Depleted dedication, lowered organisation citizenship behaviours, and illegitimate tasks in police officers

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Abstract
This study builds on the relatively limited work examining police officer identity, dedication, and organisation citizenship behaviours (OCB), by connecting illegitimate tasks to these outcomes. From the textual analysis of focus group responses by members of an Australian state police service, a clear social identity of 'copper' emerged among constables, and when this copper identity was threatened, the constables' dedication and levels of OCB depleted. The most serious threat to that identity was the need to perform illegitimate tasks based on perceived time-wasting activities. However, a new negative phenomenon, tasks reducing professional discretion, emerged as a third type of illegitimate task. The study also indicates that future studies of police dedication and OCB depletion need to consider the negative socio-political aspects of managerialism.

Given the importance of police work in maintaining civil society, it is curious that so little research on organisational-based behaviours has been completed on police officers. Because the public behaviour of police is now far more open to scrutiny through social media (Dukes & Gaither, 2017; Ince, Rojas, & Davis, 2017), instances of bad – even criminal – behaviour are being recorded and instantly spread. However, while not dismissing the potential for racist, sexist, and authoritarian attitudes to contribute to unacceptable police behaviour, it is important to understand the extent to which organisational factors may contribute to negative police behaviour. This study builds on a number of previous organisational studies that focus on police performance. However, our final orientation was arrived at after inductively analysing the data derived from transcripts of focus groups, which were conducted in response to a police union request for assistance in better understanding their members' concerns.

What emerged beyond union membership issues was a latent but clear pathology of disengagement and lowered organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB). Consequently, as we moved from inductive analysis to interpretation, we found that a conceptual framing involving relationships between OCB, work engagement, career plateau manifestations, and illegitimate tasks was most useful. The findings of this paper thus contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of police officers at work and provide guidance for better training and police management, as well as contribute to the growing importance and utility of illegitimate tasks as work stressors.

Organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB) and career plateau

OCB form a broad category of discretionary performance based on behaviours that go beyond core work tasks (Fein, 2009; Organ, 1988). Consequently, OCB can be useful for comparing

performance across groups of employees who do not share the same work tasks and duties (Xerri & Brunetto, 2013). There are two dimensions of OCB. The first type is directed at the organisation and is referred to as OCB-O, while the second type is OCB that targets individuals and is referred to as OCB-I (Coleman & Borman, 2000; Psychogios, Nyfoudi, Theororakopoulos, Szanosi, & Prouska, 2019). This paper focuses on specific ways officers display OCB-O: behaviours showing allegiance and loyalty to the organisation, displaying civic virtue and commitment to management initiatives, and endorsing and defending organisational objectives (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002).

This study began as an applied problem, with potential differences in OCB associated with police office tenure as the initial focal concern of the sponsoring organisation. Namely, the police union that sponsored this research had observed differences in engagement between early career and later career officers. Thus, the foundational research question was why early career police officers differed in union and career engagement patterns when compared to mid and late career police officers. To better operationalise differences in tenure between groups of officers, we used the concept of career plateau as an organising device to assist in sensemaking about how police officers with various years of service might differ in attitudes and performance. After reviewing the organisational behaviour literature, the concept of career plateau emerged as one of the most well-researched concepts connecting differences in tenure to the types of changes in engagement observed by the sponsoring police union.

Although career plateau has been researched for decades (Ference, Stoner, & Warren, 1977), findings are equivocal regarding the relationship between career plateau and employee behaviour, with researchers arguing for complex effects between career plateau and performance (Song, Kim, & Lee, 2019). Since the inception of career plateau, there have been several points of distinction that can differentiate between types of plateau. First, there is a distinction based on promotion and advancement, which is conceptualised in a 'hierarchical plateau', indicated by 'a lack of promotion in an organisation' (Yang, Niven, & Johnson, 2019). In addition, there is another type of plateau known as the job content plateau which relates to 'lateral stagnation' where individuals do not receive further responsibilities or enlargement of job content, and thus feel that their job is unchallenging (Yang, Niven, & Johnson, 2019: 291; see also Hurst, Baranik, & Clark, 2017).

Comprehensive analyses that include perceptions of career plateau at low to high levels suggest that the relationship between career plateau and OCB is curvilinear, expressed as a U-shaped relationship across the range of career plateau perceptions. Invariably career plateau negatively impacts both individual (OCB-I) and organisational (OCB-O) citizenship behaviours because employees perceive little challenge in their jobs (Song & Kim, 2019). In fact, job satisfaction perceptions appear as a key mediator of the relationship between career plateaus and OCB-I and OCB-O (Hurst, Baranik, & Clark, 2017).

It is this mediating relationship between career plateau and OCBs based on satisfaction perceptions of the job that we find in the present study. Building on the finding that employees' dissatisfaction at work affects the career plateau and OCB relationship, we develop the argument that officers showing evidence of career plateau will also display evidence of depleted dedication to their organisation and depleted OCB, which in turn can be affected by job dissatisfaction.

Job dissatisfaction, dedication, and OCB

The relationship between job dissatisfaction and depleted work engagement (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011) also involves OCB because OCB has shown a consistent and positive relationship with work engagement in the context of job satisfaction (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). Dedication is a narrow aspect of work engagement that subsumes identification with work activities and is associated with OCB, based on reactions such as pride and support for the organisation (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Dedication can be measured through individuals' perceptions of meaning and purpose connected to work activities, which include links to how professionals benefit the larger society (Janowitz, 2017), and can include state-based reactions such as

inspiration, enthusiasm, challenge, and pride (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Dedication has also been linked to the alignment of perceptions of self and career for professional police officers (Chevalier et al., 2019). We observe that the literature on OCB shows that OCB in general, and especially OCB-O shows a strong association with work engagement through cognitive focus on the organisation (Organ, 1988; Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006), which is often expressed as the work activity that forms the focus of individual attention (Leiter & Bakker, 2010). Consequently, the exact targets of work engagement, as well as elements of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with those targets, may become particularly salient antecedents to OCB. It is to a specific source of dissatisfaction – the experience with illegitimate tasks – that we now turn.

Illegitimate tasks

The notion of stress induced through tasks that are considered to be outside the scope of professional role boundaries has a long history in the management literature (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991; Stryker & Burke, 2000), but this concept of a particular type of stressor has recently been clarified within the construct illegitimate tasks. Accordingly, the construct of illegitimate tasks has been elaborated and advanced as a specific type of work stressor (Semmer, Jacobshagen, Meier, & Elfering, 2007; Semmer, Tschan, Meier, Facchin, & Jacobshagen, 2010). In general, illegitimate tasks are prescribed tasks in the work environment that are perceived as stressful either because they are incongruent with one's professional identity or because they cause employees to waste time and other resources. This has led to the identification of two separate subtypes of illegitimate tasks. The first subtype is the *unreasonable* task. This type of task would generally be considered as outside the appropriate range of tasks for one's occupation (Semmer et al., 2010). A second subtype of illegitimate task is the *unnecessary* task, which is connected to the perception (via professional judgement) that an assigned task should not be done at all because it wastes resources and produces little value, or that it could be done more efficiently under different arrangements or with different resources (Semmer et al., 2010).

