first community police offi-
cers in the early 1970s can be seen as an attempt to reverse
the loss of legitimacy and citizens’ trust that the Dutch
police had suffered since the late 1960s (Schaap, 2018).
These community police officers were expected to regain
trust by maintaining direct relations with citizens and by
promoting police visibility and accessibility. They were
also intended to deal with problems within the community,
such as nuisance, (petty) crime and conflicts or tensions
between people living in the neighbourhood (Terpstra,
2008; Van Sluis et al., 2013).

In the late 1970s, evaluation studies showed that in sev-
eral respects, community police officers were failing to
meet these expectations. It turned out that they were often
rather isolated from the rest of their organization. They
were also accused of being too ‘soft’ and of lacking
‘authority’ (Bastiaenen and Vriesema, 1980). Partly as an
answer to these observations, in 1977 a highly influential
report was published about the future of the Dutch police.
This strategic report – called ‘Changing police’ (Politi
in verandering) – argued that social integration of the police
should be improved. It also included a plea for problem-
oriented policing with a strong emphasis on prevention
(Heijink et al., 1977). In this view, police officers should
act not only as ‘legal professionals’, but also as ‘social
professionals’ (Punch et al., 2002). According to this
report, the aims of better social integration and a stronger
local position for the police should be realized by decen-
cralization and a more egalitarian distribution of responsi-
bilities. In realizing this, the most important strategy was to
introduce neighbourhood teams with more generalist tasks
(Cachet et al., 1998; Punch et al., 2002).

An evaluation of these neighbourhood teams in the city
of Haarlem, however, showed that their implementation
had been met with several serious problems. For instance,
the introduction of neighbourhood teams led to direct and
personal relations between the police and citizens often
being lost. Moreover, many police officers in the
neighbourhood teams proved unable to realize their broadly
defined (‘generalist’) tasks. Many citizens were also found
to prefer having a police officer in their neighbourhood
who they could get to know in person. In other words, they
wanted to have a community police officer again (Broer
et al., 1987).

Around 1990, experiences with the neighbourhood
teams contributed to a new concept in policing – area-
bound policing (literal translation of the Dutch gebiedsge-
bonden politiewerk), the Dutch version of community
policing. The core elements of this concept were that the
police should focus on small areas and be organized on a
small scale. The police should work in a ‘problem-solving
style’, and officers and citizens should know each other
directly. Working in multiagency networks and partner-
ships (also with citizens) was also seen as highly important.
Community police officers (again) became the main repre-
sentative of this police model (Beumer et al., 1997).

Despite all kinds of resistance and practical problems
(Van Sluis et al., 2013), in the 1990s, community policing
became the dominant police model in the Netherlands. An
important factor contributing to this increase in importance
was the dissatisfaction among mayors about the loss of
their municipal police. The mayors feared that the new
regionalized police system introduced in 1993 might result
in the loss of a locally embedded police organization, and
an increasing distance between the police and local com-
unities. To reassure mayors, and ensure that they
remained loyal to the new police system, the government
decided to spend more resources on community policing, as
a sort of compensation for the loss of municipal police
services (Schaap and Terpstra, 2018).

Despite increasing importance in these years, there
remained important differences between regional police
forces, in terms of both how much attention they paid to
community policing and how this was organized and imple-
mented (Terpstra, 2008). In fact, two conflicting
developments have had an important impact on community
policing in the Netherlands since then. On the one hand,
much attention has been paid to the further development of
community policing, which implied a search for more unity
in community policing and more coordination. For
instance, in 2005, a new ‘vision document’ was published
by a working group of the Board of Chief Constables. One
of its central statements was that community policing
should remain a guiding principle for the Dutch police
(Projectgroep Visie, 2005). One year later, a so-called
‘national frame of reference’ was published with the aim
that the Dutch regional police services would improve their
community policing efforts and make them more uniform
(Politieacademie, 2006).

On the other hand, in the Netherlands since the mid-
1990s, there has been increasing pressure on community
policing. The view became more dominant that community policing did not fit in with the so-called core tasks of the police, such as criminal investigation and crime control. Along the same lines were complaints by some notorious criticasters that community police officers were ‘too soft’ and paid too much attention to social services (see, e.g. Van der Torre, 1999). In 2004, this led to one of the founding fathers of community policing in the Netherlands, Kees van der Vijver, wondering whether this police model still had any future and if it would be able to survive: ‘...it is undeniable that community policing is the “wrong symbol” for society at this moment’ (Van der Vijver and Zoomer, 2004, p.267).

