

Need or greed?

Corruption and integrity management in a Gauteng police station

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The SAPS national strategic management has for a number of years pushed for the rollout of an internal anti-corruption strategy, and is at last making some headway. By examining the management of integrity and corruption at the Honeydew SAPS station, this article explores the extent to which this strategy and other integrity management tools are being applied at station level.

In 2008 the national strategic management unit of the South African Police Service (SAPS) completed the first version of the long awaited Corruption and Fraud Prevention Plan (CFPP), which is ready for implementation. This plan, or strategy, was an attempt to fill the gap left by the closure of the Anti-Corruption Unit, but had been plagued by delays since work started on it in 2002/03. In early 2009 provincial managers were instructed to begin implementing the strategy.

Over the next year the ISS will be assessing, through a series of case studies, the implementation of the CFPP in stations across the country. This article presents the findings of the first of these studies. The findings of this and two additional case studies will be presented and analysed in a forthcoming occasional paper.

SAMPLE SELECTION AND METHODOLOGY

This case study was conducted at the Honeydew SAPS station, located in the northwest of Johannesburg. The station was selected for:¹

1. Its high crime rate. As one of the country's 169 priority crime stations, Honeydew has one of

the highest violent crime rates in Gauteng. This creates a high-stress work environment, and since those responsible for management and oversight are likely to be overwhelmed by the immediate task of dealing with crime, members may be tempted to engage in illegal activities.

2. The diverse urban landscape and population of the area. The Honeydew precinct includes a relatively large and affluent suburban area, a business district, industrial area, and two poorer residential areas, Cosmos City (RDP houses and shacks) and Zandspruit informal settlement. It has a middle-class to affluent (predominantly white) population, and a working-class and poor (predominantly black) population, including a significant number of African immigrants. Zimbabwean residents of Zandspruit have on a number of occasions been the targets of violent attacks by residents.
3. The fact that the former station commissioner (promoted to cluster commander two months prior to the fieldwork) is known in Gauteng as one of the most active in anti-corruption reform.²

Honeydew police station employs approximately 260 people (including administrative staff) who

are responsible for an area of 194 square kilometres that is home to approximately 850 000 residents.

The primary intention of the case study was to ascertain to what extent the station managers and staff were aware of the CFPP, and to what extent the plan was being implemented (if at all). The secondary purpose of the study was to gain insight into the organisational culture of the station; the attitudes of members and managers to integrity and corruption management; and to understand whether any action had been taken to curb corruption, whether guided by the CFPP or not. The case study was conducted over a period of approximately six weeks.

The dominant research method was semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted with roughly ten per cent (n=29) of station employees. These included operational members, administrative staff, police reservists, new student constables, students in their probationary year, and the chair of the Community Policing Forum (CPF).

Interviews probed:

- Employees' perceptions of discipline and their understanding of rules
- The quality of relationships between junior and senior members
- Prior attempts to manage integrity/corruption at the station
- Whether corruption is perceived as a problem at the station and in the SAPS in general
- What respondents believe could/should be done to reduce corruption
- The perceived cause of corruption, and
- Whether the respondents knew of any formal SAPS anti-corruption initiatives, strategies or plans, including hotlines

It was initially intended that interviews would be supplemented through an 'integrity survey' based on that developed by the late Carl Klockars.³ Unfortunately, despite a number of attempts, the survey process has not yet been successful and no usable data have yet been produced.

The method included observation of the station environment and members, including their engagement with clients in the Community Service Centre (CSC). It was limited by the fact that it did not include observation of members outside the station.⁴

In order to protect the anonymity of subjects, interview dates and times have not been provided, with the exception of interviews with the former station commissioner and the chair of the community policing forum (CPF), from whom permission was received to use this information. Ranks of commissioned officers are not mentioned to further ensure their anonymity.⁵

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Discipline

Approximately 40 per cent of respondents felt that discipline at the station was very good, that rank was respected, rules strictly enforced, and corrective action taken against defaulting members. The majority (60 per cent), however, expressed mixed feelings. Most of these believed discipline was good, but made it clear that certain members – by some accounts half of the station, needed to improve. None dismissed the entire station as ill disciplined. Senior members tended to see the younger as comparatively ill disciplined:

It's not bad but it's not the way it should be. I joined in 1994 and discipline was right then... it's not out of control but it's not the way it should be. (Commissioned officer, crime prevention)

It was a commonly held belief by lower ranking officers that *poor communication* was responsible for poor discipline. This is expanded upon below.

