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Conceptions of Success: Understandings of Successful Policing of Human Trafficking¹

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Abstract

Most organizations experience multiple demands that challenge the performance of organizational tasks. While line officers' duties are specified by their organization's rules and obligations, they may hold different understandings of success that potentially conflict with the core aims set by management. Using the policing of human trafficking in Norway as a case example, this study aims to explore subjective conceptions of success in police organizations. Analysing data from interviews with police and prosecutors, the study identifies three separate conceptions of success in responses to human trafficking and explores how police officers dealing with multiple organizational goals balance their individual values with the rules and regulations of their organizations. The study offers important insights into some of the conflicts faced by police investigating complex crimes where the victims require particular attention, and asks whether there is a need for alternative assessments of success in such crimes.

Keywords: success, police organizations, human trafficking

Introduction

Most organizations experience multiple demands that impede the performance of organizational tasks. Different and sometimes conflicting demands may also cause divergent definitions of success and goal attainment in the organization. All organizations have implicit productivity goals that inevitably entail demands and that are perceived as standards by which success is measured (Oliver, 1991). Police organizations, for example, are increasingly governed through the organizational control of priorities, targets and performance indicators established to increase efficiency (Gundhus, 2013; Runhovde, 2017).

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However, to date, less attention has been paid to *subjective* understandings of success among public employees. The need to understand better how members of organizations formulate their goals and the debate over why organizations fail to achieve their objectives are topics in the literature of organizational sociology (Nelken, 1981). Nevertheless, with a few exceptions (e.g. Wathne, 2015), this issue has received less attention in police research literature.

Using the policing of trafficking in human beings (THB) as a case example, this study provides new knowledge about police officials' conceptions of success when facing crimes that require particular victim attention. While convictions, confiscations and sentence outcomes are common success measures in general crime management (Bacon, 2013; Innes and Sheptycki, 2004; Mackenzie and Hamilton-Smith, 2011), studies have suggested that individual police officers' assessments of 'success' vary according to the kind of crime they investigate (Brookman and Innes, 2013; O'Neill and Milne, 2014). Handling crimes that require particular victim attention may also potentially conflict with the main standards of crime control and management in police organizations, thus creating potential imbalances between officers' individual values and the rules and regulations of their organization (Hasenfeld, 2010).

Two primary aims form the study. First, it explores and reflects upon different understandings of 'success' in THB cases and how conceptions of success may vary within police organizations. Second, it explores how police officers weigh different success criteria. The study offers important insights into some of the conflicts faced by the police when dealing with crimes in which consideration of the victims is of particular importance. Thus, the study should make an important contribution to both police policy and practice, as well as to the literature on police performance and organizations.

Goals and success in police organizations

Increasingly confronted with external institutional demands such as 'output-based' quantitative performance indicators, police performance is commonly managed by means of objective measures of achievements (Lomell, 2011). Hence, success in police organizations tends to be measured through a 'prosecution-directed mode' of crime control (Innes and Sheptycki, 2004). Nonetheless, alongside detections and convictions, understandings of successful police work may include also less explicit criteria such as providing fair policing and a sense of security for the community (Bradford *et al.*, 2013). Extensive research has been

carried out on specific strategies or individual skills among investigators that may increase the likelihood of ‘investigative success’ (almost always referring to convictions) (see, O’Neill and Milne, 2014).

One exception is Brookman and Innes’ (2013) study on homicide investigators’ understandings of success; they find that homicide officers see conviction as only one of many possible ways of succeeding in murder investigations. Here, ‘success’ is also measured by the quality of the investigative process, by whether the police reduce the social impact of the homicide, and whether they manage to reduce the incidence of future homicides. Another relevant contribution is O’Neill and Milne’s (2014) study of volume crime investigators’ perceptions of success; they demonstrate that in addition to detections and convictions, ‘success’ also includes victim satisfaction and investigative thoroughness.

Determining whether the police are performing their tasks sufficiently well depends on their expected results (Bowling, 2007). Perceived success is also likely to depend on *when* the assessment is made. Presumably, police officers could assess success differently depending on whether they are facing a new case (referred to below as a *pre*-assessment) or assessing a case outcome in retrospect (a *post*-assessment).