From time to time, it may have looked as though community policing in the Netherlands was swimming against a current; nevertheless, over the years, there was also strong support for community policing. For instance, in 2007, the Dutch government decided to increase the number of community officers by 500, a growth of almost 17% within 4 years. Even more clear was the support for community policing in the Police Act 2012, which introduced the new National Police in the Netherlands. For the first time in the Netherlands, a legal position was created for community police officers. The Police Act 2012 also prescribed that there should be at least one community officer for every 5,000 inhabitants (Terpstra, 2019b). Within the National Police, community officers were meant to occupy a central position in large local teams. Once again, they were expected to represent the police in their neighbourhood, have direct relations with citizens, and be informed about the relevant issues and developments in the neighbourhood or village.

In addition to the traditional community officer, a second type of officer was introduced, called (employing inimitable bureaucratic jargon) ‘operational expert communities’. These new officers were of higher rank and were intended to be responsible for more complex tasks. The introduction of these two types of community police officers was intended to promote what was called a more ‘problem-oriented’ and ‘information-led’ style of policing. However, research conducted 3 years after the start of the National Police showed that these ambitions were hardly realized in practice (Terpstra, 2019b).

Two studies on community officers: design, methods, and some findings

The empirical data in this article are from two studies about community police officers in the Netherlands. Both ethnographic studies have provided a detailed analysis of the daily work routines of community officers and how they perceive their work and the work context. The first study was conducted in 2005 and 2006 (Terpstra, 2008, 2010), and several research methods were used. First, 15 experienced community officers, from both urban and rural areas, were interviewed about their daily work. Next, long-term observations were made of the daily work of six of the community officers, during different types of shifts. Again, these officers were from both urban and rural locations. In total, we carried out 510 hours of observation. Finally, representatives of the most important partner agencies of each community officer were interviewed.

The second study was conducted about 10 years later (Terpstra, 2019a). Its main question concerned the various ways in which the work of community police officers had changed over the preceding 10 years. The main reason for undertaking this study was to see whether establishment of the National Police in the Netherlands had an impact on the everyday work of community officers. To answer this question, a similar observational study was conducted at the six locations originally studied. The aim was to conduct this study with the same police officers. For practical reasons, however, this proved not to be possible. Since the first study, two of the six officers had got another job. For that reason, two new community officers were added in this study. They worked at the same locations where we had made observations of community policing 10 years before. In this second study, we observed the work of the six officers for about 470 hours.

The first study (Terpstra, 2008; 2010) showed that there were important differences in how community police officers did their work. It also proved that the central ambitions of community policing were realized to only a limited extent. Among the factors to explain this were that community officers were confronted with high and contradictory demands, in combination with their limited capabilities, skills and expertise. The concept of community policing was often rather vague, also for the community officers themselves. This implied that, to a considerable degree, these officers had to decide on their own, often without much support from their organization, what community policing meant and how to realize it in practice. The discrepancy between the ambitions and practice of community policing was also a consequence of the isolated position that community officers often had within their own organization.

The main conclusion of the second study (Terpstra, 2019a) was that, although there had been radical changes in the organizational context of their work as a result of the organizational restructuring of the Dutch police in 2013, the practices of community police officers, their working styles and their views about their work had not changed significantly. Some of the fundamental problems found in the first study – such as the low level of expertise, the isolated position and the lack of clarity about what community policing is or should be – were still evident.
The two studies in combination also showed that parallel to the developments of community policing in the Netherlands, at least over the past 10 to 15 years, there has been an ongoing fight over the position of community officers. In the following sections, we try to show that this fight may be understood from the perspective of conflicting institutional logics. This conflict is not only a matter of diverging cognitive schemes or different rational arguments, but also concerns symbols, frames and emotions. Each of these institutional logics has its own view on the identity and practices of community police officers.