The violation of professional scope is implicit in the notion of illegitimate tasks (Semmer et al., 2010). Once employees judge a work task to be illegitimate, this mismatch between expected duties and professional scope can threaten their professional identity, which psychologically manifests as an 'identity-threatening stressor' (Thoits, 1991) as well as disengagement and loss of belonging within one's organisation (Eatough, Meier, Igic, Elfering, Spector, & Semmer, 2016). There is evidence that such identity-threatening stressors can lead to negative outcomes such as resource depletion stemming from decreased positive self-evaluations (Stets, 2005), shifts in attention at work, leading to diverse types of negative outcomes including workplace incivility (Semmer et al., 2010) and decreased sleep quality (Pereira, Semmer, & Elfering, 2014). Research supports that the perception of experiencing illegitimate versus legitimate frustration (i.e., frustration that should be reasonably expected vs. frustration due to injustice) can have strong effects on the strength of reactions against perceived sources of injustice (Berkowitz, 1981). Anger towards one's organisation and lower job satisfaction have also been linked to illegitimate tasks using daily diary methods (Eatough et al., 2016), although these potential connections have been highlighted as an area that needs more research (Eatough et al., 2016).

To show the conceptual connections between career stage differences, manifested as career plateau, job satisfaction, dedication, OCB, and illegitimate tasks, we turn to Figure 1. The relationships in Figure 1 can be looked at according to the central mediated relationship between job satisfaction, dedication, and OCB, which has been supported in other studies (Hurst, Baranik, & Clark, 2017; Song & Kim, 2019). In addition, in Figure 1 we present the direct effect of career stage as career plateau on job satisfaction, dedication, and OCB, suggested by numerous career plateau researchers (Hurst, Baranik, & Clark, 2017; Yang, Niven, & Johnson, 2019). Finally, the relationships between illegitimate tasks on job satisfaction, dedication, and OCB are presented
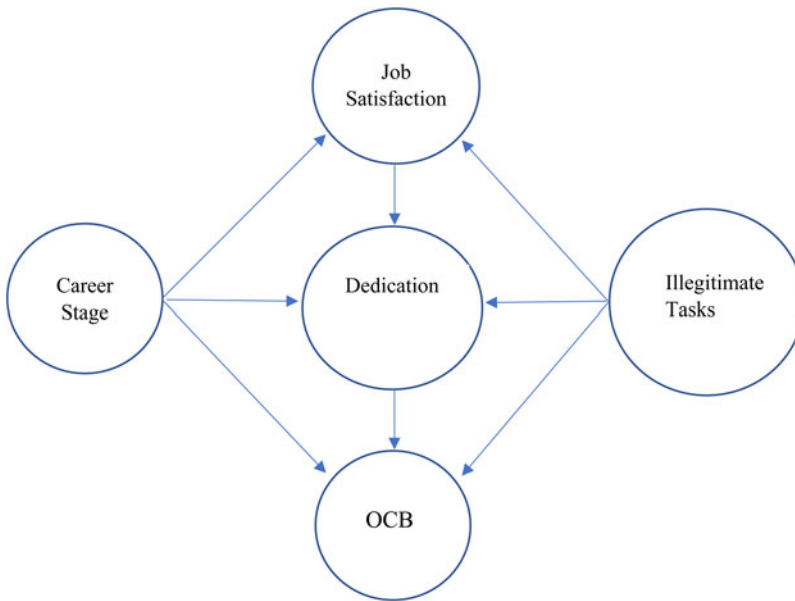
Fig. 1. Relationships between key constructs.

in Figure 1. This is in accord with much current research on illegitimate tasks (Eatough et al., 2016; Semmer et al., 2010). We note that we are assuming the operationalisation of career plateau based on career stage differences, and that we did not directly ask participants if they were in a career plateau (which could have biased responses). However, this assumption that late career officers generally experienced a form of career plateau was endorsed by the police union, and in addition our eventual results and findings produced clear support for this assumption.

Method

An Australian state police union, which has near absolute membership, requested one of the authors to conduct research on member attitudes because it was interested in engaging officers in the union for reasons beyond merely providing misconduct insurance. The union agreed to allow the findings to be used in an academic study provided anonymity was maintained. This allowed us to study police officers using focus groups. After receiving university-level ethical approval, we conducted seven focus group interviews held on different days.

Participants

The focus groups, which were recruited through police union-placed announcements on the police union website, were made available to active duty officers and cadets through police union representatives. The officers who participated in the study received no compensation, but participation was requested as a service to the profession. The focus groups were comprised according to rank and gender (male sergeants, female sergeants, etc.). The three officer ranks were: constables (junior operational officers), sergeants (senior operational officers), and cadets just entering operational police work. The police union confirmed that these different tenured groups (e.g., constables, sergeants, or cadets) would have different types of operational experience and levels of responsibility and would reflect different concerns based on career stage, which would include issues linked to career plateau. It is also believed that in terms of methodology,

homogeneous groups are more likely to produce useful data (Krueger & Casey, 2000); this is certainly the case in the police service where lower ranks are less likely to express their feelings and attitudes when higher ranks are present. This homogeneous group structure thus accords with informal advice we received from several officers prior to the research and with subsequent police research we have undertaken.

Cadets who had just graduated from the police academy as newly-sworn officers had been exposed to one year of professional socialisation, which is similar to extant research on professional socialisation (Thomas, Jinks, & Jack, 2015). Professional socialisation is a component of adult socialisation and a process by which individuals acquire the distinct behaviour, attitudes, and values of a particular profession (Thomas, Jinks, & Jack, 2015). The cadets experienced this socialisation at the state police academy and through a number of hours on patrol with experienced sergeants and constables. The participants at the constable level had between 1 and 9 years of active service as a police officer and included eight male constables and four female constables. The participants at the sergeant level had between 10 and 20 years of active service as a police officer and were about evenly split between men and women with four male sergeants and three female sergeants. Finally, the composition of the cadet group was eight male cadets and seven female cadets. Thus, in total, there were 20 male participants and 14 female participants in this study.

Procedures

Focus groups are an economical and effective way to obtain people's perceptions about phenomena in which they are personally involved (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2018). Based on a comparative study undertaken by Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, and McKenna (2017), it is reasonable to assume that, while people may be more forthcoming about personally sensitive matters in interviews, they are more likely to express 'unacceptable' views when in a homogenous group (e.g., adolescent boys discussing the way they treat girls).

