

Police, Trust and the Social Contract: An Exploratory Australian Study

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Abstract:

An exploratory study into the well-being and resilience of police officers in the New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF) was conducted in Australia. During thematic analysis, one theme Trust in Policing emerged strongly, and vivified the value and role trust had for police in the social contract, pact or agreement (Rousseau, 1998) officers had with the NSWPF. Following Rousseau's (1998: 15) theory, we framed the police organisation as a metaphorical micro society, with police as members of that micro society, a society that operates within a larger society. The findings offer previously unexamined insights into individual and collective perspectives, feelings and work lives of police officers, especially with regards to trust. Recommendations to enhance the organization's capacity to promote trust in a law enforcement environment are made, especially to enhance officers' resilience and wellbeing.

Keywords: Policing; trust; social contract; micro-society.

Introduction:

The importance of trust in workplaces, including police organisations (Schafer, 2013), has been discussed at length by previous researchers (Ellwart et al, 2012; Innocenti et al, 2011; Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2012; Salamon & Robinson, 2008; Spector & Jones, 2004; Thomas et al, 2009; Vickers, 2008; Vickers et al, 2014; Willemyns et al, 2003). There is growing evidence that individuals are motivated by prosocial motivations and model prosocial behaviours such as trustworthiness (Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010). Sadly, many efforts to reform public sector organisations, including police organisations, have taken the opposite approach, focusing on financial rewards and the strengthening of bureaucratic controls (Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010). The New Public Management's (NPM) view of organizations has been described as a chain of low-trust, principal/agent relationships, rather than fiduciary or trustee-beneficiary ones (Perry et al, 2009) concurrent to NPM being lauded as a reform framework proposed to reverse declining trust in organizations (Yang & Holzer, 2006). Whatever view is taken about NPM, a lack of appreciation for affective responses to workplace events has been found to produce productivity and morale problems (Kiel & Watson, 2009). Wise managers know that motivating people, keeping people, and creating productive work environments requires positive affect (Kiel & Watson, 2009) including the presence of trust. The best police leaders have been noted to communicate effectively and promote trust within their work groups: Chief Burtell Jefferson of the Metropolitan Police Department, Washington DC, USA would be a relevant case in point (Williams & Kellough, 2006).

In most police organisations, little is known about trust; what police officers say and think about trust in their organisation has certainly not been examined. We share what Australian police officers from New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF) say about trust: that it was essential for success in their working world, but that it was not always present the way they would wish it to be. Their reported lived experience was that, sometimes, trust was absent, uneven or unreliable, and its lack could undermine their sense of personal safety and security, and their successful membership of the organisation they serve. Police told us they *needed* trust, perhaps above anything else: “Trust”, we were told, “is a massive thing”.

We share police officer views about trust through the theoretical lens of Rousseau’s (1998) Social Contract Theory. Social contract theory requires: (a) an agreement making or a ‘pact’ process to occur between members of an organisation as its moral body; and, (b) the existence of a micro-society in that organisation whose successful cohesion is almost completely contingent on the existence and positive exchange of trust between members (Rousseau, 1998). Police officers repeatedly told us of the importance of trust, and how the positive exchange of trust within their organisation was essential to its positive and effective functioning. Police officers’ descriptions of the necessity of trust in police work strongly aligned with the processes Rousseau described in *The Social Contract* (1998): of a smaller society operating within a larger one, and having its own ‘associated moral body’ (Rousseau, 1998: 15) that included trust in that organisation. (We choose not extend our analysis to the relationship of police and the public, though the significant role of trust is noted.) Rousseau (1998) characterized trust building as an act of making a pact or agreement within the micro-society. Trust building in the micro-society requires a surrendering of one’s individual personality so the individual might better function under the direction of, and for the benefit of, the organisation. In exchange for this surrender, membership of the associated moral body enables the individual access to security via membership of the micro-society and moral body; members can feel part of the whole. When forming the social pact:

Each of us puts in common his [sic] person and his whole power under the supreme discretion of the general will; and in return we receive every member as an indivisible part of the whole (Rousseau, 1998: 15).

Framing the NSWPF as a metaphorical micro-society recognises it an organisation with its own rules, regulations and culture: a society within a larger society. Such an environment often brings a sense of belonging and ownership of the ideals of the micro society among the organisation’s members; this was evident from participants in this study (Vickers et al, 2014). Similar phenomena have been observed in other organisations: Weintraub (1984) discussed the micro-society within schools and the community, and the associated sense of ownership and unity felt by members. Emurian and colleagues (1985) noted that if trust levels were low, higher levels of individual intervention, scrutiny and critical viewing of others within the organisation often ensued (Emurian et al, 1985). The next section visits the literature on trust, trust in organisations, and trust in police organisations in particular.