The logic and perspective of community officers

To understand the almost constant fighting over the position of community police officers, it is important to first look at how these officers themselves define their role and tasks, and how they perceive their organizational identity. Although both of our studies (Terpstra, 2008, 2019a) have shown that there are important differences between community officers, it is possible to reconstruct a range of cognitive, normative and symbolic elements that constitute a more or less consistent perspective. This should not be understood as rational and well-articulated. On the contrary, in line with the notion that the knowledge of police officers is often tacit and taken-for-granted (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Nielsen, 2002; Schön, 1983), when asked, many of them would be barely able to explicate these elements. This analysis is based upon a reconstruction by the researchers, using many hours of observation and informal conversation with community officers during the fieldwork. Later, when this analysis was presented at a meeting with a large number of community police officers, most proved able to recognize these elements in how they viewed their role and work.

The logic of community police officers can be analysed by making a distinction between several elements. First, if Dutch community officers are asked to describe what they see as the core of their work, they often use the phrase ‘knowing, and being known’. They see it as their main task to be informed in detail about all relevant persons, relations, processes and incidents in ‘their’ neighbourhood or community. ‘All’ should be taken literally: it means that, beforehand, it is not clear which information may or may not be relevant. On the other hand, local residents should also know them, as the main representative of the police, hence giving their organization a personal face.

This core element has consequences for how officers perceive their relations with both their own organization and citizens. First, they see themselves primarily as a member of the police force. But in their view, they also have a special position, as a sort of outpost of their organization. Accordingly, in their view, officers need considerable autonomy to do their work in a proper way. It is not just that they value autonomy (which they usually do, because it gives them a lot of ‘freedom’ in their work), but also because they think that they are the only ones who can decide what is relevant for their work in their neighbourhood. This means that it is not unusual for community officers to deviate from departmental rules or procedures that they consider do not make much sense in their specific context. There has also been an impact on how they see their relationship with their boss. Community officers expect their boss to allow them some room and autonomy, and to show trust in their work and decisions. They want a boss who shows interest, whose door is always open, who is ready to listen and who is always prepared to reflect on difficulties in everyday community work, and to support them if necessary.

Second, the building of trust is seen as an important element in their relationship with the community. It is seen as a prerequisite for obtaining relevant information, and also for solving problems, or preventing crises or the escalation of problems. However, the building up of trust is not the same as ‘becoming friends’ (which, in their view, must be avoided). Building trust must be understood within the context of the need to manage the tensions between distance and involvement, which are both seen as necessary. For community officers, one of the main tensions is between ‘their uniform and the personal factor’. It makes their relations with citizens highly ambivalent: a competent community officer is expected to deal with this tension in a productive way.

These elements of the logic of community officers have several implications for what they see as the preferred way of doing their work. In many respects, they think that informal and personal ways of working are important, both in their relations with citizens and in their relations with colleagues (what they call ‘warm contacts’). In their view, personal and informal relations with citizens are the best way to build up trust, to acquire information, and to solve all kinds of problems. If they need the support of colleagues for activities in their community, they prefer informal ways of contacting them. They see this as the most adequate way of motivating them and of providing them with relevant information. This logic of informality implies a chronic tension with the more formalized and bureaucratic elements of their own organization (which, in turn, may promote the feeling among some of the community officers that somehow they are outsiders to their own organization).

Their work attitude may generally be described as context-bound pragmatism. This is a ground to maintain some distance from general policies and rules. Their relevance is seen as dependent on the specific contingencies of their community and work. On the other hand, their expertise
is often quite tacit. In their view, the first thing community officers need in order to do their job in a proper way is to have many years of experience. This may have two consequences. First, it means that, also in their own view, the expertise and the person are hard to distinguish. Second, many of these elements can only be realized in the long run. Building relations, creating trust, being known and so on require a great deal of time – something that the police often do not have – resulting in a new source of tension.

Finally, there is a moral element in the logic of community officers. They define this as the need for involvement, both in their work and also with the problems of their community and the people living there. Accordingly, many do not restrict their work to just police activities. For instance, if confronted with a mentally ill person who is in serious difficulty and about whom no one seems to bother, officers see it as their task to try to help, even if they accept that this is not proper police work and certainly not their area of expertise. But, on the other hand: ‘if I don’t do it, no one else will, so actually there’s no choice for me but to do this’.