In our study, each focus group lasted approximately 2 hours. The five focus groups composed of constables and sergeants were held at the state union headquarters, and these groups were: (1) male constables born in Australia, (2) three male constables born in the United Kingdom, (3) female constables, (4) male sergeants, and (5) female sergeants. The two remaining focus groups, (6) male cadets and (7) female cadets, were held at the state police academy. The focus groups were conducted by two researchers, with one researcher asking open-ended questions and the other recording responses on paper as a supplement to the digital recordings. We asked open-ended questions during the focus groups that had to do with state engagement. We explicitly defined engagement with specific reference to dedication, and we asked the participants to consider engagement and disengagement across all of their professional activities. These activities included typical tasks and duties done as a police officer including local union involvement. The exact questions posed to participants were:

(1) Why would you be engaged with the police union?
(2) Why would you not be engaged with the police union?
(3) Why would you be engaged with the state police force?
(4) Why would you not be engaged with the state police force?

Thus, our questions concerned both engagement with the union as well as the broader police organisation. This fulfilled the police union's request and aligns with the union's declaration that police officers see their involvement with the union as completely integrated with their engagement with the broader police organisation.

Analysis

The analysis was conducted in three stages. The first stage inductively derived the most significant lexical items and collocated them with related items. In the second stage, we derived separate dominant linguistic characteristics for each group by gender and rank. In the third stage, we then interpreted the findings in terms of the theoretical concepts which emerged as relevant to this study.

In the *first stage* we used a computer-assisted data analysis tool (CATA), Leximancer (version 4.5) software. There are various systems for computer-aided text analysis, with many proving useful for cognitive mapping (Kuhn & Corman, 2003) or concept and semantic mapping (Rooney, McKenna, & Barker, 2011). Many would be more familiar with N-Vivo software lexical analysis; however, Leximancer has had a significant level of usage, having now been used in over 1000 research studies. In contrast to NVivo, which allows 'researchers to assign meaning to the data during the coding stage' (Wilk, Soutar, & Harrigan, 2019: 100), researchers who use Leximancer for inductive research begin their interpretive analysis after lexical analysis. This is particularly important in ensuring that the initial process is entirely inductive, a point made by Indulska, Hovorka, and Recker (2012: 49): that is 'human coding of any sort of unstructured text is susceptible to subjectivity in the analysis. … the human analysis of text data is prone to variability of human categorization of research topics/keywords [because] pre-defined dictionaries induce bias into the analysis; … [and] interpretation of the data is prone to subjective interpretation bias, reducing the external validity of such research.' This aspect is also elaborated in Thomas (2014) and Zimitat (2006).

Leximancer is based on an algorithm that examines the occurrence and proximity of words in text through building matrices of co-location or co-occurrence with other words. We use the linguistic term *collocation*, which means that words appear together (e.g., *red apples* or *salt and pepper*) with a frequency that is greater than random. This in itself provides face validity of some semantic relationship between lexical terms. The degree of co-occurrence can be adjusted from within one sentence to three sentences. We set the level of co-occurrence within a sliding window of two sentences, which allows for a concept to be elaborated in a subsequent sentence rather than necessarily within one sentence. Co-occurrence is a well-established linguistic research concept for deriving meaning from text (Sowa, 2000; Stubbs, 1996)

The *first stage* of our research produced an inductively derived ranked list of important lexical terms (concepts) based on word frequency using Leximancer. A *concept* is not the same as a word; rather, Leximancer statistically develops a thesaurus, using only the text itself with no need for a prior or external dictionary in order to develop a concept that may include several words. For example, the concept *justice* may include the word *justice* but also *fairness*, *impartiality*, and *even-handed* if these terms also occur in the text. This process yielded a ranked list of 42 terms with *work* occurring most frequently and *deal* the least of those selected. Each of these terms has a number of concepts with which it is collocated. This collocation is provided both in a list of concepts as well as a *concept map* where the proximity of one concept with another indicates the degree to which they are likely to occur together. In our research, it is the differences in these concept maps which may suggest differential sets of tasks and duties that serve as focal points for changes in engagement. Although Leximancer also provides themes for clusters of highly semantically related concepts, we do not use these, preferring instead to create our own themes from close textual analysis and interpretation.

In the *second stage*, we compared the concept list to the concept map for each group. The concept maps were particularly useful for examining the foci of the work experience for each group. Here the foci of the work experience are differential sets of tasks and duties that serve as focal points in the concept maps and vary across the groups. This stage involved considerable immersion in the text in order to locate the major concepts in use and the ways in which they are collocated. At this stage we were still operating as inductive analysts, finding patterns of usage that might indicate valuable insights. It is at this stage only that we began to consider possible

interpretations. And at this stage, the importance of using inductive analysis rather than a priori coding becomes important. A criticism frequently levelled at textual analysis – indeed qualitative research in general – is that the analyst will simply interpret findings from a preconceived perspective (Widdowson, 1995, 1998). Therefore, we tried to avoid falling back on preconceived perspectives by using the differences in these concept maps to suggest differential sets of tasks and duties that serve as focal points for engagement. In contrast to the first and second stage, in the *third stage* we introduce the theoretical concepts of organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs), career plateau, dedication, job dissatisfaction, and illegitimate tasks. It is in this way that, following Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013), we managed the data and analysis to ensure trustworthiness by limiting researcher bias through separating '1st-order' and '2nd-order' analysis and by not simply 'cherry-picking' content that suited a particular set of outcomes. Consequently, as we moved from inductive analysis to interpretation, we found that a conceptual framing involving relationships between OCB, work engagement, job dissatisfaction, career plateau manifestations, and illegitimate tasks was most useful.

Overcoming potential bias

Qualitative research almost inevitably raises questions of bias in selection of subjects and in analysis and interpretation. As Bluhm, Harman, Lee, and Mitchell (2011: 1871) say, 'it is impossible to remove oneself completely', owing to one's training, experiences, and social standing. For ethical transparency, we provide the following information, and we review how we addressed the issues of rigor in the design of the research.

The researchers were recruited by the state police union to undertake this analysis. Thus, the potential of wariness and distrust that could occur when police are involved with external academic researchers was considerably reduced. That is, we had the approval of their union to do this work. By establishing a rapport with the focus groups, the facilitator was able to induce honest responses, which was evident in the overt anger (e.g., use of profanities when talking about aspects of their work that upset them, particularly in regard to the senior officers). By organising ranks also by sex, we believe that we minimised the potential for males to dominate or talk over women. It also allowed for genuine responses that were manifest in some differences in responses.

In terms of analysis, the initial stage is an inductive analysis provided by Leximancer. This obviates the potential for bringing in preconceived ideas. When this initial textual analysis was completed, the two researchers separately undertook analysis. We are located at two different universities, 124 km apart, so we chose to separately analyse the documents and then present them by email before one of us drove to the other campus for day-long discussions. As is appropriate with iterative analytical stages, we compared our findings and discussed relevant concepts.

We also received further feedback and checks on our analyses. Specifically, we called in a doctoral student to read our findings and present his critique to us. To obtain further critique, one of the authors presented the draft paper to his school's research retreat for consideration by some of the most notable qualitative researchers globally (one, a visiting scholar, has a h-index of 111 and 95,000 citations and another has a h-index of 37 and 12,500 citations). Thus, we feel that the analysis has undergone the most rigorous process.

