

Embedded Ethics: Discourse and Power in the New South Wales Police Service

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Abstract

In this paper we report an ethnographic research study conducted in one of the world's largest police organizations, the New South Wales Police Service. Our research question was, 'How do forms of power shape organizational members' ethical practices?' We look at existing theories that propose the deployment of two interrelated arguments: that ethics are embedded in organizational practices and discourse at a micro-level of everyday organizational life, which is contrasted with a focus on the macro-organizational, institutional forces that are seen to have an impact on ethics. Resisting this distinction between the 'micro' and the 'macro', we build on these two bodies of knowledge to explain ethical change as deeply embedded in power relations that traverse the scale of social action.

Keywords: ethics, power, practice, discourse, police organizations

Introduction

In this paper we ask, 'How do relations of power shape organizational members' ethical practices?'² We address the question through both theoretical and empirical work. Theoretically, we review and question the argument that ethics are embedded in micro-organizational power relations and are subject to shaping by macro-institutional forms of power. We do so by looking at an ethical change initiative in the New South Wales (NSW) Police Service as a situated practice in which the macro and the micro were mutually constitutive.

As researchers, we were intrigued by the NSW Police Service's attempts to reform their ethical practices; also, we were puzzled by the fact that, despite the public pressure and the considerable amount of resources committed to the reform, the concept of 'ethical policing' seemed to be an elusive reform objective. Hence, we decided to research the question of how power relations shape organizational members' ethical practices. Our analysis advances current theorizing in ethics and organization theory. To date, most approaches to how power shapes ethics in organizations propose either a micro-approach, derived from an ethnographic tradition (such as Jackall 1988), or a macro-approach, derived from a more institutional perspective (such as Crank and Langworthy 1992). We supplement this theorizing by introducing analysis in which micro- and macro-power relations interact in situated practices to shape ethics.

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The NSW Police Service represented a most interesting research subject: the Service was rife with corruption and unethical behaviour. In order to introduce more 'efficient and ethical policing' (Ryan 2002) a macro-organizational reform programme designed to expunge ethically corrupt behaviour was instigated. The main thrust of the reforms was to shift formal power relations from a coercive bureaucracy into more democratic and team-based forms. The idea behind these changes was that more democracy at the base of the organization would create space in which officers could resist corrupt tendencies and act more ethically rather than be subject to overbearing and corrupt authority. Power relations were addressed in the change programme by reforming the formal rules, relations and protocols of the organization, in particular through the introduction of new routine situated practices within the existing bureaucracy. Notably, these were the Operations Control and Review (OCR) meeting and the Employee Management System (EMS). The boundaries of the OCR and the EMS were coextensive with a particular style of speaking, characteristic of the new style of reformed policing to which police were expected to conform. As our analysis of the OCR and the EMS will show, these practices were pivotal in the constitution of ethics. We will argue that power is neither institutionally external to ethics nor is ethics somehow separated from institutional effects.

In order to discuss our research question, we have structured our paper as follows: first, we prepare the theoretical context of our argument; second, we introduce the research framework and provide an account of our methodology; third, we report the findings of the study. We were able to identify a number of lenses that were situationally constructed and institutionalized within the Police Service. These culturally situated practices were complex, subtle and distinctive (Philipsen, 1989/1990). Hence our contribution focuses on what happened in specific situational contexts in the Service and why it happened, rather than judging the observed practices. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings for future theoretical work and management practice.

Theoretical Framework

Police organizations are a particular type of organization: they are essentially, bureaucratic and militaristic in character (Dandeker 1992; Battistelli 2008). However, this does not mean that their officers are tightly scripted and framed in their enactment of official roles. As Manning (2008: 678) notes, 'performing in the interests of order is not the same as what the organization requires in formal bureaucratic terms'. Because so much police work takes place in improvised contexts that are subsequently and post-hoc tightly framed in terms of bureaucratic accountability, much of what is interesting about police organizational work is how police 'rationalize or explain the whys and wherefores of that work' (Manning 2008: 684). Thus, their work is highly situational and contextually specific, often taking place at a distance from the formal organization (Bittner 1967; Jermier et al. 1991). Not surprisingly, because of the fluid nature of policing as a practice, situated in many varied locales, much of the organizational research that has been done is processual and ethnographic, including Manning

and Van Maanen (1978), Punch (1979), Van Maanen (1988), Finnane (1987, 1996) and Chan (1997). Seminal studies from symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, such as Bittner (1967) and Cicourel (1976), demonstrate that, while being subjected to strict bureaucratic controls, police have considerable discretion because they need to be able to *read the streets* to understand the moral frameworks of street players. Hence, ethics will be played out in practice in local scenes of action.

An emerging school of thought around the notion of ethics as practice (see Clegg et al. 2007; Carter et al. 2008) suggests that ethics are embedded in organizational power relations. Their theoretical proposition is that, in order to theorize embedded ethics, it is pivotal to study power relations. There are two distinct bodies of knowledge that are relevant, yet not discussed jointly.

From a micro-organizational perspective, scholars such as Knights and McCabe (1999) see a clear link between power and discourse, using Foucault (1977) to do so. Foucault's core argument is that power and knowledge are mutually implicated in framing those truths that are held as self-evident and thus shape reality. In organization studies, early contributions by Townley (e.g. 1993) as well as more recent contributions by Halford and Leonard (2007) and Barratt (2008) make productive use of Foucault's overall oeuvre of power-related work.

The relation of rules to practice has long been considered analytically problematic. For instance, Gouldner (1954) argued that the meanings of rules are not inscribed in what they say but vary with the context of enactment. In his *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*, Gouldner (1954) defined three types of norms (including a punishment-centred bureaucracy) that operate simultaneously and create clashes in an organization's norm system. From a philosophical standpoint, Wittgenstein (1968) stressed that rules are always interpreted and enacted situationally. Consequently, there is ample opportunity for unscripted norms to override formal rules in action, which is precisely when we would expect ethics to come into play — when rules and norms clash (Munro, 1992).

Given the situational nature of rules and their interpretation, it is more likely to be rule *use*, rather than rule *existence*, which will shape ethical conduct. Reforming power relations and rewriting the rules does not necessarily reform power practices or their ethicality. Jackall's (1988) empirical research into the 'moral rules-in-use that managers construct to guide their behaviour' found that 'actual organizational moralities are ... contextual, situational, highly specific, and, most often, unarticulated' (Jackall 1988: 4,6). Research suggests that, in practice, ethics cannot be conceptualized as coterminous with rule-based codes (e.g. Clegg et al. 2007). Kjonstad and Willmott (1995: 446) are especially critical about the relation between codification and conduct: 'the provision of codes of conduct is an insufficient, and possibly a perverse, means of recognizing the significance, and promoting the development, of ethical corporate behaviour'. Such codes of conduct do not necessarily produce ethically sound practices (Munro 1992; Barker 1993).

Organizational rules and practices are framed discursively, a central contribution of discourse analysis (Clegg 1975; Astley and Zammuto 1992; Alvesson and Karreman 2000a,b; Boden 1994; Ford and Ford 1995; Czarniawaksa 1997; Deetz 1982; Iedema and Wodak 1999; Wodak and Meyer 2001; Titscher et al.

