

Summaries

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Dilemma's in criminal investigation

C.J. de Poot

Decision making in criminal investigation is a complex process involving various actors like police detectives and their chiefs as well as public prosecutors. Making choices is inevitable when it comes to criminal investigation. It is important for instance to decide which cases will be investigated and which will be put aside. Sometimes the importance of finding the culprit must be balanced against the costs involved. The investigation process itself often generates several options leading to several possible suspects, which makes deciding which path should be followed, inevitable. The quality of criminal investigation will be improved substantially if all these decisions are made consciously and explicitly.

The profession of police detective; an institutional approach

E.J. van der Torre and E.R. Muller

In the period 1980-2000 the Dutch police detective force encountered many obstacles. The police had become fused with local administration and chose decentralised organisational forms that complicated effective criminal investigation. Priorities varied considerably because the police top granted many administrative requests. Instability and the negligence of the detectives' job led to a 'crisis of investigation'. Nowadays the police top acknowledges that her legitimacy in society results from an effective execution of its core business, including criminal investigation. The top has taken more distance from local administration and administrative tasks. To become institutionalised, criminal investigation needs the development of a consistent vision on investigation. This is a complicated process due to differences between police forces and doubt about how much power must be

invested in the prevention of (serious) crime. Nevertheless a clear strategy is needed so it can be translated into stable and tried methods. Stability will be enhanced by well working lines of information and flexible organisational forms that enable the fast formation of criminal investigation teams that are able to perform their tasks.

Measuring investigative performance

C.J. de Poot and P.J. van Koppen

Criminal investigations vary from simple cases in which the offender is immediately known, to complex cases that require an extensive investigation to get solved. Worldwide, scientists and policymakers rely on 'hard' indicators, like arrest rates, clearance rates and response times to assess investigative performance. In this article, the authors show that the use of these performance measures is problematic. The measures indicate a different kind of achievement for different cases. On theoretical grounds, criminal investigations can be divided in four different categories, which require a different investigative strategy. Empirical data show that the police do indeed handle these cases differently. Information about the investigative category of a case can guide our interpretation of the customary performance measures. Availability of this information can thus increase the utility of these popular measures and improve our understanding of detective work.

Detection rates as measure of police effectiveness

E van Tulder, P. Smit and S. Siero

The main aim of this article is to investigate whether the detection rate is a useful measure of police effectiveness, i.e. is it a valid and reliable measure and what possible alternative measures exist. Results indicate that, due to police crime recording practices and other statistical artefacts, the reliability of the detection rate as a measure of police crime-solving ability is insufficient. If these deficiencies are repaired, the detection rate will be a useful measure in the future, provided it is used in combination with the two other measures mentioned in this report, the offender rate and the punishment rate. All three measures have advantages and disadvantages. Good results can be obtained only by using them together. The detection rate (and the other measures) can be used to measure police effectiveness only, not efficiency or productivity. International comparisons will always be problematic, due mainly to major differences in the organisation of the criminal justice systems.

The cooperation between the public prosecutor and the police detective force

B.L. Mac Lean

From her experience as public prosecutor the author describes the changing relationship between prosecutors and the police detective force since the end of the eighties. Until then the prosecutor, formally the investigation leader, operated on a great distance from the investigation team in a particular case. Also personal relationships were distant. Several developments necessitated a more prominent role for the prosecutor in the process of deciding which cases deserve an investigation as well as deciding what course to follow in a particular case. First, the ministry of justice confronted the prosecution with stricter directives and specific targets to be reached. Second, the amount of work to be done increased every year, so identifying priorities in investigation was inevitable. In spite of differences in work culture the author thinks that these changes have led to an exchange of expert knowledge and more mutual understanding for each others role and responsibility in the process of criminal investigation.

Wiretapping and criminal investigations

R.J. Bokhorst

In the Netherlands, wiretapping is a widely used method of criminal investigation. This article discusses the proceeds of wiretapping as they were studied in an extensive research project into major criminal investigations. These investigations dealt with serious crime e.g. murder/manslaughter, drug trade and robbery. It appeared to be that the main contribution in investigating crime does not lie in – as might perhaps be expected – gathering conclusive evidence as a direct result of wiretapping. Only in some cases utterances made on the phone served in substantiating a case against the suspect. However, important contributions were made in giving insight into (criminal) relations and friends of the suspect and the background of these contacts. It generates information that might be used in the course of the investigation process such as the examining of witnesses and suspects. Furthermore, wiretapping is extensively used in combination with other investigation methods such as covert surveillance. In order to evaluate the yields of wiretapping, all these aspects should be taken into account.