Results

From stage 1, we produced three Leximancer-generated concept maps: all constables; all sergeants; and all cadets. We chose to combine the separate male and female transcripts at these levels because differences in tenure-based groups were a main focus of the study and the larger numbers of respondents were more representative of the serving police officers at these levels. The first step in our analyses was to produce separate concept maps for both the constables and sergeants to reveal potential differences due to tenure. These maps are related to our secondary
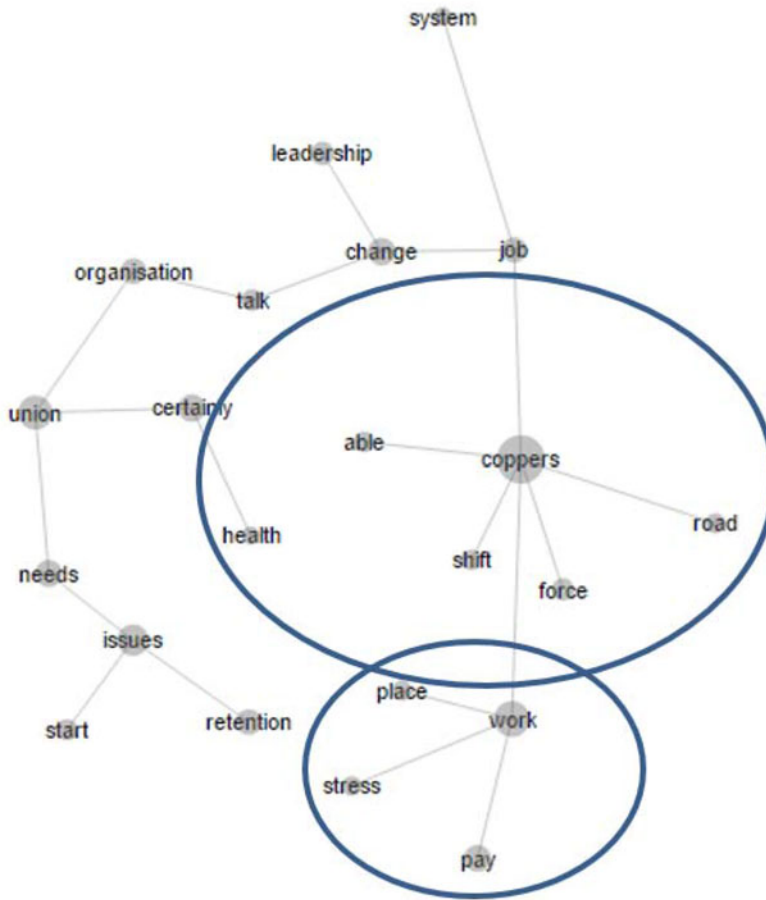
Fig. 2. Leximancer concept map for constables.

research question regarding potential differences in task and duty focus across groups. Figure 2 reveals the Leximancer concept map for all constables, which was based on 40,634 words of transcribed text. Figure 3 displays the concept map for all sergeants, which was based on 20,991 words of transcribed text. Figure 4 displays the concept map for all cadets, which was based on 23,535 words of transcribed text. In all, our analyses present concept maps and extracted statements from 85,160 words of transcribed text.

As noted earlier, Leximancer concept maps are created as the programme detects recurring terms that appear in numerous places across the total text that show semantic connections, through collocation, to other concepts. The Leximancer algorithm then produces concept maps based on semantic strength, which means that semantically stronger concepts occur in the centre of networks or nodes of subsidiary concepts. The programme also produces a table of ranked concepts to accompany each concept map, similar to the well-established lexical count of particular word occurrence. Within the ranked concepts, the most important concept relative to all other concepts derived from the analyses is listed as maximally or 100% relevant. Other concepts are given relevance values relative to the highest ranked concept. Frequency counts for concepts are also listed and can serve as important supplemental information when interpreting concept maps.
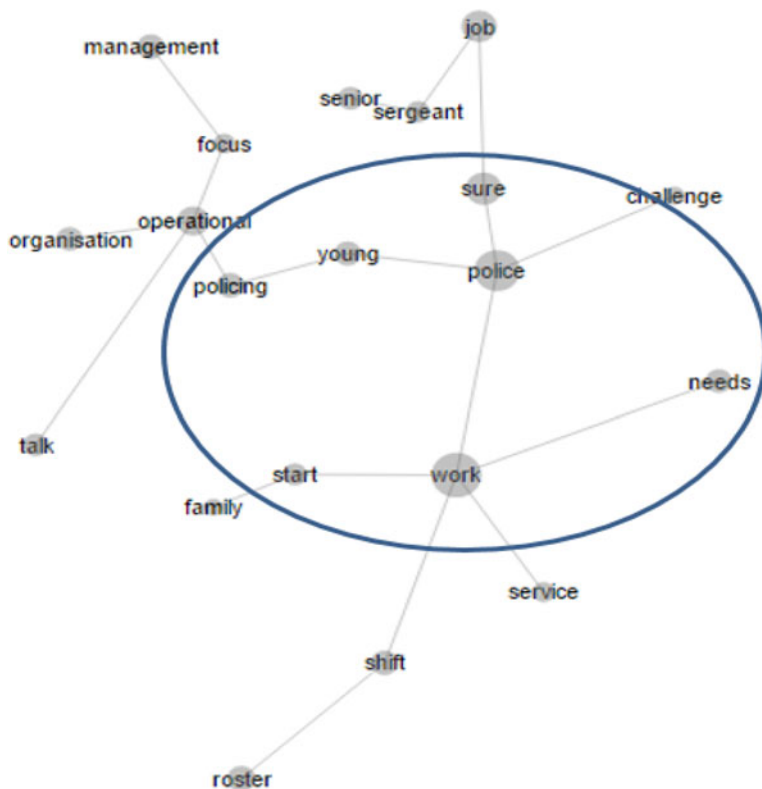
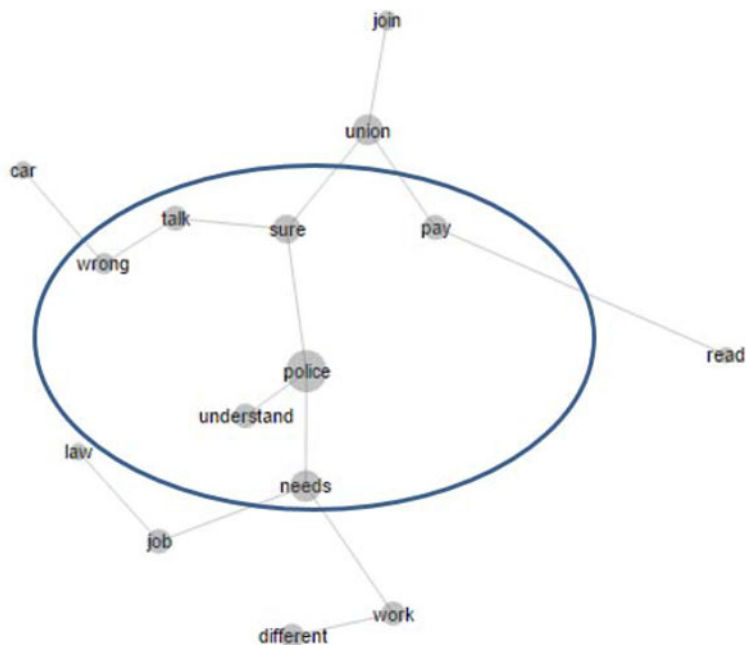**Fig. 3.** Leximancer concept map for sergeants.