Goals and success in policing THB

As stated in the UN Trafficking Protocol,ⁱ anti-trafficking policies should include prevention, victim protection and criminal prosecution (United Nations, 2000). Included as a separate Act in the Norwegian Penal Code and highlighted as a national police priority, this also applies to the Norwegian police.ⁱⁱ Nevertheless, there is a general tendency to prioritize prosecutions over the two other types of effort, making successful policing of THB mostly about whether investigations end in convictions (Brunovskis and Skilbrei, 2016; Skilbrei, 2012).

Nevertheless, among the challenges that police officers may face in addressing THB, including also difficulties in securing and maintaining victim cooperation which can severely complicate police responses (see, e.g. Cockbain and Brayley-Morris, 2017; Farrell, 2012), obtaining convictions is central (Farrell, 2009; McDonald, 2014). Accordingly, seeing convictions as sole indicators of success can thus give an erroneous picture of the police’s actual efforts. The challenge of obtaining convictions in THB cases is said to be consistent across nations, regardless of their systems of justice or the differences between legislative frameworks (Segrave *et al.*, 2009, p. 123).

THB is increasingly linked to other forms of crime, which increases the need for collaboration with non-police actors and involvement in multi-agency investigative teams

(see, e.g. Bjelland and Vestby, 2017). Faced with resource scarcity and often also a heavy case load, police and prosecutors must commonly take a tactical approach, seeking alternative penal sanctions to make convictions easier to obtain in court (Albonetti, 2014; Farrell *et al.*, 2016; Wade, 2012).

Theoretical perspectives on goals and success

The multitude of tasks that face police organizations entail substantial complexity in police officers' task management, which makes multiple or competing organizational goals quite common (see, e.g. Oliver, 1991). The distance between management and line officers can be considerable, and management and efficiency requirements can even be perceived as threats to front-line officers' sense of autonomy (Gundhus, 2009). While front-line officers are found to be quite strongly driven by a *public service motivation* (Wathne, 2015), a type of altruistic and emotional motivation that drives individuals to do something good for others or for society (Christensen *et al.*, 2015), this is not necessarily the case throughout the organization. Organizations may thus hold multiple organizational identities that represent diverging views on what the central tasks of the organization should be (Pratt and Foreman, 2000).

Organizations can also find that members develop their own operational goals, dissociated from those of the organization. Commonly understood as a gap between policy and practice in organizations (Bromley and Powell, 2012; Meyer and Rowan, 1991), *decoupling* may occur if organizational goals are opaque or outdated (Bromley and Powell, 2012), or may be a result of resistance from members of the organization (Christensen *et al.*, 2015). Organizational goals may also be *translated* downwards in the organization, giving the goals somewhat different meanings at different levels (Gundhus, 2009). When organizational goals are open to interpretation, and if members' interests differ, members are likely to exercise 'a good deal of discretion' (Sosin, 2010, p. 390).

When confronted with a potential criminal case, law enforcement agencies can choose from a set of different approaches including confrontation, incarceration, and aiming for a conviction. Often, seeking convictions is regarded as the primary option. However, in other cases, confrontation (e.g. controls or raids) is regarded as sufficient if this is believed to produce desirable outcomes (e.g. deterrence or prevention) or due to particularly small chances of obtaining convictions.

These available approaches can also be understood as *institutional logics*, i.e. 'frames of references' that make sense of individuals' actions and provide meaning to actors' social

realities (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). In the context of police organizations, convictions can be interpreted as the dominant logic guiding officers' actions. However, the police act in the area between help and control, and as previous research has demonstrated, considerations of how the police should work are influenced by their adherence to a diverse set of institutional logics (Gundhus *et al.*, forthcoming). Still, multiple logics are not necessarily conflicting, they may co-exist or be performed as constellations of aims and strategies (Reay and Hinings, 2009, Waldorff *et al.*, 2013). Drawing on the institutional logics framework and seeing logics as *opportunities for action* from which individuals may choose, this study explores how the performance of law enforcement, most obviously shown by the goal of securing court convictions, is challenged by other and potentially contradictory conceptions of goals and success.

