



Workplace learning, power, and practice: modes of participation for civilian criminal investigators

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Abstract

This article aims to contribute to the theorization of power in workplace learning. We examined the ways in which civilian investigators participate in criminal investigation practice, and how these modes related to the social ordering in the police organization. Civilians, mostly women and well educated, are being hired in large numbers to help with the shortage of staff within the Swedish police organization. We analysed 71 interviews with both civilians and police officers, covering views on the nature of investigative work, the introduction of civilians, and their competence. The interviews were analysed in an abductive process using a practice theory outlook on power and participation. The results show four different modes of participation for civilians that have vastly different consequences for their integration into the police. These modes are dependent on how civilian competence is viewed, whether civilians are viewed as different or similar, and whether they are considered competent at investigating crimes. We conclude that the struggle to define competent practice is at the core of understanding the relationship between learning and power.

Keywords Workplace learning · Power · Participation · Criminal investigation · Practice theory · Police

Introduction

There is a strong notion that learning, including workplace learning, is inherently *a good thing*. Benefits for the individual can include well-being, emancipation, or fulfilment, while benefits for the organization might come in the form of increased production, competitiveness, or adaptability to an ever-changing world. Within human resources development research, much attention is directed to promoting a “learning culture” and knowledge sharing (Caruso, 2016). It seems that research and theories of workplace learning tend to be based on the implicit assumption that people *want*

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to learn, and that other actors in the workplace also want the individual to learn and develop. We do, however, also need to know more about settings where people hold each other back, “hoard” knowledge (Evans et al., 2015), or see others’ learning as a threat.

This article aims to contribute to the theorization of power in workplace learning. While there have been several calls to expand our understanding of power and learning in workplaces (e.g. Fenwick, 2008; Fenwick et al., 2012), there are very few empirical investigations into the matter. One strand of research that engages with this question has adopted a micro perspective on power, where the workplace is seen as an environment (Fuller & Unwin, 2011) with enabling and constraining conditions for learning (e.g. Decius et al., 2021; Ellström et al., 2008). Conversely, another strand of research makes use of macro theories about power and inequality in the workplace (e.g. Wall et al., 2017). Using a relational outlook on power (Allen, 2002; Fleming & Spicer, 2014), the present investigation utilizes a participation perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and therefore a process perspective, where the central idea is that the power to define competent practice is key to understanding the connection between learning and power. Using the concept of *modes of participation* (Pina-Cabral, 2018; Wenger, 1998), we show how different struggles over the definition of competence result in different modes of participation. Complementing this perspective, the concept of teleoaffective structure (Schatzki, 2005) and its operationalizations (Lindberg et al., 2015; Lindberg & Rantatalo, 2015) are used to account for relational power and social ordering of the workplace.

We present data from an ongoing change in the Swedish police, where large numbers of civilians are being employed as a way to handle a shortage of trained police personnel. A substantial number of these civilians are employed as criminal investigators in various parts of the country and in different divisions, investigating everything from homicide and serious crimes to petty theft. These civilians face several challenges to full participation in investigative work, which has been acknowledged both internationally (e.g. Atkinson, 2017; Kiedrowski et al., 2017) and by the Swedish Police Authority (2019). The reason for our choice of setting is that it contains two major contestations which are central from a power perspective. First, the hiring of civilians means a contestation of professional boundaries, where traditional police work is redefined and renegotiated. Second, the civilians are predominantly women, entering an organization described in research as male coded or even as “macho” (e.g. Fejes & Haake, 2013; Silvestri, 2007). A total of 71 criminal investigators (56 civilian and 15 police officers) were interviewed about their introduction to the workplace, their relation to civilians/police respectively, their views of what constitutes good investigative work, and their perceptions of career opportunities. The research question guiding the empirical study was as follows: In what modes do civilians participate in criminal investigation practice, and how do these modes relate to the social ordering in the police organization?

Power and workplace learning

While workplace learning has been theorized and researched extensively, less attention has been given to how power relations affect the process of learning and

increased participation in work practices. Calls for more investigations into the relation between power and workplace learning (e.g. Fenwick, 2008) have largely gone unnoticed. Particularly, we lack understanding of how learning plays out in settings where work is changing and the nature of work is contested. In trying to understand this lack of research on workplace learning and power, we have identified two main focuses in the small body of literature that does exist: conditions for learning (the micro perspective), and larger societal power structures (the macro perspective).