This moral element can also be seen in what community officers are proud of in their work. For the police organization as a whole, this may only look like minor details. For the community officer, however, it shows that ‘being known’, having long-term relations with members of so-called ‘difficult groups’, and building up trust may work out in the long run. Consequently, the community police officer goes on his or her own to the home of a well-known and sometimes aggressive criminal who must be brought to the police station, for instance for interrogation or a stay in prison. The officer successfully convinces the person to come along, thus avoiding the need for a heavily armed special squad to carry out a raid at the house in order to make an arrest. This would not only take up a large amount of police capacity, but might also create a lot of upheaval in the neighbourhood, and the risk of escalation and violence.

This reconstruction of the logic of community police officers does not mean that they always operate in line with this way of thinking. There may be circumstances in which community police officers feel compelled to deviate from it, such as a lack of time or other practical problems. The pressure of other conflicting institutional logics may also mean that community officers do not follow what they see as the main imperatives of their job. It may be one reason why some community officers still hold this logic, but have also become disappointed, frustrated, cynical or feel fatalistic about their work.

**Conflicting institutional logics**

In the ongoing conflict over the position of community officers in the Dutch police organization, the traditional view on their work as represented in the logic held by the officers themselves has been challenged from three different angles over the past 15 years. Each of these perspectives or logics presents an alternative view on the position and work of these officers. Although, in practice, these three logics may be hard to distinguish, we treat them separately here.

The first competing logic concentrates on the supposed central importance for the police of fighting crime. In this view, the main problem is said to be that community officers are ‘too soft’. This view is closely related to the notion that the police should concentrate on their ‘core business’, such as crime fighting and crime control. For that reason, a fundamental change in community policing is seen as necessary. In this view, community policing has deviated from what is seen as the right course. This means that community officers should pay more attention to ‘real police work’ (Van der Torre et al., 2007). One of the reasons why this logic has such a strong power of persuasion to many officers (but generally not to community officers) may be that it seems to provide an answer to the deep-rooted longing for ‘real police work’, which involves more action, is more thrilling and concentrates on catching criminals instead of doing boring and routine everyday police work (Reiner, 2010).

Over the past few years, this logic has gained much influence as a consequence of the increasing attention to what is called ‘ondermijning’ (literally, ‘undermining’). This vague concept has become very popular among politicians and police officers. It should refer to diverging phenomena, such as organized crime, the drugs economy, problems of integrity in public administration, criminal families, outlaw motorcycle gangs and the loss of citizens’ trust in the state. Although the concept is very imprecise, it has helped to create a more or less permanent moral panic, suggesting that there is a serious crisis going on, both in state institutions and in society in general (for a comparable process, see Woodiwiss and Hobbs, 2009). In the Netherlands, it has been highly successful in changing the agenda, not only of the police and public prosecution agencies, but also of local governments. As a consequence, for instance, the role of the non-elected mayor has shifted to that of a crime fighter and what is called a ‘sheriff’, a shift that would have unimaginable only 15 years ago.

According to some, cooperation between community officers and criminal investigators should be improved. In more radical versions of this view, the role of community officers is redefined as being the neighbourhood crime fighter; it is even argued that community officers should be replaced by detectives (Van der Torre and Van Valkenhoef, 2017).

The second alternative logic in the ongoing fight over the role and position of community police officers concerns a more instrumental view. It is based largely upon new managerial considerations and arguments, such as the need
for economy, effectiveness and efficiency (Clarke and Newman, 1997). The first study on community officers, mentioned earlier (Terpstra, 2008), showed that the most important aspects of the daily work of community officers, such as ‘knowing, and being known’, building trust, creating long-term relations, and the importance of tacit knowledge, are hard to combine with standardized and quantitative measures and targets. The increasing influence of this approach means that the more communicative aspects of community policing are now under increasing pressure (Terpstra, 2008).

A second element is also relevant here: the managerial wish to control the work of community officers. To realize this, over the past few years, and especially since establishment of the National Police in the Netherlands, all kinds of new measures and procedures have been introduced to formalize and standardize work processes. For instance, community officers should no longer use informal methods to involve their patrol service colleagues in the management of neighbourhood problems. Now, it is expected that they will use a formal computer program, which is controlled by a coordinator within their team, to set up an assignment. The coordinator decides if a member of the patrol service should participate in the activities of the community officer. The main function is that such procedures promote managerial control over the community officers and their work (Terpstra, 2019b).