Parades observed during the fieldwork indicated a good level of discipline among shift/crime prevention members.⁶ Members stood at attention and listened attentively to their commander. Although compulsory, formal parades are not held at all stations.

Knowledge of SAPS rules and regulations

Almost all respondents believed their colleagues had a good knowledge of SAPS rules, regulations, codes and standing orders. The few who said that some rules were not known or understood believed that more experienced colleagues were familiar with rules and regulations while the more junior weren't. They tended to blame poor communication for the lack of awareness by their less experienced colleagues.

Relationships between commissioned and non-commissioned officers

In an interview the former station commissioner articulated what is probably an ideal relationship between junior and senior colleagues, saying

[it should be] relatively cordial, there has to be a good relationship between juniors and seniors, but not overly familiar to the point where people call each other by first names.⁷

He believed this described the relationships between members at Honeydew. While other respondents agreed that relationships were 'mostly good', many respondents suggested that 'good' went far beyond 'cordial'. It is unclear whether this aided the maintenance of discipline and effective policing, though it seems fair to presume good relationships are better than bad.

Some members believed there was respect for the rank hierarchy at the station while others suggested this was no longer the case, particularly at an operational level. They believed this was partly because an increasing number of commissioned officers were working at an operational level, whereas before they had station-bound managerial positions. Experienced members recounted how in the past (anywhere between ten and twenty years ago) a single sergeant, inspector, or equivalent rank, was afforded immense respect.

Currently, however, even the rank of inspector may be considered a low rank in a large station

such as Honeydew. Some respondents perceive this to be because captains and superintendents themselves work 'outside', on patrols, or with multiple commissioned officers in the CSC, with numerous inspectors and sergeants beneath them. It was suggested that this dilutes the authority of the more senior ranking staff. At Honeydew two captains and a superintendent oversee each shift. As one detective constable put it, 'There are so many managers on duty... a supt, captain, inspectors... where there are so many, someone doesn't know his job.' But from the former station commissioner's perspective, these numbers strengthened oversight.

Respondents made reference to the fact that officers working 'outside' (on patrols and crime prevention) aided the formation of friendships and good relations between juniors and seniors. It is unclear from this data whether the benefits of this outweigh possible negatives.

An assessment of the interview and observational data suggests that both relationships and discipline at this station are healthy. This is corroborated by the views expressed by respondents. One member felt she could contact her commander at any time of the day or night, with both personal and work-related problems. However, complaints about poor internal communication by respondents also suggest that good personal relations do not facilitate official communication.

EFFORTS TO REDUCE OR PREVENT CORRUPTION

The former station commissioner emphasised that station commissioners have an immense amount of work on their plates, the most pressing of which is responding to, and investigating, crime. With this pressure, managers are likely to let the monitoring and improvement of integrity and the prevention of corruption fall by the wayside. In addition, given the pressure to reduce crime, any indication that crime is being reduced is unlikely to be questioned, even if the manner in which the reduction is being achieved is

questionable. During his tenure, the former commissioner set four management priorities, one of which was corruption. He believed that if corruption management was not prioritised, it would be forgotten.

Most members could cite examples of how management had addressed corruption. Many emphasised parade and station lectures covering the consequences of police crime and corruption. A few referred to examples of members being disciplined internally or even dismissed for their involvement in corrupt activities.

While very few members said there weren't *any* initiatives to address corruption at the station, none could suggest any *proactive* attempts to *detect* corruption. This is a matter of concern, considering that members could only think of one instance in which an employee had reported a colleague for corruption. This 'code of silence' is considered common in police agencies. Of further concern is that many members explicitly stated they would not report corruption.