Research focusing on the conditions for learning has a micro perspective because it starts from understanding the workplace as a learning environment (Fuller & Unwin, 2011). This research investigates the environment (the workplace) as containing a number of conditions for learning (Decius et al., 2021; Sjöberg Forssberg et al., 2020; Wastesson et al., 2021). Here, there has been an increased interest in investigating enabling and constraining conditions (Ellström et al., 2008) including the nature of work, the organization, and the culture. For instance, important conditions for learning include managers' support for learning (Wallo et al., 2021), and favourable conditions for learning have been shown to be essential to productivity as well as well-being (Sjöberg Forssberg et al., 2020). Good conditions for learning also correlate with the ability of organizations to attract and retain employees. The way that the conditions perspective focuses on power is by pointing to inequality as a (constraining) condition for learning. Ellström et al. (2008) concluded that equality is a prerequisite for learning, arguing that inequality only leads to adaptive learning for privileged groups and that developmental learning is unlikely in unequal settings. A conditions perspective is good for describing the environment (i.e. the workplace), but has severe limitations in describing processes and outcomes of learning. This lack of insight into process and outcomes means that a conditions perspective also fails to address the dynamics of power struggles.

The second way of including power in analyses of workplace learning is to adopt a macro perspective, where societal power relations are incorporated into analysis of the workplace. Wall et al. (2017) demonstrated that learning experiences are clearly affected by power and inequalities in the workplace, using Bourdieu's field theory to show how some groups can exert power over other groups in ways which can exploit those groups or exclude them from certain activities or positions. In the same vein, several scholars have concluded that learning is unequal in that it is geared towards privileged groups (Harteis et al., 2015; Johansson & Abrahamsson, 2018). Rönnlund and Rosvall (2021) showed that young students in work-based learning were aware of structural power relations, finding four ways in which these students apprehended power relations in the workplace: social exclusion/inclusion, having/not having a say, having to do real work or made-up tasks, and gender and/or ethnicity. Sjöberg Forssberg (2020) showed that gender inequalities in the Swedish public sector strongly impact learning conditions by producing a favourable environment for men's learning and an unfavourable environment for women's, and that these unequal conditions for learning permeate many aspects of the workplace, such as budget/resources, turnover rates, employee voice, and autonomy.

A macro perspective on power also has its limitations. Bonvin and Laruffa (2018) concluded that power relations, hierarchies, and inequalities are often difficult to question and deconstruct. Furthermore, macro theories of power risk the

presupposition that certain categories are more important. Societal inequalities based on, for instance, class, gender, or race, are most likely prevalent within any organization, but the relative importance of what kind of power is in play might differ substantially between organizations. In other words, a researcher with a gender perspective is undoubtedly going to find inequalities or power structures related to gender, but gender might not be the key to understanding power in a particular organization.

Workplace learning as participation

A third possibility of viewing power is through learning as participation, where learning is seen as situated and inherently social. Participation can be defined as “the ambivalent encounter between the singular and the plural in the formation of the person in the world” (Pina-Cabral, 2018, p. 436). A focus on participation in workplace learning is also about recognizing the precedence of informal learning over arranged, intentional, and organized formal learning (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2007). In addition, participation emphasizes that learning goes far beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills. We are, in the words of van Dellen and Cohen-Scali (2015, p. 725), talking about a process that entails “identity construction and transformation”.

Gaining participation in a practice has been extensively studied and theorized. A central theory of participation has, of course, been Lave and Wenger’s (1991) work on communities of practice (CoP) and situated learning. In their work, they describe a process or path reaching from the periphery of a community to the centre. During this process, a participant gains the necessary knowledge, skills, and expertise to be considered a legitimate member of the community. Wenger (1998) expanded on the concept of participation as the “possibility of mutual recognition”. In this view, participation does not necessarily require collaboration, but rather can consist of many relations, including conflict and competition.