2000 Fairclough 1989; Fairclough et al. 2004). What rules are constituted as being is made up in and, on occasions of, everyday organizational sensemaking, as Weick (1995), adapting freely from Garfinkel (1967), argues. Weick et al. (2005) portray organizing in terms of members working out the local stories in which they find themselves. Hence, bringing action off as more or less legitimate will always be an effect of local discursive construct; thus, from the perspective of micro-practices, we are encouraged to see the moral universe in every piece of action and its accounting.

Against the focus on the micro, close observers of the police as an organization maintain that we also need to view scenes of action institutionally. For instance, Crank and Langworthy (1992: 342) argue that organizational practices and structures in a police organization 'have a great deal to do with institutional values in its environment'. They suggest that:

'incorporation of powerful myths into the structure and activities of police departments enables them to attain legitimacy; with legitimacy comes stability and protection from outside interference by powerful sovereign actors who are present in the enveloping institutional environment.' (Crank and Langworthy 1992: 338)

The linkages between research into everyday discourse and more macro-organizational issues of legitimacy (Crank and Langworthy 1992) remain under-explored. Organizations adapt to external pressure ceremonially, and implement policies that show their commitments, as institutional theory has stressed (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Institutional theory shares some resemblances with mundane theorizing in this respect: organizational actors often assume that those rules that an organization adopts will determine its members' behaviour in what institutionalists would see as a form of normative isomorphism. However, while such rules may sociologically frame the accounts that organization members make of their action they do not necessarily frame the action itself. Actions are always situated practices — sometimes far away from the formal rule-shaping policies. Policies are always played out in scenes of everyday working life, where events and local realities frame policy effects as they are articulated in practice, in quite unanticipated ways. Hence, if ethics are always situated in practices they cannot be seen apart from the power relations that frame and constitute those relations in specifically local situations, and these practices may not simply be an anticipated effect of formal, institutionalized rules, as is evident from Foucauldian-inspired micro-perspectives on power in the recent literature (Hardy and Phillips 2004; Barratt 2008).

In asking how relations of power shape organizational members' ethical practices we are, of necessity, enquiring into the link between institutionalized myths and situated practices. The main myth recounted by police in NSW about who they are is that the Service is a 'thin blue line' between anarchy and order, criminality and law. When the reality of policing in NSW was revealed by a series of media reports and commissions of inquiry to be far from the 'truth' depicted in this myth, another myth was drawn into play by the new Police Commissioner appointed to clear up the corrupt mess. The alternate myth was one of change occurring through the process of a rational reorganization. When two institutionalized myths collide, the resulting contradiction will tend to be resolved ceremonially and ritualistically (Meyer and Rowan 1977). The collision of two institutionalized myths derived from separate institutional universes, from police

lore and management theory, is something that can only be reconciled in practice. The practices that sought to reconcile the myths of policing as the custodian of the moral order and the myth of rational organizational redesign were situated in a number of specific organizational innovations. It was in the situated practices of the OCR and the EMS that the collision of the two myths occurred and ethics were shaped. Here also could be seen a collision and dissolution of the myths that there is, on the one hand, an institutional frame and, on the other, a local discourse, as the macro and the micro respectively.

The Research and Methodological Framework

Background to the NSW Police Service

The Service is one of the largest police organizations in the world. More than 17,000 employees serve a population of 7 million in the state of New South Wales, an area of over 800,000 square kilometres, equivalent in size to the US state of Texas. However, they also frequently served a less public interest. In 1997 the results of a Royal Commission, a statutory enquiry authorized by the state government with all the powers of a judicial body, revealed policing in NSW to be very different from the ethical values formally espoused by the Service: the Service was rife with unethical and corrupt behaviour, including the abuse of authority, the taking of bribes, providing false evidence, drug dealing, commissioning criminals to commit crimes, fixing internal promotions so that corrupted members were promoted, and the use of intimidation and stand-over tactics, as well as murder (Wood 1997). The extent of corruption that occurred in the Service as highlighted by the Wood Report was a source of embarrassment to major stakeholders, especially the NSW Government, the Minister of Police, the media and the electorate. Indeed, politically, it was imperative that the Service be seen to be freeing itself of corruption. The Premier and the Minister wanted stories of corrupt police off the front pages of the newspapers well before the next state election. A 'clean pair of hands', untainted by any extant corruption, was recruited from the UK Police Academy in the person of a little-known British Police Officer, a Mr Peter Ryan.

Commissioner Ryan initiated a reform programme aimed at achieving 'ethical and cost efficient policing' (Ryan 2002). He regarded modern management concepts (empowerment, teams and flatter structures) to be the solution to the problems highlighted by Wood (1997). He initiated a departure from the traditional hierarchical and military structure and, over the next five years, diligently implemented a reform process employing contemporary theories of organizational design to combat unethical behaviour. There were two practices that were specifically designed to ensure ethical policing — the Employment Management System (EMS) and the Operations Control and Review Meeting (OCR). These two change practices were pivotal in transforming the ethics of the Service.

After five years, Commissioner Ryan announced that the eradication of unethical and corrupt behaviour from the Service was in its final stage. It was front page news; so, unfortunately, shortly after his announcement, was the revelation of more secret tape recordings and other evidence that demonstrated the unethicity

of the Service. Contrary to the Commissioner's claims, 'police were not just taking bribes but actively organizing crime, introducing one [drug] dealer to another and encouraging them to work harder ... [which demonstrated that] corrupt police continued to operate without fear of or hindrance from anti-corruption measures introduced in the past five years' (Divine 2001:16). Clearly, Commissioner Ryan failed to achieve the objective of 'ethical and cost efficient policing' (Ryan 2002).

The Research Setting

The NSW Police Service underwent a programme of structural redesign and behavioural reform introduced by Commissioner Ryan. In 2001, following a chance encounter with a colleague well connected to the NSW Police Service, we were introduced to the Service's Behavioural Change Team, which was seeking to implement the reform proposal foreshadowed by the Wood Royal Commission Report. We were introduced as members of a university seeking a requisite field setting for a major research project. We explained that we were ethnographers looking for insight into not just *what* is happening but also *how* and *why* it happens (Van Maanen 1988; Manning 1988; Silverman 2005). Following the successful introduction, the first-named author entered the field to conduct a two-year ethnographic research project in a Local Area Command (LAC), termed here the Wallaroo Local Area Command.

The Wallaroo LAC was identified by one of the Service's senior officers as the most advanced and successful in regard to the reform programme's aims and objectives. The Behavioural Change Team (the group's name was later changed to the Crime Management Support Unit (CMSU)) had been working with the LAC's Commander and management team for more than two years, implementing new codes of conduct and introducing flatter structures and cross-functional teams.

Data Collection

Over a period of two years the command's officers and other employees were observed in everyday work activities. The first three months at the LAC were spent talking with members of the command, whose roles spread across management, intelligence gathering, operational (patrol officers), traffic control and criminal investigations (detectives). The objective at this early stage was to identify key players and activities in the transformation process.