Trust, Organisations and Police:

Trust is an elusive concept (Willemys et al, 2003: 117). Some claim that there is no accepted definition of trust (Rousseau et al, 1998) even if trust has been noted to influence organizational outcomes on a regular basis (McEvily et al, 2003: 91). Dimensions of trust have included the cognitive, emotional and behavioural (Lewis & Weigert, 1985), and trust has been claimed to underlay all vital knowledge transfer and sharing between individuals (Nelson & Coopriider, 1996). Trust has also been characterized variously as a state, an individual trait, and a process (Burke et al, 2007). What is agreed is that trust requires individuals to be willing to accept vulnerability, based on their positive expectations about another’s intentions or behaviours (McEvily et al, 2003: 91-92) including the belief that the trusted person will be honest, competent, benevolent, and reasonably predictable, and not an opportunist, self serving, or harmful (Vickers, 2008; Burke et al, 2007).

Trust has been explored in the organisational literature for decades (eg Deutsch, 1958; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Nelson & Coopridner, 1996; Burke et al, 2007; Thomas et al, 2009; Zeffane et al, 2011). Most concur that the presence of trust is essential for effective and successful organisations (Burke et al, 2007) and trust has been found to lead to many valued organisational outcomes: increased performance; collaborative success; improved communication; leadership satisfaction; decreased staff turnover; enhanced team work; and, improved organisational stability, performance and success (Burke et al, 2007). Managerial trustworthiness has also been found to strengthen the relationship between prosocial motivation and performance (Grant & Sumanth, 2009). The propensity to trust is an entirely individual trait and influences levels of trust within groups and organisations (Yang 2006; Spector & Jones 2003), though it remains difficult to gauge how this impacts on the trust relationship itself (Yang 2006). Trust between management and subordinates is also considered a vital constituent in the technology development, communication, changes to workplace unionism, and shifts in power in organisational life (Willemyns et al, 2003).

Feelings of positive self worth emanate from being trusted: if senior management trust an individual, workplace colleagues are likely to follow those observed patterns of behaviour (Lau et al, 2014). Organisations can enable a trusting stance to develop where members can offer and invest trust with others. This has been observed during the early stages of team formation (Spector & Jones 2004:312). Behavioural integrity is gauged in workplaces almost entirely on individual perceptions of those observing related behaviours; behavioural integrity is a construct mediated by trust, directly influencing employee's perceptions of management and the organisation (Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence 2012).

Trust expectations and social phenomena have also been researched (McEvily et al, 2003: 93) within the organizational and business context (Thomas, Zolin & Hartman 2009). Communication, trust and commitment have been reviewed within a climate of trust (Zeffane, Tipu & Ryan 2011: 80) as have employees' trust in managers in relation to job satisfaction, commitment and workplace communications (Zeffane et al, 2011: 77). Research has reinforced the centrality and importance of trust. However, further research has been recommended to explore the role of trust in influencing individual experiences, processes and outcomes within organizations (Zeffane et al, 2011: 82). We respond here to this call.

In police organisations, trust is often required, especially in situations where officers feel uncertain. If trust is present, it can enable police to reach their goal (Herrington & Roberts 2013:110). Police organisational justice processes are almost entirely facilitated by trust (Herrington & Roberts, 2013) and maintaining the structure of police organisations is mediated by trust between police officers; trust is required to ensure the integrity of the rank system (Herrington & Roberts, 2013). Trust underpins the rank system in police organisations which, in turn, relies on the embedded behaviours of those dependent upon it, encouraging positive outcomes, in turn, for officers by building pride, faith and respect for, the organisation they serve (Densten 2003:410). Within police organisations, trust has also been found to be a constituent element of the social contracts struck between members. Beckley (2014:184) argued that police culture and leadership styles are often intertwined with trust of, and within, police organisations being a key to contributing to police' legitimacy (Beckley, 2014:177).

Trust between policies critical. Studies of police organisations have found that not only do internal pressures supersede external unpredictable dangers in terms of their capacity to influence behavioural integrity (Jaramillo et al, 2005; Noblet et al, 2009), but perceptions of fairness and equity are directly related to commitment and job satisfaction (Pillai & Williams, 2004). Practical applications of police procedures based upon, and which reinforce, trust and transparency, have also been examined including: positive, weekly, peer review meetings; regular examination of grievances and problems arising; and, development of local, context-based, solutions. All have been found to reinforce trust (Schafer, 2013). Participative police management approaches are also supported by trust-based activities including the formation of representative steering committees to manage local issues, and make well informed, binding decisions (Steinheider & Wuetsewald 2008). Developing trust and engendering perceptions of a fair police, by police force members and the police organization itself (Schafer, 2013) also serve to strengthen the legitimacy of the police force as a welcome and desirable presence in the community (Herrington & Roberts, 2013).