Police discretion

Multiple organizational goals force workers to make discretionary choices (Sosin, 2010). One of the most influential accounts of discretionary decision-making comes from Lipsky (1980), discussing how public service workers—*street-level bureaucrats*—hold considerable discretionary power over their work. Faced with large amounts of work and inadequate resources, street-level bureaucrats must 'develop shortcuts and simplifications to cope with the press of responsibilities' (Lipsky, 1980, p. 18), such as to lower or otherwise restrict their aims and goals to reduce the gaps between capabilities and objectives. Discretion is thus a necessary tool, as it allows front-line personnel to tackle difficult questions in a way that is sensitive to context and attentive to the circumstances and needs of their clients (Zacka, 2017).

Adding an institutional perspective to the traditional literature on professional discretion, Sosin (2010) also considers 'cultural standards' for goal attainment, including 'fair treatment' or 'social justice towards clients'. Because cultural goals (compared to more static, organizational goals) adapt easily to the organization's institutional environment, such goals may reduce goal conflicts within organizations. Therefore, an institutional perspective on discretion may be useful to explore organizational reactions to complex crimes where victim considerations are specifically important.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 police officers and police prosecutors involved in the policing of THB. All participants had experience of policing THB, but not all did so as their core activity. Some were from THB specialist units, while others had worked more intensively with one single, extensive THB case over a considerable period. Some worked mainly as investigators, while others worked primarily ‘out in the streets’ and were more focused on the operational part of policing THB. Finally, a few participants were management-level officers.

Data was collected through two separate rounds of interviews. First, 18 police and prosecutors were recruited from a large investigation group working with an extensive case commonly referred to as Norway’s largest THB case (the ‘Lime’ case). Using a non-random, sequential sampling strategy (Miles *et al.*, 2013), the aim was to include informants with different backgrounds and responsibilities. Although the investigation included a range of additional crimes, forced labour THB was defined as a core activity. Second, five additional participants were recruited owing to their particular expertise and experience with THB. To reveal subjective perspectives of success (i.e. sampling for meaning, Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995) and to maximize the understanding of the research topic (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007), the experts were strategically sampled from different police districts and specialist investigation bodies.

Participants were asked about both specific THB cases and more general issues including general law enforcement of THB, goals and success (e.g. *What does it mean to ‘succeed’ in a THB case? How important is it to use the THB Act? Which goals are most important?*) and organizational strategies. Finally, data were analysed using thematic analysis, a method for ‘identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

Results

A variety of perspectives regarding what constitute successful responses to THB crimes are described by the informants. Still, despite differing ways to ‘succeed’, one officer (management-level) notes that *defining* their aim is the most important:

At the end of the day, it’s all about—what’s our goal? We need to define that before starting the investigation. Goals and management. Core goals, additional goals. *What do we want to achieve?* (Interview #8)

Below, the interviewees' understandings are combined into three analytically separate concepts of success: *convictions*, *victim awareness* and *crime prevention*. Some carefully selected excerpts are included as illustrations, but findings are also discussed without direct references to such quotes.

Convictions

One of the most prominent forms of success in THB cases is bringing charges against the suspect and obtaining a conviction in court. This strong focus on convictions is congruent with previous research on police action in general (see e.g. Bacon, 2013) and on THB in particular (Skilbrei, 2012).

According to the interviewees, convictions are regarded as important for two main reasons. First, convictions are seen as a type of evaluation of the investigation, also referred to as 'passing an exam'. Talking very positively about the work on one specific investigation that had yet to reach court at the time of the interview, one police officer finished by saying, '[...] but still, we haven't been through the exam yet. So, in that respect, we expect some things to come up in court' (Interview #12). Some also talk specifically about the disappointment if a long-standing case ends with an acquittal, and that they in such cases need to go through the investigation to discover 'where they have failed' (Interview #2).