It's none of my business, I must just do my job and stay out of it. (Constable, shifts)⁸

It would be so difficult because the police officer has a gun so going behind his back is suicide. All I can do is communicate with him. (Constable, shifts)

It's difficult to report your colleague but I can talk to them [about their crime]. There's a problem of trust. You report someone and then the person you reported goes to the suspect and tells them. (Constable, detectives)

When we hear there has been a special [anti-corruption/organised crime] unit [at the station]...we don't provide them with information...Because you don't get support. At the end of the day you have an attitude of 'who cares?' (Constable, shifts)

I was a constable and I know that what happens outside stays outside. Generally members would cover each other. (Commissioned officer, crime prevention)

I would just tell [the corrupt member] to stop. [If I report it] my colleagues will make me suffer for doing it. (Constable, shifts)

These comments both reinforce and contradict the claims made about good relationships. On the one hand they suggest an allegiance to colleagues, and a sense that the relationship between colleagues is more important than official corrective action or punishment. On the other hand, allusions to possible betrayal or lack of support suggest deeply faulted relationships.

The above responses emerged through conversation and were not part of the formal interview structure. In the same way, three non-commissioned officers said they would definitely report corruption. Though no commissioned officers made it clear that they would or wouldn't report corruption, three of the five gave the impression that they would.

THE SAPS AND CORRUPTION AT HONEYDEW

Eighty-five per cent of respondents believed corruption was a problem in the SAPS. Many respondents seem to base their perceptions on reports of police corruption in the media.⁹ Others said they heard members of the public and colleagues talking about police corruption, and felt that the inability of the SAPS to reduce crime was evidence of corruption. Three members said they were aware of corruption taking place in the recruitment process.

Drawing parallels between the national picture and Honeydew, a shift constable said, 'whatever Honeydew officers can do, other officers can do', expressing her suspicion of corruption at Honeydew and the SAPS as a whole.

Only two officers reported direct knowledge of corruption at the station, though more than half could clearly describe the type of corruption they believed was likely occurring. One detective alleged that almost everyone on his shift was involved in corrupt activities, including the shift commander. Another said she knew many members who accepted bribes, and that in her experience, roughly ten per cent of suspects offered bribes. A student detective expressed his

suspicious of seniors who complained of not having food money but ended road block operations buying excessive amounts of food and drink. Another respondent alleged that some detectives provided protection to drug dealers. Others claimed to have heard of colleagues extorting money from illegal immigrants. Although none admitted to being party to such extortion, one respondent responsible for crime prevention said it probably happened on his shift. A young detective acknowledged that he would not ask somebody to pay a bribe, but that if he were offered one he would accept it.

Significantly, a number of members believed that corruption had been notably reduced under the former station commissioner. This view was echoed by the chair of the CPF who stated that 'many, many, many' allegations of corruption are raised at CPF meetings.¹⁰ He claimed that it was generally the poorer and more vulnerable members of the community who were targeted, and alleged that some members demanded payment from complainants before assisting them, and negotiated bribes with suspects before arresting them.

Throughout the interview process, a number of respondents made reference to examples of corruption uncovered at the station over the past three years. These included:

- Five members selling blank (stamped and signed) affidavits to immigrants and supplying civilians with police radios
- A student instructed by his senior to release a suspect from a holding cell
- A detective caught while arranging to have a suspect's case withdrawn
- Members demanding money from illegal shebeens
- A member accepting a bribe from suspects arrested for being drunk in public

It was concerning that many employees had no knowledge of these incidents, and none knew of more than two. This means that even though action was taken against corrupt officials, this was not communicated to the whole staff, thus losing the deterrent value.

Two black respondents alleged that white officers gave white suspects preferential treatment. This was perceived as a form of 'racist corruption'. While not technically corrupt, the perception is of a station culture in which rules are bent.

PERCEIVED CAUSES OF CORRUPTION AND HOW TO PREVENT IT

When asked what they thought caused corruption, and what could be done to prevent it, respondents emphasised that better communication, better leadership and improved salaries would contribute towards improving integrity at the station.