Finally, trust has been noted as a precursor to police employee retention (Gachter, Savage & Torgler 2013), positive workplace relations, and efficiency (Beckley 2014; Herrington & Roberts. 2013; Roberts & Herrington. 2013; Schafer 2013). Trust is critical for police organisations: the mechanics, and outcomes, of trust exchanges in police organisations warrant further investigation. No studies have been found those examine the perspectives of police officers on trust, the role of trust in police organisations, and its potential to influence officer well being and resilience.

Methodology:

This paper presents findings from a qualitative study that was undertaken with New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF), in Australia. The study sought to examine *well-being and resilience of police officers in which trust in policing emerged strongly, and vivified the value and role trust had for police*. A qualitative methodology was adopted to allow the lived experiences of current rank and file police officers to be sought.

Sample:

The study used a non probability sampling procedure, namely purposive as defined by (Bryman, 2008). Purposive sampling was used due to the aim of the study, in which only the knowledge or expertise of current rank and file police officers was sought. It was important the study was made up of this group of police personnel as rank and file police officers are seldom asked to participate in police research. Most existing police research has utilized a sample made up of senior police management, external governing bodies and community members as a source for empirical data (e.g. Chan, 1999). Furthermore the sample in the study reflects the demographics of gender, length of service and captures if the sample member performs a management role in the organisation. The research team believed these factors were important in the examination of the police complaints process. The sample is made up of 14 police officers and is illustrated by figure one below:

Table 1: Demographic and Methodology Data

Pseudonym	Sex	Service	Management/ Non-management	Interview Transcript Pages	Interview Transcript Words
Aaron	Male	11 - 20 yrs	Management	35	11,320
Robert	Male	11 - 20 yrs	Management	40	13,420
Lou	Male	11 - 20 yrs	Management	25	9,036
Gregg	Male	11 - 20 yrs	Management	21	6,681
Geoff	Male	21 - 30 yrs	Management	29	10,773
Brian	Male	21 - 30 yrs	Management	27	9,030
Claire	Female	0 -10 yrs	Management	41	13,548
Darren	Male	0 -10 yrs	Non - management	33	10,357
Peter	Male	0 -10 yrs	Non – management	20	6,637
Karen	Female	0 -10 yrs	Non – management	25	5,790
Daphne	Female	11- 20 yrs	Non – management	20	6,729
Brett	Male	11- 20 yrs	Non – management	27	9,706
Tom	Male	21 - 30 yrs	Non – management	29	10,229
Louise	Female	0 - 10 yrs	Non – Management	23	7,023

Two Local Area Commands were selected for participation, again based on the principles of purposive sampling. The selection of each area command was based on one command being in a city location, the other command being in a regional location. This approach to sampling was adopted in order to reflect the differences between police practice required in city and regional locations (Fenwick et. al., 2012).

Data Collection Tool and Analysis:

Interviews were deliberately unstructured to encourage police to speak of concerns *they* felt important, rather than discussing issues solely identified by the research team. Such an approach aligned with the exploratory nature of the study, and followed Hummel's (1991) claims about the worthiness and validity of stories from those in organisations, including their richness and ring of truth.

Approval from the Human Ethics Review Committee at the University of Western Sydney was gained prior to fieldwork commencing. Interviews were conducted by two researchers, and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was undertaken (Braun & Clarke 2006:5) with one emergent theme that became almost immediately apparent was *Trust and Policing*. Our analysis focuses on officers' reported experiences, and perspectives, about trust in NSWPF.

Table 2: Trust and Policing Theme and Sub-themes

Theme: Trust and Policing
1. Trust and Rank
2. The Trust Exchange
3. Felt Trust
4. Broken Trust

Trust and Policing:

The theme of Trust and Policing emerged quickly; respondents spoke again and again about trust, between individual officers, and between officers and the organisation. Trust was not only reportedly desired, it was regarded as an occupational requirement. Respondents spoke of needing trust in many domains and roles of their police work: trust between officers doing operational roles; trust between operational officers and management; officers trusting that the organisation would support them when they needed it; and, trust that the organisation's structures, policies and processes were appropriate and adequate to provide the support police needed. If trust was absent, or unreliable, problems inevitably arose. As the earlier sections confirm, researchers have noted the importance of trust in organisational life; that interpersonal and mutual trust are integral elements of successful organisations. However, they have also noted that trust is fragile and reciprocal in nature. Building trust for successful workplaces can take time; if broken, trust can take longer to repair (Vickers et al, 2014).