However, research based on Lave and Wenger’s theory has been criticized on a number of grounds (Fenwick et al., 2012; Hughes et al., 2007), including that the theory fails to address the complexity of both practices and communities. Gardiner (2016) provides a good example of one such critique, showing that experienced newcomers’ entry transitions are more complex than the legitimate peripheral participation process suggests. The CoP view of learning is also criticized, as it is often assumed to occur in only one direction: from community to participant. Finally, CoP is said to be unable to account for how power relations exclude certain kinds of knowledge and practices (Fenwick et al., 2012), which further motivates the need for theoretical support for understanding workplace learning and power.

Responding to some of these criticisms, Wenger has in later years claimed that the theory is being used in ways that were never intended, and that power is in fact at the core of the theory:

Central to the theory is the idea that learning from a social perspective entails the power to define competence. And so when you have a claim to competence in a community, that claim to competence may or may not be accepted. Or it

may take work to convince the community to accept it. When the definition of competence is a social process taking place in a community of practice, learning always implies power relations. Inherently. (Wenger, in Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 151)

As shown, Wenger is emphatic that participation requires “work to convince”, and that the outcome of such work is not a given. Indeed, viewing participation as “work” and power as central in defining competence aligns with much of the thinking that propagated the so-called practice turn (Schatzki et al., 2001). Central to this idea is a focus on “relations and dynamics *among* individual actors and collectives” (Fenwick, 2008, p. 19), and the understanding that workplace learning is embodied – not only cognitive – and embedded in everyday practices. The interest over recent decades in socio-material perspectives on learning is one way of taking practice into account. However, socio-material perspectives can also be criticized for rarely focusing on power relations in relation to learning (see McMurtry et al., 2016 for a comprehensive overview).

As Wenger puts it, the definition of competence is a social process taking place in a community of practice, and therefore this view entails a *relational* view of power, where power “emerges out of interactions among agents and exists only in its exercise” (Allen, 2002). That is, power is rather constructed between people in a normalization of ways of being in a social order. Fleming and Spicer (2014, p. 6) labels such outlook on power as subjectification, where actors become subjects of power through “micropractices” in everyday life. In this framework, power is viewed not as being possessed by particular people, but rather as lying in the relations among people and in views of “what is normal and what is valuable” (Fenwick, 2008, p. 23). With this relational view of power, participation becomes a question of fitting in (or challenging) a social order that resides in what practices and practitioners consider normal and valuable.

Competence is, then, a question of perceived contextual suitability: being a competent professional is being able to anticipate what is regarded as a good and favourable activity in a certain practice and to act accordingly. (Lindberg & Rantatalo, 2015, p. 565).

Schatzki’s (2005) concept of teleoaffective structure describes such an ordering that takes its starting point in the exercise of power (Allen, 2002) through doings in practice. This concept takes into account the goals that a particular doing is aimed at (teleo-) but simultaneously also the emotional state of the agent (-affective). Structuring, according to Schatzki, therefore occurs both through the ends that people pursue as well as “how things matter” (Schatzki, 2001, p. 55). We use previously developed analytical frameworks (Lindberg et al., 2015; Lindberg & Rantatalo, 2015) to allow for analysis of teleoaffectivity, how a practice is socially ordered, and of specific issues surrounding legitimacy and power. Thus, we view competence as being “performed” in practice.

To sum up, the theoretical lens used in the present article is civilians’ claim to competence in investigative practice. By defining power as relational and participation as a process of gaining acceptance in a social order, this lens entails a view of participation as a struggle rather than a straightforward or linear process. We need

to understand the practice positions of “what is normal and valuable” – in Wenger’s words, how competence is defined. However, there can be competing views of what is normal and valuable, and there can be several ways to participate – or *modes* of participating – that are simultaneously in play. Different modes of participation can explain conflicts and frictions at work. These modes of participation are claimed to have fundamental importance in, for instance, the “distinction between a practice, the process of practising and the state of being practised” (Fenwick et al., 2012, p. 6). Thus, individuals and groups of individuals can enact different modes of participation that sometimes clash either with each other or with the goals of the organization (e.g. van Dellen & Cohen-Scali, 2015). Different modes of participation lead to different claims to competence. We do not, however, know much about different modes of participation, their relation, and their effect on workplace learning. It is the aim of this article to contribute theoretically to such an understanding of workplace learning and a relational view of power.