Communication

Members suggested that in order to reduce corruption the station needed to:

Have good communication (Civilian, detectives)

Communicate with members, get more involved in knowing them (Inspector, detectives)

[Realise that] consultation is key (Inspector, shifts)

[Hold] regular meetings with the rest of the station (Probationary student, detectives)

[Realise that] communication would have a positive influence on our daily tasks (Constable, shifts)

In contrast, a commissioned officer expressed frustration that his junior colleagues don't seem to listen.

I don't know what needs to be done because you talk about [corruption] but they don't take you seriously (Commissioned officer, detectives)

While this respondent may believe that communication doesn't help, the comments quoted above should not be ignored. Rather, it would seem that those in management positions should consider new and creative forms of communication over and above existing systems such as the Incident Book (IB).

Leadership and training

Respondents also believed that better leadership was needed to reduce corruption. The fact that ten respondents believed there was a need for them to be more motivated suggests that poor communication may be a cause of low morale.

They identified various needs:

Motivation. (Sergeant, shifts)

Commanders must lead by example.
(Probationary student, crime prevention)

Motivate the people. (Constable, shifts)

More motivation. (Inspector, detectives)

I don't think there is anything we are doing to educate them. (Commissioned officer, crime prevention)

Better training. (Constable, shifts)

More courses so we know what is wrong and right. (Inspector, shifts)

Teaching the students while in college.
(Commissioned officer, crime prevention)

Give credit where it's due. (Constable, detectives)

Let them promote us and recognise our qualifications, just motivate us. (Constable, shifts)

Increased salaries

Few discussions about corruption in the police are without reference to salaries. At Honeydew almost all non-commissioned officers drew a direct link between corruption and (perceived) poor salaries. In response to the question: 'What factors do you think cause members to engage in corrupt or criminal activity?' the following answers emerged:

Increase the salaries of the police, then you can consider corruption serious, if they are being paid enough. (Constable, shifts)

We are under paid. (Constable, shifts)

Some don't want to do it but they don't have another way. (Constable, shifts)

No reason other than money. I know money will never be enough but if I take out my salary and look at it now, it's month end, but by Monday it will be finished. (Constable, shifts)

When asked why commissioned officers with higher salaries were also implicated in corruption, non-commissioned respondents replied that they did not know, speculating that maybe their seniors were greedy, or that they couldn't change the habits developed earlier in their careers.

The views of student constables, reservists and very junior civilian staff are revealing. Students earn between R1 600 and R4 000, depending on how far into their training they are. Reservists at most stations receive no remuneration, though at Honeydew they have periodically received stipends sponsored by the CPF. Entry-level civilian posts tend to pay around R4 000 a month.

These categories of staff are somewhat removed from the main body of police at the station (students to a lesser extent), so often used 'they' rather than 'we' when discussing salaries. Nevertheless, many of them agreed that 'they' (police) don't earn enough, despite earning far less themselves. When asked why they thought some police engaged in corruption, these comparatively low earning staff said:

I can't tell you what's going on with *these* people [to make them get involved in corruption when they earn well]. (Probationary student, shifts)

I don't know but a lot of things could push *them* to do [corruption], wanting extra cash or something like that. (Civilian, detectives)

Some they say they receive too little money so *they* want a salary increase, but I don't know. (Field training student, shifts)

These comparatively low earners did not agree that low salaries cause corruption. One constable expressed his view that corruption occurs '...because of money. They have enough but don't understand [how to manage it]'. Another constable believed that 'people don't want to be

satisfied, money is a problem for everyone', while a probationary student said she could support herself comfortably on her R4 000 a month salary and couldn't understand why others complained.

The civilian, reservist and students below did believe that low salaries were a main cause of corruption:

Greed and money, *they* don't have enough.
(Civilian, detectives)

If someone commits corruption it means *they* do not have enough finance. *They* must pay *them* good salaries. (Reservist sergeant, shifts)

Everyone knows the police don't earn enough, you stop someone at a roadblock and they say 'Take R500, I know you don't earn'.
(Probationary student, detectives)

Money, we earn peanuts... if new recruits see that we are earning a living salary we cannot think of involving ourselves in corruption.
(Probationary student, detectives)

By including 'greed' in her justification, the civilian implies that low salaries were not the sole cause of corruption. On the other hand the reservist, who volunteered on a full-time basis did think that low salaries were to blame for corruption, thus accepting what appears to be the dominant discourse about the causes of police corruption. Most alarming are the probationary students' comments, because these suggest that within their first 16 months a student may learn to use salaries to justify corruption. The last quote suggests that new recruits will adopt this justification as soon as they enter the station.