Another example of this instrumental approach is that, since the establishment of the National Police, several of the tasks of community police officers have been given to other, higher-ranking officers, such as the operational expert community, mentioned above. In many cases, community officers perceive this as a loss, because these tasks are the most interesting and they do not see why their work should be distributed among several officers. On the other hand, community officers are increasingly used to participating in other tasks such as patrolling, for reasons of limited capacity and the need for flexibility.

This instrumentalization of community policing is hard to combine with the direct and informal methods of work, personal relations and tacit knowledge of community officers. As a result, many feel under pressure to change their working style in a way that is not in line with their own logic and preferences. They often feel that they are being forced to work in a more ‘abstract’ way (Terpstra et al., 2019) that is antithetic to what they perceive as the essentials of community policing. This is also the case with the new role that they are supposed to fulfil in the local teams of the National Police: that of internal coordinator, which in their view is hard to combine with their main task of working in the front line in their neighbourhood.

The third alternative logic in the fighting over the role and work of community officers is often more informal and hidden and operates mainly within the police organization itself, but is certainly no less effective. The main goal of this logic is to present an alternative, more modern identity of the professional role of community officers. This is most visible in the use of a negative image of the current community officers. Here, elements of modern professionalism and notions that refer to the need for managerial control and efficiency are combined with the core themes of traditional police culture, with its emphasis on action, thrills and catching criminals (Reiner, 2010). In many respects, this can be seen as the modernized version of the old-school negative image of community officers among patrol officers and criminal investigators. Stereotypical terms are used, such as referring to the community officer as a ‘neighbourhood nurse’ or as ‘Bromsnor’, a somewhat nerdy figure from a well-known children’s series aired on Dutch television between 1955 and 1975.

The core of this logic consists of two opposing images of community officers, each with a strong symbolic meaning. The first is meant to be negative, condemning and even denigrating, whereas the second is positive, worth pursuing and provides a positive identity.

On the one hand, there is the image of the ‘old-style community officer’. They are considered old-fashioned and outdated in this age of modernity. This image seems to be so strong and persuasive that it is even used in some formal documents; for instance, a report of the Dutch Police Inspection. In this report, the complaint is that ‘old-style community officers’ always work in an isolated way and define themselves as the ‘owner of solutions’ of all the problems in the neighbourhood (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2017). It shows that this logic is also related to the notion of ‘core tasks’ of the police. In other words, community officers should not see all these problems as police work. They should move these tasks to other agencies, so that the police can concentrate on ‘real police work’ and operate more efficiently.

In contrast to the negative label of the ‘old-style community officer’ (with which no one wants to identify), there is a second, positive image of the ‘new-style’ community officer – or, alternatively, and in a more-trendy way, the ‘community officer 2.0’. Although this latter concept is also very vague and imprecise, it suggests that ‘community officers 2.0’ do not spend their time on ‘useless’ activities, such as small talk with people living in the neighbourhood, or riding their bikes, just to see what is going on. Instead of those ‘meaningless’ activities, these officers are decisive coordinators who concentrate on ‘real police work’ rather than those elements of local community life to which the police should no longer pay any attention, such as groups of youths hanging around, quarrels between neighbours or traffic safety near a primary school. Interviews with young community officers show that they learn these concepts at
the Dutch Police Academy, where the frame consisting of
the two images is an important part of the courses for
community officers. This framing of community policing
is so strong and overwhelming that police students are
generally unable to withdraw from these images and see
their limited value. Besides, what young officer would be
willing to define him- or herself as ‘old style’? It is only
later, when working as community officers, that they come
to realize the discrepancy between what they learned at
school and the reality of this type of police work.

The fundamental meaning of this logic goes further than
just some images and frames. In fact, it is used to create a
new type of community police officer, who is more in line
with the managerial need for organizational control, and
who has a more limited and instrumental interpretation of
community policing.