Trust and Rank:

Australian police are required to follow instructions and accept organisational processes that are encoded in law. There are clear legal statutes which specify the roles and procedures for police officers in all jurisdictions in Australia (see *Police Act 1990 No 47 (NSW)*; *Police Regulation 2008(NSW)*; *Victoria Police Act 2013 (Vic)*; *Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000 (Qld)*; *Police Regulations 2014 (SA)* *Police Service Act 2003 (Tas)*). Within the differing jurisdictions are also published codes of conduct and professional standards for officers to follow (see *NSWPF Standards of Professional Conduct and Ethics 2014*). There is a clear expectation from within the police force that orders will be followed and that rank and hierarchy will be respected (Dubnick & Justice 2006:251). Respecting rank is contingent upon the

existence of trust between police (Densten 2003); as stated previously, social pact theory confirms that the unification of the whole is offered in exchange for the cooperation of the individual (Rousseau, 1998). Trust is essential to ensure the integrity of the rank system (Herrington & Roberts 2013) and reliance on rank and its associated behaviours serves to protect those who depend on it, and enhances police members' pride and respect for their organisation (Densten 2003: 410).

Trust was considered by respondents as being essential to the successful operation of rank, and rank was seen as a crucial element of the police structure that could be relied upon, to ensure police security and predictability as they went about their work. For police doing their jobs, the operation of, and reliance upon, rank was considered essential for work to flow. Individuals accepted, respected and adhered to the authority of rank; from this came trust in the rank structure and its capacity to protect police doing their job. Trust in rank was offered and accepted by police officers as a non-negotiable term of their employment within the policing context. Faith in its existence and its reliability was regarded as critical. Respondents confirmed that rank was a key norm within the organisation; rank was seen to give the organisation its 'force':

Peter: Being just this structural organisation; rank's there for a reason. If there wasn't rank, it wouldn't be much of a force.

Research into the importance of rank to policing has confirmed that leader effectiveness is dramatically increased when behaviours that instill faith and trust are observed by lower ranked officers (Densten, 2003:408). However, when trust is absent, organisational members can become cynical (Kannan-Narasimhan et al 2012; Willemyns et al 2003). Police officers reported needing to know they could trust rank to work effectively within the organisation, so they could feel supported and protected. However, there was evidence from some officers' remarks that the role of, and respect for, rank was changing. Daphne was concerned that the reverence for rank was diminishing:

Daphne: There's absolutely no respect for rank. I find that through the whole thing. I've watched it change. I've been here long enough. There is no respect for rank any more. A sergeant can't yell at a constable for not doing their job because then they'll go cry to the duty officer over the sergeant. If the duty officer yells ... at the constable then they'll come and complain ... There's no respect for rank. The Police Force has gotten all soft. It's all, "give everyone a hug". Yeah, I'm old school. It's, "harden up".

The police' 'pecking order' was mostly respected, although there was concern expressed that it might have been breaking down in some areas. Senior officers being more approachable tended to undermine the power of rank, even if that approachability of senior officers was welcome:

Peter: There's probably a bit, a slight break down in rank. Approachability is probably a good thing that's come from it though.

Rank demarcates roles for police; having faith in rank in the organisation influenced police' ability to do their work. Rank enabled police to have confidence in the instructions they received. The presence and centrality of rank exemplified the implied social agreements and expectations for police operating with their own micro community:

Robert: I always agree to it because they are a higher rank than me ... I'm very respectful of rank. I'll say, "Yes!". As long as it's helping the public I'm 100 per cent behind it.

Officers also discussed their expectation that rank, and its associated seniority, needed to be earned. Much of the respect for rank came with high ranking officers being seen to have "earned" the rank they enjoyed:

Karen: A lot of the older, higher up people, look at younger people and think, you have no rights. Like, you've got to earn stuff.

There was an expectation that progression through the organisation's structure was something that should be earned and should not be, and was not, easily achieved. Rank seemed to represent freedoms that less senior staff didn't currently enjoy, an expectation that was normalized in the police organisation, and largely accepted. Faith in rank was at least in part the basis for a trust exchange between police officers and the organisation. Trust in rank and the authority it carried was part of the police micro social contract:

Geoff: Openness, honesty. Someone that I know will trust me and I can trust them. And loyalty, that's a two way street. I'm not a "yes man". I won't agree to everything but if I get told to do something, I'll go and do it without a problem. But that's what we need. We just need that open, honest channel of communication, and clarity. And just if someone needs to be jumped on, jump on them and move forward.