A schedule was established for visiting the LAC one to two days (6–8 hours) a week. After six months, the data-gathering process was extended, primarily through informal interviews, observations of naturally occurring interactions, and conversations with key players as well as from sources such as organizational memos, flyers, newsletters and public documents. The officers who were interviewed came from a variety of teams, positions and ethnicities, and from both genders. The interviews ranged from 10 minutes to 3 hours. The shorter interviews were conducted on the job: here the questions and answers were informal and mostly reflected the situation and task at hand. The longer interviews were more formal and began with open-ended questions and an invitation for participants to tell their story in regard to the reform programme. When the data

collection ended, we had accumulated more than 250 research hours of data, including 34 interviews, which, along with field notes and other data sources, amounted to a dataset comprising 68 documents and 14,840 paragraphs of text data.

Data Analysis

When working with large datasets it is important to gain access to the data most relevant to the study's theoretical focus (Eisenhardt 1989). To do this, we used the Nvivo qualitative software package, which enables a researcher, while reading through transcripts of the data, to attach labels or codes to any portion of the text. A portion of text can be labelled with multiple codes. The researcher can then perform software searches on these codes and group like-coded data into categories for further analysis. We used this software to code and categorize each paragraph of data on the basis of both our a priori theoretical interest and grounded analysis.

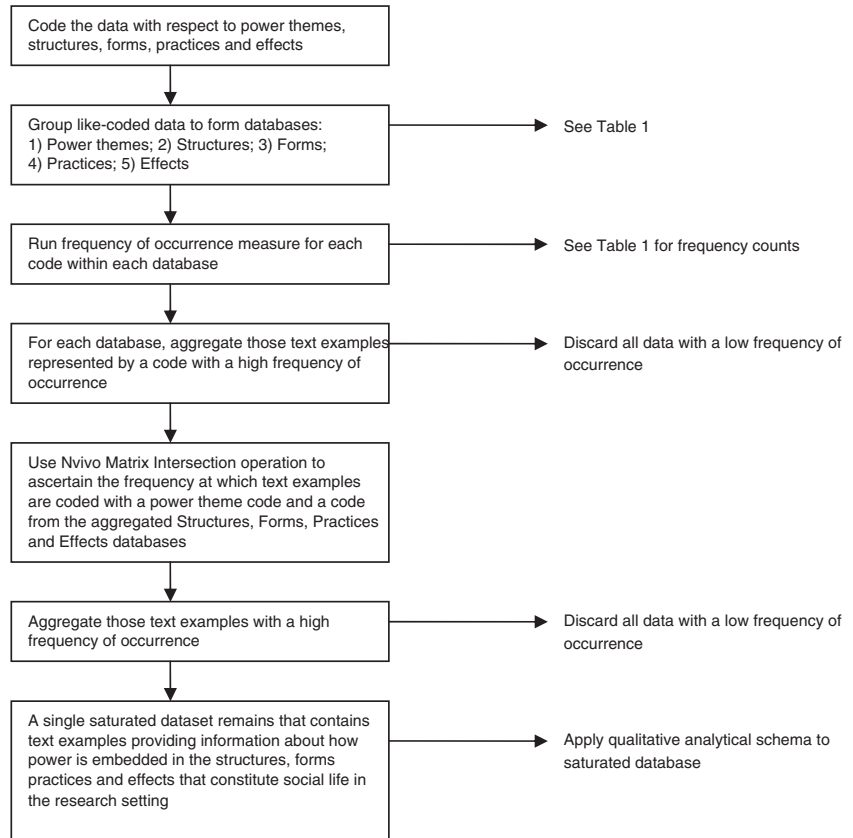
Wallaroo LAC's change initiative sought to introduce a practical de-differentiation of the social boundaries formulated by the existing highly bureaucratized organization structure. The rationale was to transform an essentially authoritarian organization into one that was more participative and democratic. In these terms, we understood the change process to represent a movement from differentiation to de-differentiation, and from domination to democracy. We drew on the work of Clegg (1990) and Lash (1990) to construct an operational frame indicative of our theoretical interests. In brief, differentiation refers to phenomena or action that establishes vertical power differentials between people, and de-differentiation is phenomena or action that reduces power differentials between people. Accordingly, we allocated the code 'differentiation' to text examples from the data in which officers referred to their power relations in terms of clearly defined differential boundaries. For example, an officer might say something like, 'I cannot question her because she out-ranks me' or 'I just do what he says because he is a detective'.

We allocated the code 'domination' to those text examples that represented an unquestioned acceptance of a particular individual's or group's right to power. An example here might be characterized by officers saying, 'I have learnt not to speak up, the consequences are too great', or 'I didn't want to take it, but I was forced'.

We allocated the code 'de-differentiation' to text examples that referred to established differential boundaries of power being blurred, usurped or challenged in some way. Instances might include an officer openly challenging a superior in a work setting, or a memo announcing a structure and policy change that requires a usually autonomous group (such as detectives) to now report to an operational team leader. We allocated the code 'democracy' to text examples that represented power in more democratic terms. An example here might be a superior officer encouraging a subordinate officer to challenge his judgements, or a detective openly accepting a general duties officer questioning his investigation techniques.

The major instrument of ethical change was to be organizational redesign. Accordingly, we also labelled text examples from the data with sub-codes representative of 'structures', 'constraining forms', 'practices' and/or 'effects'. Portions

Figure 1.
Data Processing
Procedure



of text that were allocated a sub-code indicative of ‘structures’ provided examples of overt architectures that constrained people’s behaviour, such as rank, hierarchy and functional divisions. Those allocated a sub-code indicative of ‘forms’ gave us examples of subtle and less readily observable forms of structural constraint such as ‘deference to seniority’ and a ‘code of silence’. The sub-code indicative of ‘practices’ provided examples of actual behaviours, while those allocated the sub-code of ‘effects’ gave us examples related to the effect that the events and behaviours referred to in the text had on the reform objectives.

We categorized the data by aggregating like-coded data together, which resulted in the formation of five separate databases: 1) power themes; 2) structures; 3) forms; 4) practices; 5) effects. We then drew on Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) theoretical sampling process and Gephart’s (1993) data saturation procedures to extract the data most theoretically relevant to our interests. The first step was to identify the frequency of occurrence of each sub-code in each database (see Table 1 for frequency counts). Data represented by frequently occurring sub-codes was aggregated while data represented by codes with a low frequency of occurrence was discarded.

Table 1. Databases, Respective Codes and Frequency of Occurrence Measures

Database	Code	Frequency of occurrence	High (H) or Low (L) frequency of occurrence	Aggregate (A) or discard (D)
<i>Power themes</i>	Differentiation	362	H	A
	Domination	166	H	A
	De-differentiation	107	H	A
	Democracy	19	L	D
<i>Structures</i>	Functional division	144	H	A
	Hierarchy	142	H	A
	Rank	130	H	A
	Geography	3	L	D
<i>Forms</i>	Policies and rules	67	H	A
	Technological	10	L	D
	Relationships	19	L	D
	Seniority	39	H	A
<i>Practices</i>	Routine	213	H	A
	Experience	65	H	A
	Code of silence	6	L	D
	Career	48	H	A
	Managerial dominance	164	H	A
	Work schedule	13	L	D
	Team	137	H	A
	Surrender	42	H	A
	Discipline	54	H	A
	Blowing the whistle	7	L	D
	Exercising voice	27	L	D
	Resistance	117	H	A
	Surveillance	101	H	A
	Obedience/compliance	130	H	A
	Payback	12	L	D
	Reward	2	L	D
	Collaboration	27	L	D
	Authority	60	H	A
	Punishment	84	H	A
	Protection	177	H	A
<i>Effects</i>	Deception	40	H	A
	Seeking legitimacy	180	H	A
	Undermines reform	349	H	A
	Reinforces reform	113	H	A
	Constraint	161	H	A
	Conflict	33	L	D
	Reactive policing	124	H	A
	Proactive policing	24	L	D
	Fear	79	H	A
	Frustration	74	H	A
	Motivation	6	L	D
	De-motivation	58	H	A