Fig. 4. Leximancer concept map for cadets.

Constables findings

In the constable concept map (Figure 2), it is evident that the concept 'coppers' is the central concept of the map, sharing a direct connection with six other concepts.

It was the focal point of 'copper' that described how and where the constables engaged in their work. The semantic meaning of copper was defined by the participants via probing questions in the focus groups. Close analysis of the text revealed that 'copper' meant a police officer who engages daily in the physical police operations such as driving, speaking with the community while on patrol, but most importantly seeking out and arresting criminals, (e.g., '…you're out there to hunt crooks that's what operational police do, that's our job.' [Male Sergeant Quotation 51]). The physicality of the copper concept is reinforced by linked concepts within the 'copper' node such as 'road', 'able', and 'force', which indicate the specific areas of attention that are activated within the 'copper' node. Word counts for these concepts were respectively 31, 29, and 28. This circled network of concepts is two to three times denser than all other concept networks on the map, indicating that this node of concepts is the focal point of respondents' attention. Table 1 further supports this conclusion by showing that the concept of 'copper' was listed as 100% relevant (i.e., of maximum relevance) in comparison to all other concepts that were extracted from the 40,634 words of transcribed text. Table 1 also presents all of the ranked concepts for the constable data, which reveal that no other concept came close to

Table 1. Leximancer-ranked concepts for constables

Concept	Count *n*	Relevance %
Coppers	216	100
Work	134	62
Union	115	53
Issues	96	44
Pay	79	37
Change	74	34
Certainly	68	31
Job	68	31
Needs	65	30
Retention	59	27
Leadership	55	25
Organisation	54	25
Talk	36	17
Road	31	14
Start	30	14
Able	29	13
Force	28	13
System	23	11
Shift	22	10
Place	22	10
Stress	21	10
Health	11	5

100% relevance (or the corresponding frequency count of 216 occurrences). The next closest concept was 'work', which was listed as 62% relevant (frequency count = 134). Given that the focus groups dealt with the subject of work life, this second concept was not surprising. However, it was surprising that work was of lower semantic value, showing that the constables invest their identity in the narrower 'copper' activities rather than across the broader concept of work.

Sergeants findings

Turning to the sergeant concept map (Figure 3), the central focus of the map is dominated by two concepts: 'police' and 'work'. Both concepts share a similar number of direct connections with four to five adjacent concepts. Furthermore, as revealed by the ranked concepts list in Table 2, each ranked concept has a relevance count of between 80 and 100%, with frequency counts of 71 and 89, respectively.

This information supports the proposition that both 'police' and 'work' are essential for consideration as governing nodes, and that their connections within the map network support the fact that both concepts occur together across the transcripts. This indicates a focal point of attention around the idea of 'police work' and appears connected to broader themes on the concept map. Here, following closer examination of the text, police work is considered as a noun-phrase, and the network suggests for sergeants a more emotionally detached, depersonalised understanding of work when compared to the notion of 'copper'. Thus, references to police work suggested a lower investment of identity, while references to 'copper' indicated a higher investment of

Table 2. Leximancer-ranked concepts for sergeants

Concept	Count *n*	Relevance %
Work	89	100
Police	71	80
Job	49	55
Sure	42	47
Roster	41	46
Needs	29	33
Management	27	30
Shift	27	30
Operational	26	29
Organisation	23	26
Talk	23	26
Policing	18	20
Young	17	19
Start	17	18
Sergeant	14	16
Service	14	16
Senior	13	15
Focus	12	13
Challenge	7	8
Family	5	6

identity. Other linked concepts within 'police' and 'work' nodes include the concepts of 'sure', 'needs', 'young', and 'start'. Word counts for these concepts were respectively 42, 29, 17, and 17, indicating that these were important supporting concepts within the joint concepts of 'police' and 'work'. In general, these analyses indicated that constables placed more attention on the physical aspects of policing as well as multiple encounters with members of the immediate community. In contrast, sergeants indicated a less personalised and more abstract focus of attention based on the noun-phrase 'police work': e.g., *roster*, *management*, *shift*, *operational*, and *organisation*.

Cadets findings

In contrast to both the constable and sergeant maps, the central focus of the cadet map (Figure 4) is dominated by the single concept of 'police'. Given their limited tenure as police officers, we limited our consideration to three adjacent connections evident in their responses, 'sure', 'needs', and 'understand'. While 'sure' meant different things across all transcripts (e.g., *I'm sure that, make sure that*), one meaning occurred sufficiently across ranks for further consideration. For sergeants, it was to *ensure* that things got done as they are the nodal point between managerial directives and operational practice:

> The organisation wants to make sure that we are squeaky clean [Male Sergeant Quotation 93]

This tension was linked to 'needs', encapsulated by this constable's statement:

> … it's just that your rights and needs are completely disregarded" [Male Constable Quotation 75]

In other words, it was acknowledged that there are organisational needs that are determined by superiors and enacted, but officers also have needs that superiors failed to acknowledge. This became strongly evident in further analysis. The link between 'police' and 'needs' was most distinctive in the cadet map, unsurprisingly given their operational inexperience. Table 3, which lists the ranked concepts for the cadet data, shows that the concept of 'police' was highest ranked and 'needs' was third highest. However, a perception of unmet needs for more experienced officers indicates a lack of support. Our analyses suggest that differences in the use of the term 'needs' between the cadet concept map and constable and sergeant maps support the assumption that there are key differences across tenure in how the groups of officers understand the nature of work and especially the focus of tasks and duties within the work environment. Thus, variations in the use of the terms 'needs' can be used as a conceptual mark of change in the perception of the work environment across the groups, serving as a check on our assumption that the groups did show changes in the perception of the work environment, which has been shown to be an antecedent in dedication (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Leiter & Bakker, 2010).

Summary of findings

Overall, our inductive findings indicate that the different groups indeed displayed different focal concepts for tasks and duties within the work environment, which were, in turn, connected to relevant supporting concepts. For example, with respect to Figure 2, 'copper' is clearly the governing concept. As mentioned previously, a 'copper' is a deployed officer, either on the road or on call to respond physically to law enforcement needs at the 'coalface', or in direct contact with members of the public. The fact that the term 'copper' as the central concept of the constable concept map (Figure 2) was distinct from 'police' and 'work', which were the central concepts of the sergeant concept map (Figure 3), lends tentative support for the notion that constables and sergeants indeed differ in how they see the focus of police activities and therefore the focus of their attention.