Second, obtaining convictions is seen as a way of making the police's efforts *visible*. Although there are no specific performance targets for the enforcement of THB in Norway, the police have occasionally been criticized for inadequate efforts, e.g. by obtaining too few THB convictions (Skilbrei, 2012). Elsewhere, low numbers of convictions has been used as evidence by opponents of anti-trafficking that the prevalence of THB is highly exaggerated (Farrell *et al.*, 2016). Low conviction rates are a recurrent theme in research, in political and media discussions as well as among Norwegian practitioners, which seems to strengthen the officers' strong desire to demonstrate their THB efforts.

Almost everyone mentions the importance of convictions in one way or another, both in pre- and post-assessments of success. For the majority, convictions are regarded the ultimate goal of investigations and case proceedings. This is not very remarkable given that very few organizations can succeed by relying on activities driven solely by inner motivations with no objective measure of productivity (see, e.g. Wathne, 2015). However, not everyone agrees that convictions are the best indicators of THB success. One police officer said:

I believe that if we are judged according to the number of convictions and the number of convicted perpetrators, then our focus is a bit wrong [...] To me, it's equally important for us to prevent human trafficking actually happening, and then we can't... there must be other parameters we could use. (Interview #4)

Illustrating how certain success criteria are weighed against each other, the officer alluded to the question of goal conflicts within the organization and demonstrated that for some, convictions are regarded as only one of many ways of obtaining success. These findings mirror previous studies exploring subjective understandings of success among police officers (Brookman and Innes, 2013; O'Neill and Milne, 2014).

As noted, THB cases are commonly prosecuted using alternative sanctions. Similarly, the current study indicates that 'convictions' are not limited to convictions of *human trafficking*. As outlined above, many interviewees had worked with an extensive THB case involving multiple offences, which generally allows the police to choose—sometimes pragmatically—between penal and administrative sanctionsⁱⁱⁱ in their criminal prosecution (Bjelland and Vestby, 2017; Sklansky, 2012). Many officers, including also those *not* involved in this specific case, highlighted the need to adopt strategic approaches instead of being preoccupied only with THB.

Assessments of success (both pre- and post-) appear to be influenced by what type of work the interviewees do in the enforcement of THB. Nevertheless, divergent understandings are attributable to more than differences between management and line officers (see, Lipsky, 1980). There seems to be a tendency that those working on a specifically narrow task (e.g. being responsible for specific parts of an investigation or working closely on the investigation of a specific case) regard success in terms of conviction. This supports earlier observations on police engagement (Giacomantonio, 2015). For instance, one investigator explains that he must constantly assess all investigative steps to ensure they would be admissible in court (Interview #13).

Officers with a more versatile attachment to the field, including a mix of e.g. detection, investigation, patrol work, crime prevention, or perhaps even physical contact with THB victims, tend to talk differently about convictions. These officers base their assessments on a more comprehensive and broader framework of understanding. Several of them explained that at the end of the day, their aim was to use the available resources in the most appropriate way; sometimes they achieved better results by choosing other strategies (e.g. preventive strategies) than by seeking convictions in all cases.

Victim awareness

Many informants highlight victim support as a fundamental indicator of success. What can be termed *victim awareness* generally contains two dimensions of success. First, removing victim(s) from the exploitive situation is considered to be significant and an important criterion for success. Second, success includes improving victims' life conditions, such as helping victims back to a safe everyday life, helping them return to their home countries if they wish to do so, or helping victims to obtain compensation for their injuries.

Many participants express strong compassion and concerns for victims' life situation, as defined above. Some few officers even argue that they explicitly value the safety and improvement of victims' life conditions over THB convictions, even in their *pre-assessments*. As expressed by one officer with long experience in policing THB: 'To me, they don't necessarily have to be convicted for everything, but rather, that we're able to help those who need it out of an exploitive situation. That's success' (Interview #1). This view is echoed by another officer from a specialist THB unit:

So, my [view of] success, or what I believe is good, is when I see how miserable they are and how distrustful they are of the Norwegian system, and that I manage to turn them around and get them to file a report, to trust me—*the police*. And get them through the system, and then later meet this one person and see how well they are (...) that is what I think success really is. Whether I'm rewarded for 'ticking off' one case because we're supposed to have four cases a year or something like that, I don't care about anything like that. So that's what I think is cool—from the first encounter out in the streets where they keep throwing insults at you, to later on when they come and— 'thank you for caring', or something like that. To me, that's success. (Interview #3)