We used Nvivo software search tools to identify text examples coded with both a power theme sub-code and sub-codes from the structures forms, practices or effects databases. In short, we used the software systematically to trace theoretical links across the databases, utilizing, as per our research question, the power theme sub-codes as moderating variables. Once again, we aggregated the frequently occurring text examples to form a separate database, and discarded all other text examples. The result was a single dataset containing the most frequently occurring text examples coded with sub-codes from the power themes, structures

Table 2. Frequency at which Codes for Aggregated Databases Intersected with Power Theme Codes

Database	Code	Frequency of intersection with a power theme code	High (H) or Low (L) frequency of occurrence	Aggregate (A) or Discard (D)
<i>Structures</i>	Functional division	54	H	A
	Hierarchy	99	H	A
	Rank	73	H	A
	Policies and rules	29	L	D
<i>Forms</i>	Seniority	24	L	D
	Routine	100	H	A
	Experience	27	L	D
	Career	24	L	D
	Managerial dominance	104	H	A
	Team	50	H	A
<i>Practices</i>	Surrender	28	L	D
	Discipline	42	H	A
	Exercising voice	18	L	D
	Resistance	34	L	D
	Surveillance	71	H	A
	Obedience/compliance	96	H	A
	Authority	34	L	D
	Punishment	41	H	A
	Protection	84	H	A
	Deception	20	L	D
	Seeking legitimacy	79	H	A
<i>Effects</i>	Undermines reform	161	H	A
	Reinforces reform	34	L	D
	Constraint	91	H	A
	Reactive policing	76	H	A
	Fear	56	H	A
	Frustration	39	L	D
	De-motivation	38	L	D

forms, practices and effects databases — in short, the remaining dataset contained the data most relevant to our theoretical interests, which we analysed qualitatively.

Having extracted the text examples illustrating how power relations shape the behaviour of officers, we focused subsequent analysis on ethics. Accordingly, we analysed each paragraph of text in this dataset to establish whether these text examples were more or less reproductive or transformative of the old and corrupt Service ethics.

The Findings

We divide the data analysis into a narrative in three sections to elucidate the story that unfolds. First, we explore the ways in which power relations are constituted historically; second, we show how these relations shape ethics in practice; and third, we demonstrate how these power relations shape discourse, which, in turn, enacts ethics in practice. Pulling the themes together, we shed light on our overall research question: ‘How do power relations shape organizational members’ ethical practices?’

The Historical Constitution of Forms of Power

The Royal Commission's findings illustrated how strong discipline and a strict adherence to authoritarian principles of management constituted a culture of obedience and fear in the Service: even if one was not corrupt, one did not question the authority of superiors. As one officer appearing before the Royal Commission said:

'You weren't there to lose. You were there to win. If that meant bending the rules, so be it ... we didn't see ourselves as criminals by assaulting someone or trying to put criminals behind bars. That was — you know the morality that we saw ... My view of it is — and it's somewhat cynical — it's a big game and the criminals tell lies, the police tell lies, or did tell lies, and if you, shall we say, played it by the rules the whole time, you'd lose.' (Wood 1997: 186)

Rather than recent reform initiatives, past experience provided the most salient contemporary point of reference for the behaviours and attitudes of the police officers participating in our study. Our data shows that historically developed and legitimized practices shaped ethicality in practice. Chief among these practices were numerous examples where officers made reference to the significance of obeying orders relayed by hierarchy. While one might expect this in a police organization, it had consequences for the reform objectives. For instance, while the researcher was travelling in a patrol vehicle, a General Duties Senior Constable explained that the 'usual reaction' of officers in supervising positions drew heavily on their past experience in the Service:

'[it] is just [a reflection of] all the people in that sort of era. They would say, "Who is the boss there?" They would then, to justify their position, say "I don't necessarily agree with this but the boss said so and we've got to do it." ... I knew full well that ... these people could have a voice and could have a say, but they chose not to because they felt they had to obey the boss.' (Ddt040400r, Section 0, Paragraphs 77–81)¹

The reform process had introduced flattened and team-based working structures in place of the old hierarchies. However, the relationship between team leaders and detectives was especially problematic because, traditionally, supervising officers naturally obey superiors. Despite being formally allocated to teams and expected to report to a team leader, detectives continued to act autonomously and to exercise their traditional discretionary power. Team leaders, despite their post-reform formal authority, continued to act deferentially when interacting with detectives. For instance, when asked by the researcher how he felt about having detectives reporting to him, a team leader said, 'I haven't had a problem with them, because really, on our shift, I don't see any of them' (Dbatlil1, Section 0, Paragraphs 242–268). The detectives in his team did not bother to report to him. They just went about their business and he never followed them up.

The fit between organizational members and the historical order of things is paramount. Without this fit, officers lose social acceptance and are marginalized. A NSW Police Service senior officer, who was a member of the Crime Management Support Unit, provides some historical insight into how cultural fit between people and the Service contributes to behaviour and attitudes:

'The need to fit in, in a police service, is higher than the need to fit in a University, and therefore, fitting in demands self-censorship from a very early age ... because, too much lateral thought leads to challenge, leads to isolation. You have to demonstrate your credibility to fit in to a network.' (Drj24, Section 0, Paragraphs 34–42)

The officer is suggesting that the need to socially 'fit in' to an already established discourse is such that it constrains the innovative capacity of officers, who learn to think and act within a very clear set of social boundaries. Our data indicates that not only do officers act within the boundaries but the nature and relative position of the boundaries is controlled by political action. The boundaries and the power relations they establish are maintained through discipline and punishment, as explained in the following quote from a Team Leader:

'When I first started in the job, when the Senior Sergeant called out, you said, "Shit, what have I been called for, Christ I am in trouble here." When an Inspector called, you would tremble in your boots. When a Superintendent called you, you would get your badge, because, you know, I am going to get my badge taken.' (Dbgt23Section 0, Paragraph 34)

The Team Leader's view that a superior would only call an officer to punish him or her was widespread. Note that he frames the exercise of punishment within a hierarchical frame, evident in his reference to increasing severity of the punishment that officers would expect from higher levels of the hierarchy.

Commissioner Ryan acknowledged the problematic consequences of the Service's punitive system, which his reform plan sought to change, as we have outlined. Despite this, officers continued to exercise forms of punishment. As numerous officers commented independently, 'punishment still pervades the organization' (Dddoopf, Section 0, Paragraphs 1–6). Although the reformed system espoused the need to empower officers, those who exercised their 'voice' (Hirschman 1970) were routinely put on insubordination charges for 'speaking their mind' (Dtgt30, Section 0, Paragraphs 309–357), especially when criticizing decisions made by higher-ranking officers.

The possibility of an insubordination charge, let alone it being carried out, does little to encourage lower-level officers to move outside the historical boundaries of power and exercise their voice, although it does discourage conflict. Ethically speaking, it facilitates compliance, in which the first priority is to avoid a clash of values with those perceived to be in positions of power.