Methods

We report from a study of civilian investigators working with the Swedish police, which provides a case of a process of gaining participation that is beset with potential problems. These civilian investigators are currently hired in large numbers, and face several challenges to full participation in investigative work, as acknowledged both internationally (e.g. Atkinson, 2017; Kiedrowski et al., 2017) and by the Swedish Police Authority (2019). First, as they are not warranted police officers, they face a question of legitimacy and difficulties with certain tasks regulated by law, such as the use of force and coercion. Second, this group of civilians mainly consists of women being introduced into a historically male organization (Fejes & Haake, 2013; Silvestri, 2007). Third, a majority of this group have degrees and expertise in various fields that could potentially be of use in the organization. However, with this educational background and expertise also come higher demands for salary and working conditions that differ from those of warranted investigators. The civilians are often academics, who sometimes have specializations with particular bearing on the investigative work, such as economics in fraud investigations. Others have less specialized degrees, but are still more educated than the average police officer, at least in terms of formal education length and scope. In contrast, the police profession has historically and traditionally been practised by individuals from working-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds (Reiner, 2010).

Participants and data collection

Data were drawn from a cross-sectional qualitative interview study with 71 participants (56 civilian and 15 police investigators). We recruited participants for this study partly through information provided at an internal training course for civilian investigators, and partly through information on the police intranet. Before we started the data collection, we received informed consent from all participants.

Then, with the help of two research assistants, we conducted interviews during the years 2020–2021. The duration of the interviews ranged from about 45 to about 90 min. Due to social restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted using video conferencing software (Zoom and Skype) and a few by telephone. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim before further analysis, which resulted in a total of around 1000 single-spaced pages (~500 000 words). Table 1 gives an overview of the participants' status (police or civilian), gender, educational background, degree subject, and city size.

The interview guide was semi-structured, with many open and descriptive questions, and were followed up by supplementary questions which could differ depending on the content and depth in each answer (Bryman, 2012). In the interviews, among other things, participants were asked about how they perceived the work as an investigator and how a workday would normally look. They were also asked about how they “learnt the ropes” when they were new and how they perceived their introduction to the investigative unit. Other interview areas targeted if and how civilians' different educational and work backgrounds affected the reception from and relation to police personnel, division of labour, pros and cons with civilian investigators, their views on the police organization, and their views on the possibility of competence and career development. To target the question of what is “normal and valuable”, we asked the participants how they perceived a skilled investigator and how they would describe a role model at work.

Analysis

The analysis we conducted was done in several steps and iterations, inspired both by abductive analysis (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021) and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023). The data were analysed in NVivo 12, where we utilized the case function to keep track of background data and the coding function to arrange the material into themes and categories. First, all 71 interviews were read in their entirety and sorted in terms of issues related to learning and power in the workplace. After this stage, we analysed what the participants considered “normal and valuable” – that is, ideas of what the work as an investigator entailed and what constituted a competent investigator. Using Lindberg & Rantatalo's (2015) notion of *qualities* to describe ideal competencies, this analysis revealed the knowledge, traits, and skills that the participants considered valuable (Appendix A). Thus, this step of the analysis was aimed at describing the teleoaffective structure, by showing both ideal ends that are pursued and what matters to these respondents.

Next, we proceeded to a more inductive and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023) of how the participants viewed the onboarding process and how they “learned the ropes” as an investigator. We also analysed the (power) relations that the participants expressed that had bearings on how they viewed civilian competence.

In the final stage, we performed an abductive analysis using the concept of modes of participation (Fenwick et al., 2012; Pina-Cabral, 2018), comparing the modes and positions that the participants held as revealed by the previous steps in

Table 1 Background information on the participants

Civilians (<i>n</i> = 56)						
Gender	Unit	Educational background	Degree subject	City size ^a		
Male	Volume crime	Higher education	Social work	Large city	12	20
Female	Domestic violence	Upper secondary education	Criminology	Medium city	8	17
	Serious crime	Other (military, vocational, PhD studies)	Law	Small city/rural area	8	19
	White-collar crime	Unspecified	Political science		7	
	Youth crime		Psychology		6	
	Environmental crime		Sociology		4	
	Special Victims Unit		Behavioural science		3	
	Work incidents		Other		8	
	Cyber crime					
	Intellectual property					
	Traffic investigation					
Police (<i>n</i> = 15)						
Gender	Unit	Educational background	Degree subject	City size ^a		
Male	Volume crime	Upper secondary education	Social work	Large city	2	3
Female	Domestic violence	Higher education	Law	Medium city	1	5
	Serious crime	Military	Psychology	Small city/rural area	1	7
	Youth crime		Education		1	