The Trust Exchange:

The trust building process, or the trust exchange, was an important part of making a pact or agreement within the micro society. Trust building requires the surrendering of the individual's desires and perspectives, so they might operate under the direction of, and for the benefit of, the micro-society organisation (Rousseau, 1998). In exchange for the individual's surrender, membership of the moral body is enabled and the security that membership implies (Rousseau, 1998). In the metaphorical micro-society of NSWPF, police officers routinely engaged in a similar trust exchange: they operated under the direction of the organisation, for the benefit of the organisation, in return for the security of knowing the organisation was supporting and protecting them both critical and positive constituents of the organization's, and the individual's, success.

Respondents spoke of trust as if it was a currency of exchange. The exchanges included: police with other police; police with the community (not examined in this article, as noted previously); and, police with the police organisation. Below, we share police views on the value placed on trust, and how perceptions of trustworthiness were seen to be central elements of the trust exchange process. Trust in the organisation, and of other police, also reportedly related closely to expectations of fair and equitable treatment (see also, Herrington et al., 2013; Schafer, 2013). The trust exchange was important for both police management and non management as it helped support the rank structure of the organisation, and create an effective police organisation that was seen to be trustworthy and functional. The success of this trust exchange also legitimized the role of police within the organisation (Beckley 2014; Herrington & Roberts, 2013).

Trustworthiness was described, not just as a characteristic of an officer, or of the police organisation, but as something intangible that officers relied upon, exchanged and used daily within that organisation. Unsurprisingly, trustworthiness was not assumed to exist but needed to be proven, and established, through interactions with others. The exchange of trust between parties could then continue to flow until the exchange of trust was hampered, or broken. And trust wasn't just about the other party being honest and ethical; it was trust in that person's capacity to get the work done. Once established, trust was relied upon and was seen as a positive workplace behaviour that could develop and grow. However, if trust is broken for any reason disappointment and mistrust would follow:

Aaron: I think people have to earn your trust just as I have to earn other people's trust... especially at the upper levels of the police. I understand why some bosses use certain staff, because you trust them.

Facilitator: Right, okay. So they try and surround themselves with people they trust, is that what you're saying?

Aaron: Yeah, who you trust to get the job done. ... Inherent trust is the ethical one ... but the trust about, ideally, about whether they can get the job done, also needs to be built up with me. They 56

have to show that they can actually do it and that sort of thing. I get disappointed if people let you down, especially if you communicated X, Y, Z being done and it doesn't get done at once.

Officers relied on this established trust, and acted accordingly. Police officers also reported their view that levels of responsibility and rank were related in their minds with how reliable another officer was. Junior police officers, with less experience, accepted their lower rank in the organization, especially if they felt this was in exchange for being able to trust in supportive senior management and supervisory decisions made by others. They felt secure knowing more senior officers were making the decisions:

Darren: *You've got the hierarchy. So, obviously the Commander's at the top, and the Inspectors deal with the Sergeants, and the Sergeants deal with us, kind of thing. I like that. I like the idea that anybody with a higher rank than you can help you. I like that idea. ... Like, you've got your Sergeants; you've got your Inspectors; you've got the ...Commissioner, in control of everything. You've still got that kind of hierarchy of how everything comes down.*

Officers of higher rank also held trust in the organisation and had clear expectations in the exchanges of trust, especially around the established ethical and professional standards they were expected to follow. While norms such as these were not always encoded, they were evident in observed patterns of behaviour in the micro society: if an officer was seen to do 'the wrong thing', which may have included disrespecting rank, they would be reminded of their unspoken trust agreement and their need to adhere to it:

Lou: *If a Constable's doing the wrong thing, and they kept doing the wrong thing, they'd be on a performance plan before the end of the day... I won't tolerate or allow in my police station for a Constable in an open environment to walk up to the Serge and call them by their nickname or their first name. Because that erodes the rank structure and erodes the accountability systems and their authority... The troops know what's acceptable. Because you give them an inch, they'll take a mile.*

Being able to trust other police was reported to help with team work, and meeting one another socially was reported to help officers learn to trust one another more during the working day, which was seen as a positive outcome for those working together:

Peter: *When it comes down to, especially on the truck with front line policing, it definitely boosts the camaraderie. And just the trust is the main thing. Socializing with other work colleagues is-, we see them in a different light and you learn better how they operate and it's easier to work with them.*

Team work was reportedly an important aspect of police work and it was reported that, in order for teamwork to be successful, team members needed to trust one another enough to surrender their individual identity, and become part of the team. Once again, for this to occur, officers needed to trust that the team environment would protect and support them in their roles. Officers also reported developing a sense of obligation to reciprocate trust that was invested in them, something past researchers have confirmed (see Salamon et al 2008):

Brian: *It's working in a team environment which is what policing's all about. It's working in a team environment: we're not individuals; we don't work as an individual. So, working together in a good, hard core, knit team is so important.*

The trust exchange in the team environment was seen as crucial for police to feel effective, and secure, when performing their team member roles.