Almost all participants who have THB as their primary specialist field and whose daily work mainly concerns THB strongly emphasize victim support, something which clearly contrasts with participants whose daily tasks are not as strongly centred on THB. Differences in understandings of success may also be related to organizational tasks and physical proximity to the THB field; officers who work *on the scene* talk considerably more about the importance of victims' well-being than officers for whom the physical presence of the victims is not as strong. This does not mean that the latter group are not concerned with victims' well-being. In fact, many of these informants strongly emphasize the importance of acting in the

victims' interests. Still, the data suggest *different* driving forces behind these officers' victim attention; for instance, owing to the victims' crucial importance in court proceedings, the police sometimes go out of their way to assist alleged victims. One interpretation of this type of attention could therefore be linked to keeping victims motivated throughout the investigation, with the aim of finally obtaining a conviction.

Crime prevention

Previous studies have suggested that reactive police efforts are insufficient to tackle THB and have emphasized the need for broader, proactive strategies (Farrell, 2012; Farrell *et al.*, 2014). The current study also reveals a substantial focus on prevention as a form of success against THB. A general view is that preventive strategies are designed not only to be appropriate, but also as being crucial in a crime field where building a case and bringing it to court often involves major challenges for the police. The findings are thus consistent with the view that traditional reactive crime investigations are not sufficient for new and more complex crimes (Ratcliffe, 2016, p. 2).

Prevention through focus on key persons and criminal networks

Generally, but *particularly* in the context of crime prevention, the informants emphasize the necessity of focusing on key persons or networks rather than on the THB offence alone. Successfully combatting THB is reported to entail removing potential 'recruitment pools for new victims' (Interview #3) by putting specific criminal groups out of action. To succeed, many informants describe how they must consider strategically whether legal provisions other than THB would be more helpful (against key persons or networks), commonly referred to as the 'Al Capone' approach (Hoyle *et al.*, 2011). Several officers noted that their aim is to reach as far as possible with the fewest resources. One officer explains:

Foreigners can be deported, so instead of letting them stay here for years, allowing them to build a network and so on, one should rather charge them for some simple forms of offence, making sure they are deported. In this way, no network can be built around them. (Interview #5)

As noted elsewhere (Renan, 2015; Sklansky, 2012), choosing strategically between a set of available means is considered effective in ending the activities of specific criminal networks. Nonetheless, some participants acknowledge that such instrumental use of sanctions may not always work sufficiently. Although expelled from Norway, traffickers may still control

victims physically located in Norway, as illustrated by one officer: ‘Wherever [the traffickers] are, they’re only one phone call away; *I’m visiting your mother now, when will you send money?*’ (Interview #2). Echoing previous findings on the prosecution of THB cases (Wade, 2012), the officer quoted above (#5) explains that although they sometimes consider alternative legal provisions to THB, they must always weigh this choice against actually going for THB, in order to ‘*really stop them*’.

The idea of breaking the trafficking chain by putting a specific criminal network out of action can be understood as disruptive policing. Discussed extensively in the academic literature (Innes and Sheptycki, 2004; Lomell, 2018; Ratcliffe, 2016), disruption is traditionally understood as ‘the rationale to circumvent the formal justice system in order, more easily, to effect the speedy closure of a given problem’ (Johnston, 2000, p. 61). Learning how a criminal network’s activities are performed and maintained and how the network is operated, provides knowledge about how they can ‘most effectively and efficiently be disrupted’ (Tilley, 2016, p. 161). Disruption thus includes arrest of key persons in a network (Carson, 2007), or confiscation of assets necessary to maintain or operate the network (Mackenzie and Hamilton-Smith, 2011; Tilley, 2016).