In summary, our data indicates that a historically constituted, yet clearly understood, 'rule of anticipated reaction' (Friedrich 1937) existed in the Service, whereby officers would not do certain things in anticipation of the probable results. Over time, the enforcement of this unwritten rule resulted in a 'mobilization of bias' (Schattschneider 1962) that privileged some officers with positions of dominance while marginalizing others, thus undermining the reform agenda of the Service and implementation of ethical change initiatives.

How forms of power shape ethics in practice

Goffman's (1959) conception of social grammars helps us to understand interaction in the Service. Goffman argues that while social grammars are similar to norms, people are unaware of how they constrain them. Ethics are enacted through these grammars which are used to decide whether behaviour is acceptable or not. The key to understanding the research question is that historically shaped power relations frame ethics in practice. As we have seen, historically, power relations in the Service were hierarchical and disciplining. Important

outcomes for ethics in the Service followed; these power relations silenced critical voices and made ethics a matter of compliance.

Facilitating a plurality of voices was a central objective of the Service's reform agenda. One of the key initiatives for achieving this objective was the introduction of the Employee Management System (EMS). The EMS was a software management system designed to help change the Service's culture by, among other things, providing all officers with an official channel for exercising their voice. In theory, any officer could, at any time, sit at a computer, initialize the EMS and report anything to do with internal operations that they believed to be 'good', 'bad', 'unjust' or 'unethical', including the practices of superior officers. They could officially challenge inappropriate behaviour on behalf of their superiors and peers. At the time of its implementation, Commissioner Ryan said that the EMS would be *the* practice to bring about cultural change and ultimately instil ethically sound practices in the Service (Ryan 1996, 1998, 2002). Instead, the EMS became another mechanism through which management could exercise punishment and domination. While the EMS provided an opportunity to enhance the Service's institutional legitimacy, in reality use of it remained within the narrow confines of the old social grammar of punishment and discipline.

Participants provided numerous examples of how the EMS was used as a tool by officers in positions of power to coerce other officers into compliance. Senior officers also used it strategically to position themselves for promotion. Several lower-level officers and recruits on probation provided examples of their names being entered into the EMS for minor issues of perceived malfeasance by senior officers. Those in management or supervisory positions had increased their use of the EMS because using it had recently become a criterion on which they would be judged for promotion. A Team Leader provides an excellent example that describes how the EMS was being used in practice:

'Do you want to know something that is really interesting at the moment? Very interesting, and it happens here, I've noticed. All of our complaints, or not all of them, but 90% of them, are coming from internal. It's no longer the public that rings up and says, I want to whinge about Constable so and so. It's, oh, you haven't got your nametag on, that's the third time in a row. I am going to put you on the EMS system ... Unless there is something I really deserve, but nine times out of 10, these are little shit things that can be solved with a straight conversation ... "Look, you've done this mate, what is going on, what's the story, what's your side of things? Oh, look, I am sorry, it won't happen again... blah, blah, blah ... all right then, well, then consider yourself counselled and that's the end of the session, isn't it?" ... What they put on the system, what you're saying to them is, that's going to be used against you when you apply for a job. [The selection panel will say] "Hang on, you are on the bloody EMS system three times and you are saying you are the best Supervisor in the world?" And they can use it, because they know it exists ... so, suddenly my career path goes further down that way [pointing her finger to the ground], while his goes further that way [points her finger to the ceiling].' (Dbatlii2, Section 0, Paragraphs 477–500).

Fairclough (1989) suggests that language does not merely represent reality but rather constitutes it. Language frames reality, and by doing so it generates meaning and influences action. In our case, the informal language used to describe the EMS constituted its meaning in the Service. Moreover, the informal language used to describe a conversation contrasts with the much more formal style required by the EMS. The typicality of this quote was supported by many other

data examples, such as the one that follows, which was an informal conversation between the field researcher (RES) a new recruit (NR) and an experienced general duties officer (GD); it shows how it was largely being used with a supervisory gaze downwards, as a disciplinary mechanism for the lower ranks:

- RES: Tell me about the reform process here.
 GD: Everybody is out for themselves ... like this EMS system [sic]. We know they put us on it so they can write down that they have counselled us [and hence used the EMS as they are now required]. It's about promotion. It's not about doing good policing. There is no trust in [working] relationships.
 RES: [Asked new recruit] Would you question a superior?
 NR: NO!
 RES: Why?
 NR: I don't know.
 RES: Where did you learn not to question — at the academy?
 NR: NO. It's like this. I was reprimanded for a report that I put in about break and enter by the crime manager and I said to her I was given different information, I spoke back to her. Since then she's been all over me for the minute things — I know her eyes are on me.
 GD: Yeah, it's about getting somebody, if you speak out you can expect to be got.
 RES: You mean, punished?
 GD: EXACTLY!
 NR: Like, I asked George [GD, pseudonym] how to do something and he told me, I did it that way and the Duty Officer got stuck into me, telling me I did it wrong. I went back to George [the GD] and the other guys and they said well, you've done it right, they didn't know what the Duty Officer was on about. I was sort of stuck in between — I did it the way the Duty Officer said.
 RES: Why?
 NR: He is more higher [sic].
 RES: Did you question him?
 NR: No way! I have learnt very quickly not to do that.
 GD: The reason he wanted it changed was so his stats [on the use of the EMS] looked good. But that's not the job, them looking good is more important than doing the job.
 RES: Why don't you question them?
 GD: Because we end up on the EMS system.
 RES: Can't you put them on the EMS system?
 GD: Technically, yes. Yes, [laughed] ... But I can tell you that if I put a D.O. [Duty Officer] on the EMS he'd get me, my life would be hell. It is just something you don't do.
 RES: It sounds like you fear them?
 GD: EXACTLY! I DO!
 (Dgoemsf, Section 0, Paragraphs 3–65)

Taken as a whole, the data examples that refer to the EMS tell the story of how the EMS constituted a new discursive resource that organizational members drew upon to make sense of and negotiate their reality. Furthermore, the designers of the EMS neglected the political complexities of its specific social context. While, technically, lower-level officers could report on their superiors, the unwritten 'rule of anticipated reaction' (Friedrich 1973) was very much on their minds. In short, they were aware that if they made such a report their careers were at risk.

This finding is particularly relevant for our research question. Rather than giving lower-level officers the voice they need to check the ethics of superior officers, the

EMS facilitated their ongoing silence. It achieved the opposite of what was intended: it reinforced practices of discipline, punishment and domination. Paradoxically, since pre-existing organizational power relations undermined and ultimately perverted the EMS, the EMS ensured that the ethics of the Service remained vulnerable. The EMS initiative that was meant to improve ethics in the Service did not so much change ethics as reinforce the practices it was designed to eradicate.