^aDefinitions derived from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions: large city > 200 000 inhabitants, medium city 50 000–199 000, small city/rural area < 50 000

the analysis. In this stage, we took inspiration from Sætre and Van de Ven's (2021) work in explicating the abductive process, by observing anomalies and hunches and then confirming and evaluating them using the data in several iterations and discussions among the authors. From good practice of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023), our analysis aimed at producing meaning-based interpretive stories, while at the same time adhering to rigour and attention to the complexity of our material. We call the analysis abductive because it has substantial employment of theory, that is, our explicit-made but still personal view on how participation, learning and power "works". This includes the teleoaffective structure, the process of participation and the view of power as relational. In the abductive process, these theoretical points of departure were used to make sense of what we interpreted as concern and conflict in the respondents' answers to our questions.

The abductive process described above resulted in two general constituents of the views on civilians: whether the civilians were considered *different from or the same as* police investigators, and the perceived *competence* of civilians; that is, whether they were considered *better, equal, or worse* at investigating crimes. Coding our data in this manner, we were able to construct four different modes of participation: civilians as different-better, civilians as different-equal, civilians as same-equal, and civilians as different-worse (Fig. 1). The remaining two intersections (same-better and same-worse) were considered not applicable (N/A), since if civilians were viewed as "the same" then they could not be better or worse.

Findings: Civilian modes of participation

Turning to the findings, we demonstrate how participation was considered different in different modes, depending on a number of factors. These different ways of participating, and gaining participation, are what we construct as modes of participation. Table 2 gives an overview of the modes of participation that resulted from our analysis.

In each mode of participation, we present three empirical themes (Table 2). First, the modes are described based on the arguments and rationalizations for the relevant view of civilians; that is, what the civilians "are" and how they

	Civilians different	Civilians same
Civilians better	Mode 1	N/A
Civilians equal	Mode 2	Mode 3
Civilians worse	Mode 4	N/A

Fig. 1 The main constituents in the construction of modes of participation

contribute to the police. Second, we describe the views on important competences; that is, the views on the “normal and valuable” that signified this mode of participation, and which qualities were considered to constitute competent practice (Lindberg & Rantatalo, 2015). Third, we present how the participants viewed civilians’ introduction and reception at the workplace. We also present our interpretation of what these modes mean for practice; that is, what the possible outcomes and consequences are for each mode. When quoting participants, we indicate the number of the interview in square brackets, the participant’s gender, and whether they were a police officer or civilian.

Mode 1: Professionals (Civilians as different-better)

We named this mode “professionals” as it highlights the respondents’ view of civilians as academically trained. This mode was also perhaps the most surprising in our material, as it took a critical stance towards the police concerning both the police organization and the police officers working in investigation. This mode of participation viewed civilians as generally *better investigators* than police officers, depending on a number of arguments. Prominent in this mode was, for instance, a view of what is called the “academic way of thinking” or “analytic thinking”:

The police officers, and I’m generalizing here, well, they go to work and do the best they can. They don’t have this... being structured maybe? And thinking... having a habit from higher studies where you have to know stuff and structure information in a certain way. I guess you learn that as a police officer as well, but it’s not the same, because it’s very different to study behavioural science or social work compared to police training. It really is, and you get this academic way of thinking and approaching problems. [33, female civilian]

This quotation also highlights another theme in the data: a dissatisfaction with the drive and capacity of police officers. Many civilians held the view that police officers mainly wanted to work in active duty, and that they were less keen to work as investigators. In other words, the civilians viewed themselves as really wanting to be where they were at the workplace, while investigation was not the first choice for police officers. Concerning their views on the police organization, many of these civilians had worked in other government organizations and were surprised to find a lack of structure and awareness of legislation when they entered the police. Many of the civilians also expressed frustration over the reluctance to change ways of working and the organization:

Now I sound very negative. I like it here, it’s not like that, but at the same time I see so many development opportunities as well. There’s a lot to work with. I really have more to give, that’s how I feel. And then I can get a little bit like — do I need to train as a police officer to get things done around here? [58, female civilian]