Some informants explicitly talk of such disruptive policing as ‘success’. Asked whether a case outcome is successful if they manage to put an end to the exploitation, but do not achieve a THB conviction, one officer replied:

Yes, I believe so. If we manage to stop it—because this is about preventing what may happen next. If we don’t do anything here, then this will just continue. I believe that stopping it [the criminal activity] would be the success criterion. And then it’s not insignificant to get them convicted of human trafficking, but it’s also about drawing some boundaries regarding what [a conviction] will actually take. (Interview #6)

However, for many officers, ending the exploitation is not fully considered ‘success’ unless it also includes a penalty. The officer continues:

So yes, I think it’s important to stop it. If we could put an end to this, making sure they don’t do it anymore—and at the same time inflict a type of penalty that actually affects them, such as confiscating the profits of the criminal activities. That would be a success.

Prevention through deterrence

Dismantling a criminal network may have deterrent effects on other potential THB exploiters. One officer remarks that if they specifically target e.g. a Bulgarian network and its members are sentenced, there will be a clear decline in new Bulgarians entering Norway the following years. However, deterrent effects come with temporal restrictions, as another one remarks: ‘...but then there’s the question of how long that actually lasts’ (Interview #14). Still, many talk explicitly about deterrence as a success indicator. For instance, talking about his involvement in a situation that was initially presumed to be an extensive labour THB case, but that was eventually considered *not* to be of the severity to take action against THB, an officer involved in the case says:

But I tell you, *no one* dares to exploit others in that way anymore. So, if that’s not success, then I don’t know what it is! So, in our opinion, we succeeded in the case. While others would think that ‘ok so there was no human trafficking, well, then there’s no need to prioritize human trafficking’. But it could have ended with human trafficking! [...] So I believe we must look into *what is the success factor?* And that is that the fewest people possible are exploited, no matter what. (Interview #4)

Discussion

Police organizations are characterized by a high degree of autonomy, leaving line officers with discretionary power to execute their work (Gundhus, 2009; Lipsky, 1980). While management usually stresses convictions as core organizational goals, line officers may hold other or additional understandings of success, as this study shows. *Convictions* specifically, but also *crime prevention*, are typical goals also in general policing, and accordingly it is not surprising that those working with THB are driven by these objectives. More distinct are the findings related to what we term *victim awareness*; despite producing few visible results to prove organizational productivity, this is a significant outcome that sometimes even takes precedence over more traditional conceptions of success.

Multiple aims and goals

Commonly, multiple standards exist for the same activities, such as ‘rehabilitative and punitive standards for organizing the penal system’ (Sosin, 2010, p. 388). The current study indicates that police officials respond to multiple organizational goals, and thus see multiple means of achieving success. For instance, although one of the officers quoted above specifically defined success as removing victims from exploitation, this is not to say that the

officer ruled out the importance of punishing perpetrators. Individuals thus perform their work according to different understandings that interact with and complement each other. As noted above, the set of available opportunities for organizational activity (i.e. convictions, prevention or victim-centred goals) acts as a frame of reference from which members of the police can make sense of their own actions (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). Although line officers' duties are specified by the rules and obligations of management, their discretionary power still allows freedom of action (Buvik, 2016). Making use of their professional discretion, police officers may perform their tasks in a way that takes into account the context of the crime as well as the needs and preferences of victims.

The above findings imply that work type and operative experience influence how police officials relate to the issue of success. As line officers' actions are influenced by both the expectations of the organization and of the clients they serve (Granér and Kronkvist, 2014; Lipsky, 1980), one possible explanation relates to motivation and to whom they are accountable: officers with different work tasks answer to, and are motivated by, different actors (see, Brodtkin, 2008). Victim satisfaction is e.g. significantly more emphasized by officers with versatile workloads and by officers who currently or previously have been physically close to THB victims. These officers seem to be most strongly motivated by the well-being of victims and victims' perceptions of their performance, also known as *public service motivation* (Wathne, 2015). As one of the officers noted, his motivation does not come from rewards for 'ticking off' a case on his managers' performance indicator, but rather by seeing improvements in the victim's life situation. Balancing formal rules and regulations on one hand and his own values on the other, he still ranks victim satisfaction as his strongest motivation—even though this does not meet management's primary expectations and conceptions of goal attainment.