How power relations are constituted by, and constitute, discourse that shapes ethics in practice

One of the many ways that power operates is through discourse (Fairclough 1989). Language is not merely a way of expressing ethics; rather, language is performative and actively enacts and shapes reality, including ethical reality. For instance, the Royal Commission revealed, prior to our study, that many police officers referred to their wrongdoing as ‘noble cause corruption’ (Wood 1997). The term was widely understood in the Service to involve practices such as fabricating and planting evidence to obtain a conviction against a person they believed deserved to be found guilty. Ultimately, the ends justified the means because such behaviour produced ostensibly ‘good’ convictions. Officers maintained that it was in the best interests of the public that they acted as they did. For them, collaborating with criminals and ‘green lighting’ certain acts of crime prevented worse crime occurring. Green lighting — another frequently used term to explain noble cause corruption — involved giving criminals who supplied information that led to the conviction of other criminals the green light (permission to go forward) to commit acts of crime, including armed robberies, drug trafficking and illegal gaming. Ostensibly, for many officers, unethical behaviour actually made sense in terms of discourse of the Service. An organizational ideology existed, in Fairclough’s (1989) terms: the sentiment that one has to do some evil in order to do good discursively framed their action. New employees gained an implicit understanding of what police actually do from such embedded discourse. More importantly, the Service’s use of terms such as ‘green lighting’ and ‘noble cause corruption’ provided a language with which to legitimize unethical behaviour.

Our data shows that it was not only organizational discourse that shaped ethics but one of the Service’s most important nodal points of power — through which an ‘ordering of statements’ (Kendall and Wickham 1999) flowed. The Operations Control and Review (OCR) meeting was situated as such a nodal point. The OCR was a formal meeting within which the Service’s senior management team coordinated and discussed the operational performance of each LAC. It was video recorded and televised in LACs throughout the state. The meeting was a form of Electronic Panopticon in reverse: it did not exercise surveillance over all members but all members exercised surveillance over it as they watched the recording of OCR meetings in police stations throughout the State. The meeting unequivocally framed the dominant modes of discourse prescribed by the highest level of the Service. It televised the most senior officers using the new rhetoric of reform, being publicly judged in its terms, while also having to provide accounts of crime and clear-up statistics in their command.

In the OCR meetings the effect of power relations on the discursive construction of ethics could be most clearly seen. An officer gave testament to the OCR's pervasive impact and infamous notoriety throughout the Service:

'we are OCR driven; because, the OCRs are every four [or] five months. But even on the way home ... from that OCR, you are thinking about how you can make sure that [in] the next one you're going to cover all your bases. And you really ... you are trying to put into place short-term strategies to cater for long-term problems.' (Dwst05 Section 0, Paragraphs 101–119)

As a Team Leader said, the enactment of the OCR, even in terms of its spatial arrangements, sent strong messages to all who saw it in action:

'Look at the structure of it ... The place has two tables along the front, they [Commanders waiting to be questioned on their performance] are the heads on the block, you've got the Chiefs [Commissioner and his executive team] are out at the front and facing them [the Commanders with their head on the block], the rest of it is all audience and on the fringes, there are people around the edges, this guy is putting these huge big bloody graphs up on the walls saying ah, what have you done about your robberies in this area? And the guy just sits there; it is just a big magnifying glass.' (Djtt23', Section 0, Paragraphs 161–211)

While the OCR was designed to coordinate the operational performance of LACs, according to the comments of numerous officers, it appeared to be an arena in which senior executives reinforced their superiority by attacking and punishing Local Area Commanders, as attested to a Crime Manager:

'Inspectors and Superintendents go into these OCRs and being belittled by higher rank and they come back and it's embarrassing and belittling ... and comments that I've heard is that, if we as police spoke to members of the public, the same way senior officers spoke to other officers, we would have a complaint brought against us.' (NB_tltm, Section 0, Paragraph 65)

The focus on individuals rather than operations is also reflected in the previous officer's use of the metaphor 'heads on the block', portraying the OCR as a setting for an execution (also see Van Dijk 1997). And the officer's comment that 'it is just a big magnifying glass' indicates that the OCR was seen as a very public normalizing mechanism.

These broadcasts and the subsequent ordering of statements framed the formation of a legitimate discourse of public attribution of individual responsibility for error. The scripts that were presented were evidently formally legitimated and approved. We found that the way things were said and done in the OCR, particularly orders, commands and instructions, were being mirrored at lower levels of the organization. For instance, the field researcher witnessed one senior officer, while acting in the role of Commander at the Wallaroo LAC, make the following statement during a supervisor briefing session:

'it is time for courageous leadership and that courageous leadership means letting them [members of the command] know that if they don't want to do it our way then they are on their way [meaning fired or transferred to another command].' (Dm&dmdf, Section 1.1.1.1, Paragraphs 258–263)

The researcher noted that this statement had been used in a recent Senior Management meeting. Furthermore, in the week or two that followed, the researcher witnessed conversations between officers in the command that indicated that supervising officers had delivered very similar statements to them.

What facilitated the creation of this ordering of statements was the televising of the proceedings; officers were seen being 'grilled' — that is, ridiculed and abused. The OCR meeting was a prime medium through which officers in management positions throughout the Service were made aware of how to manage. Rather than leave space for dialogue, the OCR enforced an unambiguous and fact-driven question-and-answer session that did not allow for ethically charged situations to be discussed. Responsibilities were attributed in a way that could not be evaded by qualified answers; in the absence of qualification of accounts a crude empiricism of management only informed by quantitative facts prevailed. The facts were increasingly being represented in statistical terms as 'clear-up' rates and throughput of apprehensions. The creation of an OCR-driven organization that enacted itself within a discursive framework defined by the limited language of the OCR was not so much a solution to existing ethical issues but a further contribution to them.

Viewing the OCR provided a temporal, spatial, personal and authoritative context that introduced a strict procedure for distributing responsibilities (Brunsson 1994) in a uniquely public way in the Service. Consequently, the OCR served as a constraint on the discursive practices of officers in the Service that largely limited the sense that members were able to make of the non-routine situations they experienced every day (Bittner 1967). The OCR marginalized the interpretive problems that officers might experience on an everyday basis with ethics in practice and installed a 'fact-driven' discourse that, in its focus on results, did not allow for discussion of how these results were ethically achieved. Importantly, rather than being a catalyst for learning, the discursive practices of the OCR meetings were a mechanism for fixing blame, which reinforced power relations and magnified potential problems that learning had not resolved into a public televisual space. Thus, on-screen, officers were able to make a judgement of the relative importance of the new ethical commitment of the Service and the facts-driven discourse, which stressed managing by the numbers.

The data discussed in this section significantly advances our understanding of how power relations were enacted in and through prevailing discourses, shaping ethics. Our data reveals that ethics were embedded in what had been the traditional power relationships in the Service rather than in the newly reformed relations of team-based authority. These ethics were enacted in a discourse in which unethical and corrupt behaviour was seen as a means justified by its efficiency in achieving legitimate ends. The OCR meetings and the EMS were introduced as strategies and practices through which the Commissioner intended the Service to change. However, in practice, traditional power relations discursively continued to frame the boundaries of what was perceived as ethical and unethical behaviour (Fairclough 1989). What was regarded as ethical was what superiors tolerated in pursuit of a 'good look' in the OCR, rather than that which the objectives of the reform agenda encouraged.

The EMS and the OCR contributed to an ordering of statements that organized what was taken to be social reality within the Service. Even in the reformed Service, breaching the normalcy presumed in the ordering of statements established boundaries of discursive action that drew forth retaliation and punishment. The mechanisms for embedding reform as a new discourse through

the EMS and the OCR did not reform the traditional, hierarchical power relations of dominance and differentiation but merely allowed them to reassert themselves in the new arenas.