Table 3. Leximancer-ranked concepts for cadets

Concept	Count n	Relevance %
Police	108	100
Union	67	62
Needs	59	55
Work	49	45
Sure	48	44
Different	44	41
Talk	43	40
Job	41	38
Pay	40	37
Understand	31	29
Join	23	21
Read	21	19
Wrong	20	19
Car	19	18
Law	10	9

Such differences show that officers at different levels of tenure had different types of task and duty focus for work performance, which is consistent with the observation that opportunities to enact OCB are clearly perceived differently by different types of employees when they have a difference in task and duties (Turnipseed & Rassuli, 2005). For example, if employees focus on tasks and duties that relate more to individuals within the organisation, they will have more opportunities to change OCB-I. In contrast, employees who are mostly involved in tasks and duties that involve defending and endorsing the organisation in general will have more opportunities to enact OCB-O. Thus, we concluded that the main concept distinctions which emerged from the transcripts were primarily related to the concepts of 'coppers' and 'police'. In particular, the constables map (Figure 2) can be summarised to some extent by the single concept 'copper'. However, we also note that sergeants as well as constables used the term 'copper'. We note that in the sergeant-specific analyses of Figure 3 and Table 2, the concepts of 'police' and 'work' were also both highly relevant. However, because these two concepts almost always appeared together, we considered these concepts to reflect the notion of 'police work', with the concept of police being the more descriptive within this pair (linguistically, the preceding noun in a noun-cluster provides an adjectival function). Based on these conclusions, we selected the central terms of 'police' and 'coppers' for a follow-up series of deductive analyses. At this point, we searched for evidence of the two specific themes of 'copper(s)' and 'cop(s)' and 'police'. We extracted 121 quotations with the use of 'copper(s)' or 'cop(s)' and 231 quotations with the use of 'police'. Consistent with stage 3, we then deductively examined all 352 quotations for evidence of depletion of dedication and evidence of lowered OCBs. Instances of each type of occurrence were noted and compared across groups.

Critical issues

From this analysis and interpretation, we were able to identify four critical issues.

Depletion of dedication and career plateau

In Figure 1, we presented a series of proposed associations between career plateau which we here manifest as career stage, and the constructs of job satisfaction, dedication, and OCB. Accordingly, we examined depleted dedication across all transcripts, with several dedication-specific themes emerging. As noted earlier, engagement in general and dedication in particular can be considered to have strong, positive associations with OCB (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Consistent with the references to depleted inspiration in the dedication literature (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) we discovered themes related to notions of depleted inspiration and evidence of career plateau. Regarding the depletion of inspiration, most responses came from constables rather than sergeants as:

> They're counting and targeting the people that aren't getting the numbers, and the **coppers** themselves detest it. [Male Sergeant Quotation 18]

> Now, it's micro management for the sake of making someone look good at our – at the expense of the coalface ... so, someone can get promoted. [Male Constable Quotation 33]

> We, as coppers out there would be absolutely screwed if we didn't have the association [police union]. We'd be walked on, trodden on and shat on, because the organisation is autocratic [Male Constable Quotation 38]

> Every **cop** will tell you, we've got the best job in the world, and we do, we have the best job in the world, except for the fact the people we're working for [Male Constable Quotation 41]

This indicates a clear delineation between the ranks and commissioned officers. Although placed in the invidious position of having to implement management policy, sergeants were nonetheless perceived as part of the group doing coppering, while those at inspector level and above clearly were not, as is evident in this male constable's statement:

> I think, at that management level, … sergeant level and down, we're generally okay … I've never had an officer of **police** … ever stick up for me.[Male Constable Quotation 95]

Participants demonstrated evidence of depleted dedication, relative to work activities and related social networks. However, the expressions that signalled the lack of challenge, frustration, and stagnation inherent in a career plateau came mostly from sergeants rather than constables. Accordingly, the following quotes present evidence that one of the core assumptions within our study design – that variations in career plateau could be operationalised by differences in tenure between early career and late career officers – was met:

> I made a decision … about three years ago, which was I used to owe this job everything; I loved it, and now it owes me. And unfortunately, you will get more and more **coppers** doing it. [Depleted OCBO: Male Sergeant Quotation 21]

> You will struggle to find a **copper** that will say to someone on the street, you should come and be on the police force now, it's really good. [Depleted OCBO: Male Sergeant Quotation 24]

> I'm going to get off the road, and you're never going to see me [Male Sergeant Quotation 27]

> You'd be an absolute fool to join us right now. Except for the money there is nothing good about what I do. [Male Sergeant Quotation 28]

Depleted OCBs

Participants also demonstrated evidence of depleted OCBs, particularly in regard to lowered reciprocal loyalty, not defending the organisation, and showing a lack of civic virtue. Evidence of depleted OCBs seemed to be split evenly between constables as well as sergeants:

> We work in a place that is so good at public perception, we're brilliant at it. [COMMISSIONER'S NAME] is probably one of the greatest politicians you're going to meet. Unfortunately, he's a police commissioner not a politician. [Depleted OCBI: Male Constable Quotation 78]

> I've worked in places where I've had guns pointed at me, I've had rocks thrown at me, I've had commendations of merit because I've had to pull people out of fires, and this **police** force has done nothing for me, other than give me a pay cheque every fortnight [Depleted OCBO: Male Constable Quotation 82]

> The organisation wants to make sure that we are squeaky clean, you know that we hold the big banner up of integrity, we walk around and wave this integrity. But like I said, I gave you a classic example that it's bullshit, it's spin. [Depleted OCBO: Male Sergeant Quotation 93]

> There are a number of people that are literally, just waiting for their pensions … no interest in actual police work, no interest in helping anyone. [Depleted OCBI: Male Constable Quotation 96]

> I would be prepared to leave because I don't feel the loyalty to [STATE POLICE] that I felt for my employer back home [UK] [Depleted OCBO: Male Constable Quotation 102]

Illegitimate tasks

While not specifically a research question at the outset of the study, we were struck by the high occurrence of illegitimate task statements within the constable and sergeant focus groups. More importantly, these illegitimate task statements textually co-occurred with references to depleted dedication and lowered OCBs. As expected from previous work on illegitimate tasks (Semmer et al., 2007; Semmer et al., 2010), we uncovered the dimensions of unreasonable tasks as being outside of their professional scope as well as unnecessary time-wasting tasks. Evidence of illegitimate tasks seemed to be split evenly between constables and sergeants.