Management-level officers and officers responsible for discrete parts of an investigation, on the other hand, seem to be most motivated by a 'prosecution-directed' logic of crime control. While management is responsible for organizational productivity and must account for their line officers to the state system and to society in general, officers responsible for specific investigative matters must answer to their chief investigator and are expected to 'pass the exam' in court. This suggestion is consistent with the findings of Giacomantonio (2015) and Crawford (1998), where Crawford notes that management by performance indicators or other internally defined organizational goals may lead to lower priorities of other types of 'social goals'.

Decision-making is generally about choosing the alternatives with the most familiar or probable outcomes (March and Olsen, 1984). Potentially, this may explain why officers who are particularly ‘close’ to THB victims (and thus aware the many challenges associated with THB convictions) tend to value removing victims from exploitation over aiming for conviction, even in their *pre*-assessments. Potentially, this could also explain the extensive use of alternative sanctions against THB. As such, it may be a case of adaptive responses (Lipsky, 1980) or a rationalization of strategies. Given the challenges associated with convictions, choosing alternative sanctions may increase the chance to achieve *some* kind of instrumental goal attainment.

The conceptions of success presented above differ in terms of visibility, objectivity and operationalization, which may raise issues of public accountability. Prevention and victim support are not just difficult to measure; achievements are also not readily apparent and may not be so until years later. Thus, when achievements are difficult to demonstrate, some officers seem to seek a variety of strategies to meet management’s requirements for organizational productivity, taking into consideration both their inner motivations and the organization’s instrumental demands.

Conflicting goals and interests

As noted, workers faced with multiple goals must make discretionary choices of goals to pursue (Sosin, 2010). Many interviewees mentioned that success includes the strategic use of sanctions to more easily obtain convictions or to disrupt traffickers’ business models. Some noted that due to resource scarcity, their role was essentially to make pragmatic choices in the face of the multitude of potential THB cases (see, Sklansky, 2012). It seems that provided the criminals are punished, the goal of convictions is not limited to convictions of *THB*, but is open to interpretation. As Sosin (2010) notes, such situations are likely to result in extensive use of discretion. Investigating THB may be very resource extensive, which means that choosing alternative sanctions can be considered more appropriate, resource-saving and effective.

However, pressures to meet institutional demands can divert attention away from victims’ individual needs; choosing alternative sanctions in preference to the THB Act can have serious consequences for the victims. In Norway, those identified as potential trafficking victims are entitled to assistance, protection and specific rights and follow-up measures, including temporary or even permanent residence permits (Jahnsen and Skilbrei, 2017). However, victim identification presupposes the use of the THB Act. Using alternative

sanctions can thus deprive victim of rights they are legally entitled to.^{iv} These rights exist for good reasons; victims who break away from a trafficking network are extremely vulnerable, they may be marginalized after long-term exploitation, and they may have very limited access to civil rights.

Still, not all victims want their cases tried in court. Attending a trial involves exposure to severe stress, and many victims fear serious reprisals from the trafficking networks. Not all victims are aware of available protection services, others only want help to escape from their current situation. Some victims also decline assistance and are reluctant in encounters with the police (Brunovskis and Surtees, 2012). Taken together, this illustrates the complexity of tackling THB and the importance of taking into account victims' own wishes and needs when police encounter a suspected THB case.

Front-line workers typically develop concepts of their jobs and their clients that 'reduce the strain between capabilities and goals, thereby making their jobs psychologically easier to manage' (Lipsky, 1980, p. 141). The findings from the current study seem to support this view; for some officers, the issue of *victim awareness* is significant and helps making sense of their actions. Line workers' actions are influenced by the extent to which they consider their managers' orders legitimate (Lipsky, 1980), and accordingly, seeing certain victim outcomes as indicators of success may be an example of *decoupling* or *translation of goals* downwards in the organization (Bromley and Powell, 2012). Finding 'alternative stories' of success may thus be attributable to officers' personal value systems and/or be a way of legitimizing their efforts in situations where they do not believe they will succeed in obtaining convictions (Oliver, 1991).

Is there a need for alternative assessments of success?

Owing to visibility challenges and obvious temporal restrictions (including duration of effects and time required to demonstrate results), we are far from any objective success criteria in facing THB. Despite national expectations to prevent, detect and prosecute THB, prevented crimes are 'non-events'. The same applies to achievements related to 'victim satisfaction'. This leaves court convictions as the most objective and visible measure of successful police interventions.