Felt Trust:

Felt trust describes the feeling of being trusted by another. The construct of felt trust was extended by Lau and colleagues (2014) to include more than just feeling trusted; they claimed felt trust could also include

feelings of being relied upon by others. Positive self esteem has been found to flow with such feelings, as do proactive and self evaluative outcomes; felt trust was also acknowledged to be both a state and a process (Lau et al, 2014; Salamon& Robinson, 2008). Employees self-evaluate positively when they feel trusted in their workplace and those same employees who feel trusted are less inclined to abuse the trust placed in them by superiors. An investment of trust by superiors is rarely exploited (Lau et al, 2014). Felt trust emanating from top management is likely to produce employees who would act responsibly, ethically and cooperatively (Salamon& Robinson, 2008). So, felt trust can be felt, given, and invested (Lau et al, 2014). Felt trust has also been found to be more likely to be reciprocated and will give a sense of confidence that reinforces the trustee's ability to perform well in their role (Lau et al, 2014). The trustee becomes aware of the vulnerability felt by the trust giver and normally would be unlikely to break or exploit that trust (Salamon et al. 2008). However, *if the trust is broken* or exploited by the trustee, the exchange will be broken and trust will be very difficult to re establish.

Respondents confirmed what the trust literature has said. Respondents from NSW Police spoke about felt trust and also reported that when trust is lost or broken that it was not easy to replicate or replace. Tom, speaking of feeling the trust of his team, also reflected this concern around the potential for negative outcomes that can sometimes arise when senior staff are moved from one position or location to another, within the organisation. Tom stated that this can have a detrimental effect on the team due to the vacuum of felt trust left behind during his (temporary) departure:

Tom: I actually know my team appreciate me because, quite regularly, I've been pulled in and out of the team and had another sergeant come in who does, probably, the opposite to me. There's a massive change between my team when he's there and when I'm there; a massive change. Our performance goes down. They just lose any desire to be in the workplace ... it really does affect them when he's there. Since he's been removed from our command and I've gone back into the team again, they just enjoy the fact I put the trust in them and give them the freedom to do their job, as long as they return that trust back to me.

Tom was emphasizing the conditional and reciprocal nature of the trust investment and exchange he was involved in with his team. Trust had to be given in order to be received. And when a trust investment was made, this police manager felt he was repaid with higher productivity and work performance from the team. However, when trust was withheld or nonexistent, for example when another less trusted and trusting team leader led the team, performance and morale suffered.

Felt trust was also discussed in terms of its ability to underpin emotional support in the workplace and was shared between groups of officers regardless of rank or seniority. Informal methods of support in police organisations, perhaps more often utilized in the past, were noted during interviews for their capacity to build trust, and encourage felt trust. Drinks together after a shift was seen as helpful; it wasn't the drinking that was considered important, but the personal sharing having a social drink together afforded, including the development of trust and increased emotional support. Informal social support gatherings were considered especially important because many police believed that these situations worked better than the use of formal employee support programs:

Tom: The only support was the old sit around on a Thursday night cut out...we're talking a long time ago, pre-Royal Commission. You'd have a couple of beers at work on the Thursday night in the meal room and have a chin-wag. That, still to this day, I still believe is one of the best support mechanisms you have, because although we didn't have the EAP and all that sort of stuff, we had each other. People would talk to each other...Everyone's different too. Some people enjoy the EAP, enjoy counselors. I never have. I've enjoyed talking to people that I trust and dealing with it that way.

Police reported their view that, for officers to reveal vulnerability and seek assistance, they needed to trust the person from whom they were seeking support and, ideally, feel trusted by them also. One officer spoke of how he shared a very traumatic episode of police work at such a gathering, something he had previously

not spoken about with anyone. The junior officer felt able to share his vulnerability and trauma *only after a senior officer* shared a similarly traumatic experience and trusted the team by sharing *his* trauma and his vulnerability:

That took me, I reckon, six months to deal with because I couldn't, being young and inexperienced, I couldn't talk about it. I couldn't explain it and I was having numerous sleepless nights. It wasn't until we were actually sitting around the meal room one night at work We were having a chin-wag and one of the senior constables was just talking about different things. He talked about something he saw and how it affected him and gave him sleepless nights. I went, "That's affected you?" He went "Yeah, yeah." I went, "Oh." Then I told my story and once I realised that it was normal for us to experience that, it really helped me. I wasn't different to anyone else.