Discussion

From an institutional perspective one could argue that it was no surprise that there was a gap between the reform rhetoric and organizational action. As Crank and Langworthy (1992) point out, external factors influence organizational activities and structures. In our case, there were important external forces at play. For instance, the reform programme was mandated by the Royal Commission's report, which, in turn, was instigated by media, public and political pressure on government. The reform programme responded to external pressures questioning the legitimacy of NSW Police Service practices. The reform programme achieved its ceremonial purposes: government looked to be doing something about a widely perceived problem. The concept of 'ethical and cost efficient policing' (Ryan 2002) was a means of establishing legitimacy in the eyes of external stakeholders. It came about through the Police Commissioner's reform response to the recommendations of the Wood Royal Commission. However, newly introduced practices such as the OCR and the EMS reinforced the very practices they were designed to diminish. The status quo and *modus operandi* were tacitly reinforced even as they were explicitly changed. In other words, highly visible initiatives like the EMS or the OCR were examples of legitimizing actions. What ultimately drove organizational members was not functional improvement of policing but maintaining the internal status quo and enhancing legitimacy vis-à-vis important stakeholders. The new practices that were introduced became the vehicle both for ceremonial adjustment internally and resistance to change — simultaneously.

For instance, the OCR meeting meant that those officers watching it on police video and television interpreted the gaze (Foucault 1977) of Commissioner Ryan's executive team. The practices through which the senior officials chose to exercise authority were more remarked upon than the senior officers' role in implementing the reform agenda. The researchers interpreted the OCR broadcasts to mean that failure to conform was more punishable than the ability to reform. The EMS reinforced this conformance with perceived power relations: among junior officers, speaking out against the old ways of corrupt practice was not encouraged by the new emphasis on ethical and efficient policing. 'Old hands' could produce praiseworthy results through what were implicitly known in their local context to be unethical means. The ends justified the means. Officers saw an elective affinity between deeply embedded, local and unethical practices and the official versions of the rational, right and just way to manage that they interpreted in the OCR and the EMS.

Although the reform programme emphasized ethical decision making, it did not provide the Service's members with a language with which to engage in ethical sensemaking. Even after the reform agenda was introduced, the languages in use remained those of the old military model and the thin blue line of police

lore. Consequently, police officers did not have an available organizational forum in which they could discuss ambiguous experiences in terms of ethically charged situations. The new practices, including the EMS and the OCR, did not allow organizational members to articulate the uncertainties and messiness of these everyday organizational practices and their 'bounded morality' (Donaldson and Dunfee 1994). For instance, should one 'green light' a small dealer to catch the 'big fish' supplying the dealer? Is any collaboration with a dealer unethical, no matter what are the benefits of such an unethical alliance? From this perspective, one had to do some 'evil' in order to do 'good' (to catch the big fish and meet performance management targets).

We argue that the Service's management and its change strategies, especially the EMS and the OCR, did not address the complexity of these ethical issues, or the ethical dilemmas. Instead it maintained a black-and-white world in which there 'should' be only 'good' cops and 'bad' criminals. No formal contexts in which the more complex stories of right and wrong could be told were available other than those that were a part of the new reforms — the OCR and the EMS — and these were flawed by the ways in which they *did* what they *said*. Acting ethically in a complex world requires an adequately complex discursive repertoire. In contrast, the language of the NSW Police Service created a world of 'good' cops, 'bad' criminals and 'clear' rules for 'good' ethics. An unambiguous language of reform met a reality of ambiguous practices on the streets, in the bars and in the cells. The reform language did not frame the working police officers' milieu and sense of their selves as subjects up against tough people, in a tough job. The scripts of the street ran counter to those of the reform sheets.

Speaking more generally, we can learn from our study that organizational micro-practices powerfully shape the embedded ethical context. Organizational ethics is constructed in and through those micro-practices that shape conduct. As local actors make sense of events, their language frames their capacity to reflect on behaviour as ethical. From our case, it follows that although it might be tempting for ethical theory and practice to develop clear principles and guidelines, it will often not help organizational actors to make decisions in situ. Practice is complex: this will apply to a police organization as much as to any other organization. Ethics that try to manage morally correct behaviour will have to provide a language that is capable of mapping this complexity. Otherwise, as happened in the NSW Police Service, ethicality will disappear between the spaces; in this case, between the scripts of the street and those of the reform sheets. Hence we can partly answer our research question: it is organizational micro-practices, enacted in discourse and embedded in power relations, that shape ethics in practice. But we need to complement this finding theoretically further by looking at its relation with institutional power effects.

Our discussion demonstrates that *what* was framed as a desirable and ambitious change project ('ethical and efficient policing') was defined institutionally; *how* these changes were appropriated and made sense of occurred in situated practices. Institutionally, the reform agenda was a response to a crisis of confidence in the Service. Revelations flowing from the Wood Commission were a public relations disaster for the Service and its overseers in government.² Even in moments of crisis instigated by public relations disasters and pressure, the

system remained stuck in the old, default ways of doing things as change initiatives were quickly integrated into 'the dark side' (Vaughan 1999). Research into resistance to change suggests such behaviour as normal (Collinson 1994; Tilly 1991; Sewell 1998).

The new practices such as the EMS and the OCR were ostensibly neutral and technical means to achieve reform by instituting new routines. Feldman and Pentland (2003) have argued that routines can be both a source of change as well as stability. According to their theory, routines have ostensive aspects which represent structure but they also have a performative aspect that brings routines to life. They argue that:

'the ostensive aspect enables people to guide, account for, and refer to specific performances of a routine, and the performative aspect creates, maintains, and modifies the ostensive aspect of the routine. We argue that the relationship between ostensive and performative aspects of routines creates an on-going opportunity for variation, selection, and retention of new practices.' (Feldman and Pentland 2003: 94)

In our case study, new practices such as the OCR and the EMS were quickly absorbed into old routines. The ostensive dimension of routines dominated; the performative dimension was kept under control by the limited discursive repertoire that young employees, especially, had to make sense of, or modify routines. As Feldman and Pentland suggest, performative variation and change only occur when members of the organization describe these variations as legitimate instances of the ostensive aspect of the routine. However, legitimacy was framed by the historically constituted power relations that dominated the Service. Thus, one extension of Feldman and Pentland's work (2003) is to take into account how power shapes people's ability and willingness to perform routines creatively; any theory of (ethical) change must take such power relations into account.

Here we find the complementary answer to our research question: old practices moulded new initiatives such as the EMS and the OCR in ways that, rather than achieving ethically accountable and transparent policing, paradoxically reinforced prior power relations. Hence our story could be interpreted as one of failed planned change ... up to a point. From an institutional perspective, it wasn't: rather the change programme did legitimate the Police Service and its management in the eyes of the immediate external environment. The reforms allowed Commissioner Ryan and his team to argue that they were doing what was possible to change the Service.³ Internally, the reform necessarily allowed subordinates and superiors room to interpret vaguely formulated objectives such as 'efficient and ethical policing'. As we have shown, the interpretations of the reform as implemented in the OCR and the EMS reinforced the status quo. Paradoxically, the Service achieved both ceremonial adaptation to environmental pressure as well as maintenance of the status quo internally. The ethics of the Service were shaped through both micro- and macro-power relations that are, in reality, inseparable. Institutionalized practices such as the OCR and the EMS act as relays that translate the realities of everyday policing and external pressures to change. In conclusion, these are the forms of power that shape ethics in practice. Focus on either of them — as practised in most contemporary theorizing on ethics in organizations — will not do justice to the complexities and ambiguities of ethics.