Although currently not subject to performance indicators, some police districts are still assessed through numerical goals for convictions set by local management. Such goals do not reflect what those tasked to reach these numbers believe is important, or give due credit to additional achievements (Mackenzie and Hamilton-Smith, 2011). Street-level discretion

provides opportunities for resistance to the rules and regulations promoted by management; nevertheless, as Brodtkin (2012, p. 945) notes, it is striking how little power is held by lower-level practitioners in shaping organizational practices to fit their own personal conceptions of policy. Probably, officers who value removing victims from exploitation over more formalized expectations of crime management will gain little recognition from the rest of the organization if their achievements are not readily visible.

Police performance, including service quality, is virtually impossible to measure (Lipsky, 1980; Reiner, 2010). Yet, a central question concerns how achievements other than convictions can be measured and recognized, and whether there is need for more nuanced and flexible performance models that include measures not currently displayed on paper. Such models could e.g. rely less on rigid annual numerical targets thus allowing for observations of longer-term outcomes, and seek to capture contextual factors including how performance is perceived by their clients (Mackenzie and Hamilton-Smith, 2011). Because longer-term review models will draw increased attention to the different stages of police interventions, these will also increase the focus on potentially problematic targets as well as resource allocation and prioritization, ultimately improving organizational performance.

Alternatively, police organizations could arrange for informed and structured discussions, e.g. for discussion groups where front-line officers can recount their analysis of particular interventions and outcomes to management. Allowing for ‘cultural standards’ for goal attainment (Sosin, 2010) including ‘justice towards clients’ or ‘victim satisfaction’, create opportunities to focus on such outcomes. Last, accepting and making room for discretion, including expressions of officers’ own preferences and values, will motivate workers to invest themselves more in their performance (Zacka, 2017).

Concluding remarks

This study has provided a more nuanced understanding of the different ways police and prosecutors speak of, and relate to, the issue of success in the policing of THB. While differing conceptions of success and partly differing perspectives on the purpose of service are demonstrated, the most obvious finding to emerge is that *victim awareness* and the improvement of victims’ life situation is a relevant and meaningful guiding principle for police performance, sometimes even taking precedence over the more traditional goals of crime management. However, seeing the improvement of victims’ life conditions as a significant indicator of success is probably not unique to police officers handling THB

(Bradford et al., 2013). Similar assessments may also occur when facing crimes where victims are subject to particularly offensive violations (e.g. intimate partner violence or violence/sexual abuse of children).

The study demonstrates how officers dealing with multiple organizational goals must balance between individual values and the rules and regulations of their organization. From a street-level bureaucracy perspective, a timely question concerns whether the expectations set by management are too rigid and unrealistic, and thus do not resonate with the line officers, or whether practitioners supporting alternative conceptions hold overly rationalist attitudes to the issue of success.

Not all approaches highlighted as successful policing yield easily tracked and appraisable outcomes. Therefore, the study also raises questions about the need for more appropriate review models that capture more subjective and contextual assessments. Knowledge about subjective understandings of success and their application in the actions of police is important for developing suitable police reactions not only against THB, but also for crimes in which considerations of the victim is of particular importance. Such crimes, compared to less victim-centred crimes such as domestic burglaries or tax evasion, require particular assessment abilities among individual police officers and require officers to broaden their understanding of ‘successful policing’. The police must be capable of considering appropriate and relevant success assessments in each individual case, *and they must be allowed to do so.*

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ⁱ The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which is a supplement to United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.politiet.no/nm/rad/menneskehandel/slik-jobber-politiet-for-a-bekjempe-menneskehandel/> [Accessed January 12, 2017]. See also Bjelland (2017) for a more thorough discussion of Norwegian law enforcement efforts, as well as for a statistical description of the total set of reported THB cases in Norway.

ⁱⁱⁱ Administrative sanctions are sanctions under the Public Administration Act, which regulates the executive work of governmental and municipal administrative agencies.

^{iv} It is the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration that finally grants victims' rights, but the chances of being granted rights are poor if there is no THB report from the police.