When trust was felt within a team in this way, issues of concern that were reported were also better managed within the team effectively because of a belief in the existence of mutual trust. The existence of felt trust helped mediate issues individuals or groups felt during the working day, and enabled officers to deal with issues informally and swiftly. Officers also discussed positive team environments being built on strong foundations of trust and police then being more able to execute their responsibilities with greater confidence. A collective experience of felt trust has been found to be evident in shared values operating as a precursor to reciprocal and/or unconditional trust (Gillespie & Mann 2004). This collective experience of felt and given trust was shared by police interviewed as also being trust given and received, and both reciprocal and unconditional. Given the risks associated with doing police work, being able to trust other police officers and the organisation was seen to be essential for police officers' ongoing sense of security:

Brian: *A positive aspect is being able to trust the people you work with, having confidence in the people you work with. At the end of the day, if I'm working with you my life is in your hands and my partner. So I've got to be able to trust you knowing full well that I've got the utmost confidence in my work colleagues; that they've got my back, I've got their back.*

Broken Trust:

As noted above, trust is hard-won and when trust given or felt is broken, betrayed, withdrawn, absent, or lost, the outcomes for police, and police organisations, can be very serious. Police reported needing to have faith on those around them as they went about their police work.

Police leadership has been found to be directly impacted by senior police displaying behaviour that instills faith in them among subordinate staff (Densten 2003). Central to the role of all police officers is their capability to execute the task at hand, and have faith in their partner or colleagues for support should the occasion arise. Engaging with criminals is an inherently risky activity: the breadth of risky situations that may arise during a police officer's working day is extreme. Unsurprisingly, it was considered essential that officers could rely on co-workers for reliable and honest support:

Robert: *If you don't trust your partner you're hamstrung. I won't even engage with criminals if I don't trust my partner because some things we do are [risky].*

Broken trust can be considered dangerous to police doing their work: an absence of trust between police is very likely to undermine an otherwise effective police team, then placing individuals and groups of police at an even higher risk:

Karen: *...If you don't trust who you're working on a truck with, you may as well sit in the station all day. Because if you get called to a high risk incident, and you've got to count on that person and you can't, it's useless. It helps no one. It's just more risky.*

The untrustworthiness of fellow officers was commented on frequently: any uncertainty around trusting a fellow officer was seen to undermine much of what needed to happen in an effective police organisation. 59

For example, being told a “fib” (a lie) by another officer was considered enough to undermine trust in that officer in the future. Unfortunately, being untruthful was considered by some as being routine on the part of their colleagues:

***Darren:** At the moment it's taking me a little while. Like when somebody tells me a fib, it takes me a little while to think it through and say, “No, this doesn't make sense because of this, and this”. ... You know bec ause, yeah, everyone lies to you.*

Officers discussed honesty as being an essential element of trustworthiness. Unfortunately, police interviewed routinely reflected their concerns that trust being regularly undermined by a lack of honesty, and that dishonest interactions happened on a regular basis:

***Darren:** I find that I'm very trusting almost immediately, which is changing. ... Before I joined the police force I trusted everybody. ... You know when somebody is lying to you but you're kind of like, you know, “I'll give you the benefit of the doubt”, kind of thing. But since [then] though, I've found that I'm becoming less like that. I'm questioning everybody a lot more ... like, just about everybody in the police force pretty much. Like, whatever somebody tells me, I'm kind of like second guessing, which is good, you know? It's good because you need that kind of response when somebody tells you something; to kind of think about it.*

Management’s trust in subordinate staff, and their management colleagues, was also considered to be very important and management decisions were also reportedly impacted by perceived levels of trust above, below and across the organisation. Gossip and rumour-mongering at all levels were reported to regularly undermine trust in the organisation:

Geoff: Yes, a lack of support and trust can really make my role difficult. When you feel as though you haven't got the support of those [people around you]... you can't trust them. To be quite honest, they stab you in the back. The cops talk; we're terrible gossipers. I hate gossip. Rumour gossip and innuendo just doesn't wash with me. If someone hasn't got the balls to say it to your face, my honest opinion is they should just shut their mouth and move on. I've got no time for it, I don't like it. It's negative.

Gossip in organisations has been found elsewhere to be responsible for inhibiting strong trust relationships between managers and subordinate staff in workplaces (Ellwart, Wittek&Wielers 2012). Unfortunately, the same study concluded that, in densely populated organizations, especially where relationships with managers was difficult, negative gossip was almost unavoidable and could have a very negative outcome for the organisation (Ellwart et al, 2012).