 Consistent with other findings (Semmer et al., 2010) we found several illegitimate tasks based on unreasonable tasks outside of professional scope. Typical of this theme were:

> I've got three computers, so therefore I've got all of my expiration notices, yeah I'm a traffic **copper** … to put in and all of this sort of stuff, and now, all of a sudden I've got another 45 minutes of putting in information into this reporting system, this text based reporting system that could all be pulled out of the ORM system, but oh no, it's not convenient, so we'll have the coppers put it into the text base system. [Male Constable Quotation 22]

> I mean when I was asked to write those macros for that stupid bloody inputting of the data at the end of each day, I said I didn't want to do it – hey, [STATE POLICE] don't pay me for those skills. [Male Constable Quotation 32]

> My responsibilities range from time to time, but for police **officers** in an office … I was always being bombarded with little informal questions here and there about, can I – do

we have access to – for this type of leave or that type of leave or what's my, what are my conditions in relation to this, that or the other? [Female Sergeant Quotation 63]

The second type of illegitimate task – the perceived waste of time and resources – was also evident in our findings. In several quotations, the respondents refer to their broader context of wasting time on unnecessary tasks:

> So, they're all the things that people are measured on, you know, what do you do when you come to work for 8 or 10 hours a day, you know, you're not expected just to drive around and you know, look in shop windows, you're out there to hunt crooks that's what operational **police** do, that's our job. [Male Sergeant Quotation 51]

Undertaking tasks that are motivated by priority funding was also considered to be of dubious worth:

> … these random breath test stations they set up … and that's one of the things that LSAs [Local Service Areas] are measured on, because an amount of money is given by the federal government to all state governments to give to their **police** departments to the police force to go out there and do your random breath – it's a national you know, road traffic exercise. [Male Sergeant Quotation 61]

Loss of agency

We uncovered evidence for a third category of illegitimate tasks which was related to lack of professional agency. This lack of agency manifested in two ways:

Resource deficits

> You don't have the tools necessary to do what you need to do, and to make matters worse, you have a hindrance, you have problems and barriers put up to your performance" [Male Constable Quotation 38]

> Because we've had our hands tied further, and further, and further, and further, and our budget's cut further, and further, and further to feed other people's pockets [Male Sergeant Quotation 81]

> And if they're paying double time and a half, then [STATE POLICE] would rather shift people around and ruin a whole team's life to make sure he has that day off, rather than actually paying. [Male Constable Quotation 88]

Inability to use discretion

Being forced to comply with managerial guidelines limited officers' ability to use their judgement in daily practice:

> I'm embarrassed with the fact now that our discretion as **police**men, our discretion of whether we report someone or caution someone is now being taken away. [Male Sergeant Quotation 59]

> And so, you're taking the discretion away from the **copper**, you know. … I don't know the full details but the way it came in the paper, some old woman in a frame or in a wheelchair you know, crossed within 20 metres of a traffic light; she got pinched - $190 fine. Come on, get real – get real! [Male Sergeant Quotation 17]

Discussion and conclusions

Because the public behaviour of police is now far more salient and is open to increased scrutiny through traditional and social media (Dukes & Gaither, 2017; Ince, Rojas, & Davis, 2017), this study builds on the work of previous organisational studies of police that focus on OCB and illegitimate tasks by identifying two related concepts: career plateau and another form of illegitimate task, namely reduced discretionary ability. Furthermore, we have found that the negative perceptions were related to identity, particularly at the constable level, of being a copper. This identity set them apart, antagonistically, from the commissioned officers who were perceived as forcing organisational demands on them while being indifferent to their needs. The copper social identity is particularly important in defining their work identity in terms of the physicality of core police work, namely preventing and detecting crime and bringing wrongdoers to justice. This was juxtaposed to their perception of the role of management, the commissioned officers, in creating procedures and setting tasks that aligned with criteria with which 'coppers' did not identify. When the identity of *copper* is threatened, regardless of whether that threat be from pressures internal or external to the organisation, constables face a higher likelihood of engagement depletion. This is consistent with previous research, in that police work generates 'a strong professional subculture' that creates a gulf between 'management cops' and 'street cops' (Cockcroft, 2012).

The two main themes that emerged for the depletion of dedication showed that more than just a lack of physical resources contributed to a loss of engagement.

Depletion of dedication, OCB, and career plateau

First, our findings are highly consistent with existing Australian research on OCB that links deficits in organisational support to lowered OCBs, which may manifest in a variety of forms (Chung, 2018). Depleted engagement was expressed proportionally more by constables than sergeants indicating that these issues were more important for those working centrally on the frontline with the community. However, evidence of stagnation due to career plateau was addressed more by sergeants compared to constables. This may be due to the fact that sergeants had more time to witness illegitimate task events engendering organisational cynicism, which interacted with career plateau during their relatively longer tenure. It is important to note that there is no necessary negative connection between career plateau and job attitudes or other variables (Yang, Johnson, & Niven, 2018). Relevant here are the roles that a sergeant plays that differ from their frontline constable roles. Although they were not perceived as management, or not real coppers, by the constables, sergeants nonetheless not only do frontline policing by supervising crime investigation and managing custody but also do considerable middle management activity including record keeping, performance monitoring, workload planning and the deployment of teams, and financial management (Butterfield, Edwards, & Woodall, 2005). These new challenges may account for the curvilinear relationship between career plateau and OCB, but do not account for constables' disposition. Our untested proposition, given that responses showed a high level of disengagement coming from an inability to gain personal value, pride, and ongoing meaning from the job, despite their satisfaction with pay levels, is that constables are likely to have lowered OCB.

The study provides evidence for OCB depletion according to the OCB-O pathway because OCB targeted at the organisation was diminished. Depleted OCB-O was evident in regard to lowered reciprocal loyalty, not defending the organisation, and showing a lack of civic virtue. Evidence of depleted OCB-O seemed to be split evenly between constables and sergeants, although due to differences in task and duty focus it seems that constables may have disengaged from OCB-I to some extent as well. The general feeling was a lack of reciprocal loyalty, based on the perception that the police management was interested in officers only so long as they met their KPIs, 'got the numbers', and provided public relations displays that aligned with the current

political agenda (e.g., reducing the road toll or cracking down on hooliganism). This sense that management does not adequately support frontline officers or display trust in them aligns with Beck and Wilson's (1997) Australian findings two decades prior.

Illegitimate tasks

The second theme that also accords with recent research (Eatough et al., 2016) was found in the multiple associations between depleted dedication, OCB, and illegitimate tasks. The results showed three main themes for illegitimate tasks that were consistent with the findings of previous illegitimate task research (Pereira et al., 2014; Semmer et al., 2010). First, both constables and sergeants expressed disengagement linked to being required to perform tasks that were outside their professional scope, such as excessive data entry and other administrative tasks that could be performed by an office worker. This state seemed to have come about because budget restrictions had reduced staff and resources. The other form of illegitimate task, unnecessary police work that reduced the time for more important police work, was mostly evident in sergeants. This involved mostly monitoring work required in a metric-based audit culture (Power, 1997). For all sergeants, this seemed to be any task aimed at meeting economic and strategic corporate milestones rather than the real and less evidential police work of 'hunting crooks'.

Lack of agency

Our study has identified a third theme, which we locate within the category of illegitimate tasks, this being a reduction in the officers' sense of agency in completing their work. In these instances, both constables and sergeants revealed frustration about not being able to use their experience-based discretion to assess situations and act in a way that benefited police and the community. This lack of agency fits with other depleting factors related to micro-management from higher levels of administration designed to reduce organisational liability and enhance public image. There is considerable evidence in critiques of New Public Management methods that performance measures used to monitor performance fail to capture many intangible assets and traditional values that are vital to public service motivation (Bakker, 2015). Such assets include forms of co-operation, knowledge sharing and development, fairness, dignity, participation, commitment, trust, creativity, and communities of practice (Diefenbach, 2009: 900).