Table 2 Civilian modes of participation

	Mode 1: Professionals <i>Civilians as different-better</i>	Mode 2: Experts <i>Civilians as different-equal</i>	Mode 3: Reinforcements <i>Civilians as same-equal</i>	Mode 4: Helpers <i>Civilians as different-worse</i>
Empirical themes:				
<i>Arguments and rationalizations</i>	“Academic thinking” Higher drive and capacity Wanting change and development	Difference is enriching the police Specialist knowledge increases the capacity of the police	Being an investigator is about having the right personality or mindset – unimportant whether police officer or civilian	Civilians lack policing experience
<i>Views on important competences</i>	Analytic Organizing information Writing and compiling	Expertise Knowledge	Generic competences	Knowing “what it’s like out there” Resilience
<i>Views on introduction and reception of civilians</i>	Mostly negative Felt left on their own	Mixed	Mostly positive Felt need to prove themselves	Mostly negative Civilians were not given a chance
Mode mainly argued by...	Civilian academics	Civilian academics Police officers	Civilians without a degree Police officers	Police officers
Meanings for practice:				
<i>Degree of contestation to the police organization</i>	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	MEDIUM
<i>Possible outcomes</i>	Accommodation (the police organization adapts) or exit (civilians leave the organization)	Accommodation or assimilation	Assimilation (the civilians adapt)	Assimilation (the civilians adapt) and civilians as “second-class citizens”

Views on important competences

In this mode of participation, the civilians were seen as contributing competence that was connected to academic mindset and skills. Important qualities expressed in this mode were an analytic capacity, being able to handle and compile large amounts of information, but also being able to see what was relevant in all this information.

Several prosecutors that I've been in contact with, they ask: "You're a civilian, huh?" "Yes, I am." "You guys are very good." Prosecutors think civilian employees are a bit more rigorous. My boss has also said that the police employees are afraid because they know that civilians are usually such good investigators, so that's why they are this way. [47, female civilian]

Another thing that was stressed was the ability to "write"; that is, to present investigations in a way that was clear and intelligible and that made it easier for the prosecutors and judges to make the right decisions.

Views on introduction and reception

Although there were several exceptions, the introduction and reception were mostly viewed as non-existent or at least very unsatisfactory. It seemed as if civilians in this mode of participation had different and higher expectations coming from other workplaces.

Interviewer: When you started, how did you learn how to investigate?

Participant: Do you really want to know that?

Interviewer: Yes...

Participant: "Here's a case file, go on, investigate." No training, no shadowing someone experienced... Bad, very bad introduction. [6, female civilian]

Contestation and possible outcomes

We interpreted this mode as posing a high level of contestation to the police organization, as it implied that the police must change in order to accommodate the needs, views, competences, and ambitions of these civilian investigators. This change of the organization as a participative process is best described as *accommodative*. If change does not transpire, we predict that this mode will likely lead to some level of discontent, conflicts, and civilians quitting. We already saw clear dissatisfaction expressed by some of the participants in our interviews.

I'm pretty much done here. Like, I need a little more challenge and such. And when I don't get that, I get a little bored, so then I look for other things that can give me a little more challenge. So, I don't think I could have got that in my role here. [55, female civilian]

Mode 2: Experts (Civilians as different-equal)

In contrast to professionals, the second mode highlights the specialist and expert knowledge the civilians bring to the police, as a form of immaterial *resource*. The defining characteristic of this mode was a positive outlook on civilians in the police. These participants welcomed a more diverse workforce, and felt that specialist competence could increase the capacity of the police. Many of them also considered “difference” to be something positive in itself.

Especially that civilian investigators are more likely to have different backgrounds or work experiences than police officers have. So I think it's very positive that they're coming in. It can also contribute to streamlining, it becomes, like, a lot of the stuff that I said you don't have to be a police officer to do. [41, male police officer]

This quotation also highlights another perceived advantage of civilians, namely that they increase the capacity of the police both numerically and in freeing up police officers to be assigned to tasks that can only be carried out by warranted officers.

Views on important competences

This mode of participation stressed the importance of new perspectives and thinking in new ways that were believed to emanate from having a background other than police education and working as a police officer. There were also many who viewed civilians as strengthening the expertise around crime investigations that require technical and specialist knowledge.