When trust is broken or damaged, police officers can be left feeling cynical towards the organisation and its processes (Kannan-Narasimhan et al. 2012). The police interviewed reported that they would avoid, withdraw from, and potentially isolate themselves in the organisation if trust was broken, in order to try and protect themselves. However, paradoxically, rather than protecting themselves, they were unwittingly increasing their vulnerability and potentially further compromising their well being by cutting off potential avenues of support within the organisation:

***Geoff:** A couple of things have impacted upon [me] and one is that I just feel as though as far as my peers go, I can't trust them. The other one is that I start to shut down and not talk about things with those who I know I can't trust.*

In the absence of trust, officers reported withdrawing from the organisation and colleagues they felt unable to trust, concealing their concerns, and internalizing negative experiences. Unfortunately, by doing so, they

were potentially placing their physical, mental and emotional health at greater risk the opposite of what they probably intended.

Discussion and Conclusion:

Geoff: It's just a matter of trust. As I said, trust is a massive thing.

Rousseau's (1998) social contract theory requires an agreement or pact to be made between members of an organisation and its associated moral body; a highly functioning micro-society depends upon trust, and the exchange of trust between members (Rousseau, 1998). Police officers repeatedly told us of the importance of trust, and how the positive exchange of trust was required by them to do police work and was essential to NSWPF's positive and effective functioning. Trust has long been associated with valued organisational outcomes: high performance; strong collaboration; effective team work; and, improved stability and success for the organisations who engage with it (Burke et al, 2007). Trust is also highly valued and sought after by police, and by police organisations. This is unsurprising, given that police routinely engage in potentially high risk work activities. Respondents in this study confirmed the need for trust by individual police and the police organisation, for both to be effective.

Kiel and Watson (2009) suggested that the most important challenge facing public sector organisations is to make them more humane and caring, and that affective leadership is an essential ingredient of more efficient and productive workplaces. Trust is essential in humane and caring workplaces: a major way to develop trust in organisations is via increased communication and sharing (Ospina&Yaroni, 2003). To this end, we recommend that greater efforts be directed towards initiating, developing and supporting trust in police organisations to benefit individual police officers, as well as the organisations they serve. Finding ways to encourage trust development and exchange through both formal and informal means would be useful. For some officers, the natural camaraderie that can emerge from social get together is preferable to formal counseling mechanisms, though both should be available to staff at all times. The following informal approaches are recommended:

- Senior police officers sharing their challenging, even traumatising, policing experiences, as well as what they might perceive in themselves as weaknesses would offer a vulnerability and preparedness to share that many junior officers might be unaware of, and could respond to with enhanced felt and given trust, directed to both the senior officer concerned, and the organisation at large;
- Senior police might make a point of orchestrating informal, social gatherings possible for police at all levels to attend, but that might also be *gently facilitated* in ways that encourage, but don't insist upon, sharing between officers. To encourage this sharing of emotional and personal information, we suggest that numbers at such gatherings are kept low, that meetings are off police premises, and they are planned on a regular and ongoing basis, to enable trust to germinate and grow over time, for sharing to happen naturally, over time, as incidents of concern occur during police officers' working lives;
- Most importantly, we recommend that senior police take time to review, between senior officers, activities or responses by senior officers that might serve to undermine or breach trust between senior and junior police. As we have seen, trust is hard to develop, easily broken, and vital to the successful operation of the organisation at all levels. Certainly, it is our observation, based on the stories shared here, that police at all levels care very much about trust, observe what other officers are doing in relation to being trustworthy on a routine basis, and are likely to become more trusting if they feel trusted, and can trust those around them, especially those at the senior levels of the organisation;

- Workplace training was already being used to deliver essential information and skills to staff, both support staff and sworn officers within NSWPF. However, we recommend an emphasis of more innovative approaches which harness informal peer support systems and processes, and which encourage the initiation and development of cooperative, trusted relationships within the workplace.

Police organisations need to address, head on, questions of trust that have emerged from this exploratory study, to enhance the effectiveness of the organisation, and to enhance the wellbeing and resilience of officers and their ability to most capably perform their job. We believe that initiation, enhancement, and underpinning of what may already be espoused value of trust, demands approaches that will engender and increase the experience of felt and given trust between individual police officers at all levels, and between individual officers and the organisation. Developing trust will not only enable police to feel more protected and secure in their roles, we claim that developing high levels of trust will have direct and materially positive outcome on police officers' ability to respond to adversity experienced in their workplaces. Feeling safe and knowing that their colleagues "have got their back" were confirmed as essential elements of feeling safe and confident when undertaking police work. Feeling secure during their workday, and finding trust and trusting contexts to share the unavoidable grief, fear, stress, strain and anxiety that police can face when doing police work is essential for enhancing officer resilience and ensuring their ongoing work health and safety, physically and mentally. We recommend urgent research into trust, felt trust, enabled trust, and the enhancement of police officer resilience and wellbeing.

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