Conclusion

Before we draw some conclusions from our research it is important to point out the limitations of our study. First, it is a study of just one police organization. However, it is research into a highly significant organization. The NSW Police Service is the world's third-largest police force, and it is not unrepresentative. There is little evidence to suggest that the NSW Police Service was an aberration because it was corrupt. Other forces in Australia (in Victoria, most recently in 2007, and Queensland in the 1980s) have been revealed as equally corrupt, as have the Metropolitan Police in the UK, the Hong Kong Police, the NYPD and the LAPD at various stages in their histories (Gordon 2007).

Police organizations are not the only type of coercive organization that state governments use to maintain order. As Victor and Cullen (1988) have shown, organizational form is a major determinant of ethical climate. There are many military-style organizations, including customs and immigration services, firefighters and coast guards. Such organizations often struggle with the legacy of their quasi-militaristic past, and seek to change to flatter, more empowered organization forms as they adopt technologies that demand change. Although we acknowledge the limitations of the Service's particulars, such as its Australian identity, its being a police organization and a solitary case study, our findings can be used to understand other organizational contexts in different industries and countries. The processes highlighted are not confined to coercive organizations, since discursive power is at play in all organizations. Hence, we propose that ethics in other corporate and public organizations will also be framed by discursive power.

Ethics will always be shaped by power relations that are deeply embedded in organization practices, even when the rhetoric of the discourses shifts. The NSW Police Service's introduction of reform initiatives such as the EMS had the unintended consequence of reinforcing established power relations even as it changed the apparent structures of authority. Similarly, the strong power effects of the discourse promoted by and through the OCR undermined the objective of a more ethically sound organization. Both examples show how language and practice are inextricably intertwined — changing the formal rhetoric but implementing it through practices that are less critically reflexive has powerful effects on an organization and its members. Furthermore, our study highlights the importance of institutional pressures on organizations, and how external legitimacy and survival can be sustained by ceremonial performances.

While ethics might be associated with contractual arrangements or principles such as the 'Good' and the 'Just', we argue that ethics will be forged in the midst of power relations, embedded in practice and enacted in members' discourses (Nietzsche 1969). Future research might focus on how organizational members discursively construct the ethicality of situations, for example how a problem becomes initially framed as an ethical issue. Many organizational members did not see 'green lighting' petty criminals as a potentially ethically dubious practice if it helped them to catch other criminals. However, after the Royal Commission, pressure from the external environment questioned the practice as unethical. Once this happened, organizational members had to make sense of 'green lighting' through a new language. The new language created

tensions in the organization with past power relations and historical patterns of rationality. Research should start with the tensions that a new language of change introduces, rather than judging changing practices normatively as ethical or unethical (Margolis and Walsh 2002; Philipsen 1989/1990). Moreover, future research should focus not only on institutional pressures to behave more ethically, expressed in formal reform programmes, but also on how these expectations become appropriated in practice. Based on our analysis, we would suggest that such change and reform programmes can, paradoxically, support old practices while still creating new legitimacies. In the case of the NSW Police Service, it was necessary to gain re-legitimization from the external environment. However, the way in which the policies associated with re-legitimization were implemented in practice meant that the Service appropriated the reform in ways that failed to reconcile the contradictions that reform produced.

Our study has important implications for the practice of managing ethics. In response to ethical challenges, new rules are often proposed to manage ethics. However, every change programme has to deal with the gaps between structural innovations, the use of these innovations, and organizational members' sensemaking. Organizations should place more emphasis on peer dynamics and culture than on trying to prescribe law-like codes of conduct. Looking at codes of conduct, while important, may not be sufficient. Attempts to change ethics need to build on an understanding of power practices at work as well as the power effects of the institutional environment. Compliance perspectives on ethics take power relations for granted rather than understanding them as crucial to the process of making sense of rules and situated contexts.

Typically, official organizational rhetoric defines the status quo as ethical practice. Our study offers an interesting and important counterfactual — here the status quo was the informal corrupt organization embedded in practice rather than that represented by the formal ethics of the Service. From this perspective an approach that locates ethical responsibility only *in* the individual organizational member's *character* is limited. Rather, ethics are at stake in day-to-day *practices* and in the *learned and routine ways of doing things*.

Our study has shown how ethics are re- and de-contextualized through organizational practices. These practices not only embed and enact ethics but also form the framework for their institutionalization, politicization and contestation. Ethics imply power as much as power implies ethics. An ethics innocent of power is an ethics of ignorance: power is always implicated with ethical discourse and practices. On a discursive level, ethics are a mechanism to name, categorize and solve human problems; from a practice perspective, ethics do not exist as entities or things but only exist when they are enacted in language. Indeed, we might as well speak of power/discourse/ethics for they are indissoluble.

Notes

- 1 These codes are used to disguise the identity of the respondents and enable the researcher to locate the data in the overall dataset.
- 2 The starting points for disasters are often embedded in culturally and institutionally accepted norms (see Turner 1978; Beamish 2000; Vaughan 1981/1982; 1990, 1999). As Vaughan (1999: 274) argues, drawing on Durkheim, deviance is a routine nonconformity and a predictable product of all organizations (see also Canguilhem 1968). In Vaughan's words, 'the

same characteristics of a system that produce the bright side will regularly provoke the dark side' (1999: 274).

- 3 For a while it seemed as if the Commissioner had pulled off the ceremonial institutional side of myth-making. It was the reforms that were making the front pages, and the 'roll-overs' of the Royal Commission, where corrupt police who had been caught through detailed surveillance were encouraged to give evidence against other corrupt officers, were receding in public memory. Unfortunately, however, this was before the television career of one of Commissioner Ryan's officers, chief of detectives, Graham 'Chook' Fowler, became public. Chook Fowler was a big man of few words. Many of them, to judge from the video evidence obtained from the hidden camera in his car, started with 'f' and ended in 'k'. Few people knew him before his unanticipated appearance on the newscasts, apart from his colleagues in the New South Wales (NSW) Police Service, his family, neighbours and friends. Among the latter were members of Sydney's criminal fraternity. Indeed, many of these were such good friends that they allegedly regularly paid him off, through one of his mates, Trevor Haken, an officer junior to Chook. Everyday organizational life in the NSW Police Service in which Chook and Trevor were players resembled a Hollywood script. In his own words, Trevor Haken, who 'rolled over' to present evidence against his erstwhile mates, said:

'The corrupt were really my heroes and — as they were with everybody because the corrupt were the working detectives and ... they say that the police force is the thin blue line — really what they mean is the line between criminals and society is the thin blue line.' (Four Corners, ABC Television, Training Day, Reporter: Chris Masters, Broadcast, 26 July 2004)

Not long after these events became public, the Commissioner resigned his commission and a new Commissioner was appointed by the Government with an explicit brief to keep negative stories about policing off the front pages and television. This has not proved to be the case, as a summary article from 2007 (<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/holding-judgement/2007/06/08/1181089328815.html>) suggests.

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