Commissioned officers were less likely to support the argument that corruption is the result of low salaries, although this was not uniformly the case, as the quotes below from interviews show:

It's useless if officers are paid more, you can pay them more and they will still continue... it doesn't mean that if I don't have money today then I must go and be corrupt. (Commissioned officer, detectives)

Greed. I don't want to say being underpaid because generally I wouldn't say members are

underpaid. It's greed and opportunity.
(Commissioned officer, crime prevention)

The former station commissioner approached the issue slightly differently, saying:

We need to review the policy on extra-remunerative work... if you look at the current economic climate you realise that you need more money to survive... so police should be able to work on their days off... cost of living is higher [in different provinces] but you don't earn more... so salary is always an issue but not a justification.¹¹

Two commissioned officers embraced the salary-corruption justification:

Maybe if members get paid enough, maybe they can stop. (Commissioned officer, crime prevention)

Honesty and integrity are linked to salary. They must throw something heavy in our pocket so that maybe we can reduce corruption.
(Commissioned officer, shifts)

Respondents who supported the view that corruption is linked to salary levels were asked what salary they thought would be sufficient to prevent corruption. A constable's salary was used as a baseline. Answers ranged from R7 000 to R15 000 with an average of R10 500 after deductions. Importantly, constables do start at R7 000 (before deductions), though their maximum salary of R8 500 is not a significant increase.

KNOWLEDGE OF SAPS ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGIES, STRUCTURES AND HOTLINES

The interviews probed whether employees had any knowledge of organisation-wide efforts, strategies or mechanisms to aid in the control and reduction of corruption. Besides the obvious attempt to gauge members' overall knowledge, it was expected that these questions would demonstrate whether the respondents had any knowledge of the CFPP. Only two respondents, one of whom was the former station commissioner, were aware

of formal strategies to reduce and control corruption.

Twelve respondents were aware of some sort of anti-corruption hotline, though none knew the number and most did not mention it until asked specifically if they knew of the existence of such a hotline. Below are some of the more typical answers to questions about the hotline:

They even have a number to phone. I don't know what the number is but I saw it somewhere, 0800-blah-blah-blah-blah. (Constable, shifts)

We have a hotline but we usually refer them to 10111. I don't know the number of the other line. (Commissioned officer, crime prevention)

I don't know about a hotline. (Reservist constable, shifts)

I know the JMPD have a hotline, we don't have one but we have Crime Stop [10111]. (Commissioned officer, crime prevention)

We don't have a hotline, I have not come across one. (Commissioned officer, shifts)

There is a SAPS hotline. The number is 10111 and another 0800-something. (Constable, shifts)

Incredibly, an LED (electronic) panel screen in the station's CSC periodically flashed the message, *Please Report Corrupt Activity: 0800 701 701*. The number is the Public Service Commission's national anti-corruption hotline punted within the organisation through posters and other communication. The responses seem to suggest that this form of communication is ineffective.

Other structures mentioned by respondents included an anti-corruption unit (mentioned four times, although it does not exist any longer and has not existed for the past seven years), crime intelligence (n=1), organised crime (n=1), and 'those people dealing with corruption'. General standing orders, policies and disciplinary structures were also seen to contribute to integrity management, though not through any specific focus on corruption.

The former station commissioner had copies of the framework on which the CFPP was founded and had tailored this to fit the station.