In many local teams of Dutch National Police, conflict
over the position, identity and activities of community offi-
cers has been going on for many years. The constant clash
between the conflicting institutional logics has a direct
impact on everyday relations in the police. To a certain
degree, this conflict is also a clash between generations,
each with a different level of education. Many of the young,
better-educated officers, in recently created positions such
as the operational expert community, have quite negative
views of the current, often older, community officers. They
present themselves as ‘officers 2.0’, suggesting that they
are better and more up to date than the ‘old-style neigh-
bourhood nurses’. On the other hand, for many of the older
community officers, confrontation with these negative
images and frames is painful. They are often felt to be
degrading and denigrating, as if their work and dedication
are being spurned. These images are clearly overgenerali-
izations and their factual truth may be doubted, but they
may still have ‘real’ consequences for community officers
and their work.

Recently, Campeau (2019) dealt with the importance of
generations for understanding differences in police culture.
The analysis presented here differs in several respects from
what she found. In her study, the ‘old-school’ officers were
often in the higher ranks. The new and better-educated
generation was felt as threatening to the status quo. In the
Dutch police teams, we found almost the opposite conflict:
better-educated young officers with higher ranks who used
negative images and frames as a strategy to create another
style of community policing that was more in line with their
own professional views and interests.

Concluding remarks
In the Netherlands, the successful institutionalization of
community policing has not prevented ongoing conflict
about the position, identity and work practices of
community police officers. This conflict can be understood
as resulting from contradictions between different institu-
tional logics, especially those dealing with the identities
and practices of community officers. These institutional
logics concern not just more or less rational arguments and
considerations, but also include symbols, frames and emo-
tions – as illustrated by the use of ‘community officer 2.0’
and ‘old-style officer’. They mean that the conflict can go
on beneath the official surface of the police organization, in
a more or less hidden way.

To understand change and continuity in the police, the
conflict between different institutional logics is of central
importance. Despite restructuring and organizational
reforms in the Dutch police system over recent decades,
this conflict seems to be more or less constant. The conflict
is not only about change and continuity in community poli-
cing, but also about different views on how these should be
realized, and the positive and negative aspects of change
and continuity.

The conflicts between different institutional logics are
also relevant to understanding the often-noted implemen-
tation problems in community policing. They show that this
‘implementation gap’ (Hill and Hupe, 2009; Terpstra and
Fyfe, 2015) should not be seen as only a (temporary) con-
sequence of some technical factors and circumstances, such
as a lack of resources, skills or professional expertise.
Because these implementation problems result from con-
fllicting institutional logics that are strongly embedded in
the police and police cultures, it can be expected that these
problems will be chronic, an undeniable fact as long as
these deep-rooted conflicting perspectives and logics with
regard to community policing continue to exist.

This analysis is also relevant for understanding the pro-
cess of professionalization in community policing. The
conflict between different institutional logics, such as new
managerialism, a crime-fighting perspective and elements
of traditional police culture, in combination with the need
to control the work of community officers, focuses on dif-
f erent interpretations of the professionalism of these offi-
cers. The resulting tensions may be understood by using the
terms introduced by Evetts (2009), occupational and orga-
nizational professionalism. In the conflict described here,
 attempts are being made to replace a more occupational
view on professionalism, which is based on experience,
craftsmanship, direct and personal relations, involvement,
trust, tacit knowledge and discretion, with another, more
managerial and organizational view on professionalism.
This latter view puts greater emphasis on standardization,
formalization, measurable targets, ‘hard’ policing, control
and distrust.

It may be expected that this conflict over community poli-
cing will continue. Many of the community officers
feel that they are caught in what Zacka (2017) calls an
‘impossible situation’. They feel that they are expected to work in a way that runs against their own professional logic and views. If they try to meet these expectations, this will probably feel a form of self-betrayal. However, if they stick to their own view, they realize that they run the risk of being labelled an ‘old-style community officer’ or ‘neighbourhood nurse’.

Despite the pressures that many community officers have felt in recent years, most decide to stick to their own views and practices (Terpstra et al., 2016). There is one important factor that leads many community officers to hold on to their views about good community policing. This has to do with the direct social environment in which they operate: communities and citizens are asking them to operate in a more direct, personal and informal way, and this differs sharply from what the management of their organization often wants them to do.

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