Overall, depletion in dedication and OCBs, along with the demands of illegitimate tasks, combined in different ways to act as antecedents for systematic disengagement from the thin blue line by constables and sergeants. Depending on the type of job demands and the scarcity of the various resources, both sergeants and constables displayed a high degree of likelihood to disengage from their job, due to illegitimate tasks.

Limitations

This study should be interpreted in the context of at least four limitations. First, as a qualitative study, the observations reflect the views and experiences of a small group of individuals in a particular context. Whilst our sample was drawn potentially from the entire state police force, and contained participants from various professional backgrounds and experience, further research is needed to examine the extent to which these findings apply to other similar groups. Second, we acknowledge that, because our sample was self-selected, this may unduly represent those with particularly strong views or experiences. Third, we acknowledge that the method used to collect data (i.e., focus groups) and our categorisation by rank and gender could have produced a certain group effect (Wilkinson & Silverman, 2004). Finally, including cadets in the study did not provide much usable data to compare with operational officers. Although there was potential

to consider the effect of socialisation (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013) on cadets, our focus group questions did not elicit useful information about this.

Directions for future research

This study leads us to six potential areas for future research. First, research on illegitimate tasks undertaken by professional occupations like police is enhanced by incorporating the factors of different levels of engagement, OCB, and career plateau. Given that occupations occur along a continuum from highly professional to nonprofessional occupations (Hickson & Thomas, 1969), more research could detect variance in the perceived mismatch between a person's expectations for role-specific behaviours in the work environment and actual work tasks they are required to do. Such research may indicate that perceived illegitimacy of tasks is related to professional identity and judgement.

Second, lowered levels of OCB figured prominently in this research. We examined OCB as linked to illegitimate tasks, but one area for future research would be a study of potential interactions between the effects of perceived justice violations, especially perceived interactional justice violations and illegitimate tasks on OCB. OCB has been shown to be connected to justice violations in reference to HRM policies (Frenkel, Restubog, & Bednall, 2012) through a perceived denial of required organisational support (Tremblay, Cloutier, Simard, Chenevert, & Vandenberghe, 2010), and through the fair treatment of co-workers (Harris, Lavelle, & McMahan, 2020). Although justice perceptions have been connected to OCB, perceived organisational support, and management policies across numerous studies (Frenkel et al., 2012; Tremblay, Vandenberghe, & Doucet, 2013), it remains for future researchers to examine potential relationships between perceived interactional justice and illegitimate tasks on OCB. While much remains to be learned about depletion of engagement, links to lowered OCB, career plateau, and illegitimate tasks, the results of this study offer several foundations for constructing further studies related to the interactions between these variables within the growth in illegitimate task research (Semmer, Tschan, & Jacobshagen, 2019).

Third, the issue of agency was identified in this research as a significant source of discontent among ranked police. Agency for professional workers is characterised by the capacity to use one's discretion and intuition based on experience to make judgements about appropriate action (McKenna & Rooney, 2008; Warhurst & Black, 2017). Socio-political research in this area over 20 years has been productive, and we suggest that incorporating these insights into psychologically framed research provides greater contextual insight. Referring specifically to the police service, Worrall, Mather, and Cooper (2007: 2) stated that 'a failure to deliver the central government agenda, as measured by performance indicators, has created an environment which serves to limit local discretion and which allows for no deviation in terms of local police procedures and objectives'. Rogerson (1999) stated that new police service performance indicators had increased the level of inflexibility as they pursued management set targets. Baines and Van Den Broek (2017) study asserts that New Public Management managerial models 'have had a standardising influence on work practices and content' (p. 130) that reduces professional discretion and makes it difficult to act on individual and social issues that are not specified government and management set outcome targets. The effect in the case of Australian and Canadian care workers was to eliminate 'many of the professional knowledge and skill-based, fluid, ongoing practices once thought to characterise high-quality care work' (p. 130). We argue that action based on professional judgement and discretion is aligned with OCB-O because it is discretionary behaviour that goes beyond core work tasks. We would also encourage critical theory to be incorporated in or to work alongside psychological analysis in understanding agency and power in contemporary management theory (see, e.g., Bardon & Josserand, 2018).

Fourth, we have identified the deficit-dependent task as an extension of the illegitimate task framework. That is, certain tasks will appear to be particularly illegitimate because, by an

employee's own professional judgement, they would not choose to devote already scarce resources to a particular task. Such tasks – deficit-dependent illegitimate tasks – could serve to further reduce agency by enhancing the association between depleted resources and OCB as a moderating variable. However, it remains for future research to empirically test this presumed relationship between depleted resources and OCB via illegitimate task moderation. This proposition is somewhat consistent with the work of Psychogios et al. (2019) who discovered a strong mediation effect due to job satisfaction (which is associated with agency) between adverse working conditions and OCB-O.

Fifth, we also note that depleted agency conceptually links to deficits in the critical psychological state of autonomy – one of the three critical psychological states within self-determination theory (SDT; Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Accordingly, we advocate that the stressor of illegitimate tasks be further incorporated into and tested within an SDT framework, particularly as an antecedent to decreased autonomy and subsequently lowered intrinsic motivation. As part of such investigations, we advocate the use of person-centred approaches to investigate constellations of stressors that emerge around illegitimate tasks (Keller et al., 2017). In addition, in line with existing research (Semmer et al., 2019), the further use of self-determination-based frames consistent with the 'stress as offense to self' approach could be used to articulate possible motivational effects of illegitimate tasks in greater detail.

Sixth, engagement or work engagement targets, similar to targets of commitment, could have additional importance within future research. Within the job demands literature, it is noted that antecedents of engagement can range from organisational factors such as pay to group-level factors such as climate, to more micro factors such as role clarity and task-specific factors such as autonomy and task identity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Salient job demands might suggest areas of focus where employees could choose to allocate attention to gain additional resources over time. While specific types of job demands have been investigated (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Dick, 2011), more research is needed in regard to contextual factors that make certain types of demands more salient than others. Relevant to this point is that this study offers support for the association of career plateau with decreased OCB based on the work focus of police sergeants. This contribution of a tenure-based focus associated with lower OCB and career plateau markers deserves further investigation via quantitative tests for interactions between these variables. By considering a combination of affective, normative, and continuance commitment concurrently, according to Yang, Johnson, & Niven, we might gain a better understanding of the career plateau.

This research was initiated by police union concern about the perceived loss of engagement among their members. Our findings have vindicated their concern by unearthing serious levels of disengagement and low organisational citizenship among its members. We have also found important insights into the copper identity of frontline constables as well as deep concerns about a loss of agency. Accordingly, via a deeper and more nuanced consideration of task and duty focus differences based on career stage, as well as connections between illegitimate tasks, job dissatisfaction, dedication, and OCB, based on career plateau, police service managers should now have a much clearer understanding of what is needed to maintain the thin blue line.

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