Nevertheless, the only other references made to any formal strategy were the following:

There is supposed to be a strategy, I think they have one. (Inspector, shifts)

Yes they do. There was a draft... I think there was a policy, we had to talk about it at the lectures and it gave instruction, clear indication on who to go to. (Commissioned officer, detectives)

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this case study was to ascertain the extent and manner in which the Corruption and Fraud Prevention Plan (CFPP) had been implemented at Honeydew SAPS. It became clear early on in the study that it had not been implemented. This had been the predicted finding. The secondary objective – to probe the organisational culture of the station with regards to integrity and corruption – offered valuable insights into the way in which the police view corruption, supporting the following analysis:

- The management of integrity and corruption is undermined by a general lack of morale among many employees. The belief that salaries are too low, that leadership and communication are poor, and that staff are unmotivated, suggest a general disaffection. However, it should also be noted that, since the interviews showed that the interpersonal relationships between juniors and seniors were good, the basis for improvement exists
- These factors described above contribute to a station culture in which students potentially learn corrupt practices that are retained as they climb the rank hierarchy
- Sympathy for colleagues involved in corruption, fear of retribution or ambivalence suggest a culture in which whistle blowing is highly unlikely to manifest
- There is little deterrent advantage currently gained from the disciplining of corrupt

officials since few, if any, seem to be aware of it. In addition, efforts to address corruption, however commendable, are apparently ad-hoc despite the commissioner's strategy, again undermining any deterrent effect action may have

- There is overall little knowledge of existing mechanisms to counter and report corruption
- The perception that corruption pervades the organisation, even if not directly within Honeydew, threatens employee pride and trust in the organisation

Station management alone cannot be blamed for the negative attitudes revealed though the interviews. Indeed, it would appear that the former station commissioner at Honeydew took corruption more seriously than most. One of the problems seems to be that there is little evidence that Gauteng Strategic Management has effectively disseminated the CFPP to station level. This may be due to delays from head office, or may demonstrate a lack of will or know-how, though there is evidence that momentum is slowly building.

Regardless of where the fault lies, it is concerning that, even under the leadership of a committed and motivated commissioner, the findings suggest a culture of mistrust, dishonesty, and fear. It is evident that managing corruption at the Honeydew station will require more than a single anti-corruption strategy. Rather, it will need to take into account the many variables threatening the culture of the station.



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NOTES

- 1 Following this first case study a minor adjustment will be made to the selection of stations. The new method will still focus on priority stations but will also be based on the SAPS performance chart.
- 2 The commissioner (an assistant commissioner by rank and position) had served as head of the station for two and a half years. His successor had taken up her post six days prior to the commencement of research. It was therefore deemed more advantageous to the study to interview the former commissioner regarding his

tenure and knowledge of the station. As the former station commissioner at Hillbrow, he actively and successfully tackled corruption. More recently he has served as part of a small expert advisory group to Gauteng SAPS management regarding provincial initiatives to tackle corruption.

- 3 See for example: Carl Klockars, Sanja Kutnjak Ivkovic, Maria Haberland (eds.), *The Contours of Police Integrity*, California: Sage Publications, 2003.
- 4 Research currently being conducted by researchers at the Forced Migration Project at the University of the Witwatersrand has as its main focus the observation of SAPS members' engagement with immigrants outside the station. This research is due to be released in late 2009 and should complement the case studies being pursued by the ISS.
- 5 Because commissioned officers are comparatively scarce, mention of the rank and division of an officer would make them easily identifiable to somebody at the station.
- 6 Strictly speaking, parades should be held at the beginning and end of all shifts. Important information is to be communicated and members are to be inspected and posted.
- 7 A Faull, Thursday 5 February 2009. Interview with Assistant-Commissioner Reddy, former station commissioner, Honeydew SAPS.
- 8 'Shifts' is police-speak referring to uniformed members who work in the Community Service Centre and attend to general complaints. Although the shifts perform a crime prevention function, 'crime prevention' units exist as separate entities. Crime prevention members work shifts structured around crime patterns, and generally only respond to priority complaints, while 'shifts' work according to a set rotation schedule and must attend to all complaints.
- 9 This raises important questions around the responsibility of the media in generating negative perceptions of the SAPS both among the public and those within the organisation.
- 10 A Faull, 25 March 2009. Telephonic interview with Mr John Bailey.
- 11 A Faull, Thursday 5 February 2009. Interview with Assistant-Commissioner Reddy, former station commissioner, Honeydew SAPS.
- 12 SAPS members make a contribution to medical and pension funds which are then added to by the state. For most the 'insufficient salary' refers to earnings after these and tax deductions.