Now that it takes so much in investigations, so much IT knowledge, so much knowledge about financial stuff, that it's quite obvious that you have to bring in a lot of civilians, many cutting-edge skills, because without that, it would have been a disaster. [21, male police officer]

Views on introduction and reception

The views of how civilians were introduced in this mode were mixed, ranging from very dissatisfied to very satisfied. It was also quite apparent that introductions looked different at different workplaces. Something that seemed to be key to a positive outlook in this mode of participation, however, was a recognition of the competence that civilians bring.

I think I've been very well received. I hear the colleagues, police colleagues, say things like how they appreciate civilian competence... I'm impressed. [30, female civilian]

This positivism could be expressed despite the introduction having been very similar to the one described in the previous mode, with very little formal introduction and much independent learning.

Contestation and possible outcomes

The degree of contestation in this mode of participation was significantly lower, as the police organization was seen as welcoming diversity (as long as this did not require change). Our interpretation is that the second mode can result in either accommodative or assimilative participative processes. However, some civilians with clearly defined specialist roles and technical skills experienced loneliness and had difficulty feeling part of the group.

Mode 3: Reinforcements (Civilians as same-equal)

We named this mode “reinforcements” as it entails a view of civilians as addition to the existing workforce, without necessarily bringing something different to the table. This mode of participation stressed the similarity between police and civilians. Here, the generic nature of work and the view that personality plays a big role were used to argue that educational background was unimportant.

There’s no difference whatsoever, only related to your personality and understanding of what the job is about. I know police officers who are outstanding investigators and interrogators, and I know civilians who are just as good... It has nothing to do with if you are police trained or not. [45, male civilian]

Personality and the skills connected to the practical work of investigation were considered key, and this had little to do with the civilian-police divide.

Views on important competences

As stated, this mode of participation stressed the generic competences viewed as important in investigative practice. It is worth mentioning that these competences were also represented in the other modes of participation, but here they became part of the argument defining civilians and police officers as equal. They included, for example, talking to people, getting things done, creativity, curiosity, and confidence (Appendix A).

Views on introduction and reception

While many participants described similar experiences of having very little in the way of introduction to the work, the view of the work as practical and generic seemed to result in a more positive outlook. It was argued that the work could not be learnt in any way other than “learning by doing”. One participant who had been quite happy with her introduction said:

You were thrown right into it. With interrogations and that. The first few times I had a police officer sitting beside me, and after a while I had to manage on my own. So you learn as you go along. [34, female civilian]

Contestation and possible outcomes

The third mode will likely result in assimilation and little or no contestation of the police organization. Assimilation is here referred to as a process where the individual agent changes to fit into the organization, rather than the organization changing to accommodate the individual. However, some participants felt that they were tested and had to prove themselves before they could become a member of the group.

There have been these situations where you're supposed to show that you can make the cut. Though I've felt that they like me, they've tried to put me in my place. It's like "tough love". [4, female civilian]

Mode 4: Helpers (Civilians as different-worse)

This fourth and final mode of participation viewed civilians as lacking important competences, and saw them as having an uphill struggle to become full participants in the practice of crime investigation. At best, they are "helpers" in that "real police officers" (Interview 54) would be the first choice and civilians a second choice. What the civilians lacked, in this view, was experience of "real police work".

When I see what's happened here and I read a report, I see what the officers have written, I see their PM, I've been through something like that at some point. I know what it's like out there, I have an understanding of it, that experience is what I mean, I think... you're afraid that suddenly, my experience isn't important anymore, here comes someone who has no idea what it's like out there. [26, female police officer]

This lack of experience was seen as making civilians unable to understand an important part of the process of investigation: the tasks completed by active-duty police officers in the field. In addition, they were considered to lack a sense of "what it's like out there" and an understanding of how things were in the world of working with criminals. One civilian described a police co-worker who was new to investigation at her workplace:

When she [the new police co-worker] entered the workplace, she had the experience that everyone thought she knew everything. She doesn't need any education, she doesn't need an introduction, she already knows everything. While she felt that because she hadn't worked in an investigative unit before, she'd never got to try this particular stuff that we do. [42, female civilian]

As this quotation exemplifies, the civilians also expressed a sense of this sentiment that being a police officer was automatically better, and that colleagues with

police education felt very confident in their abilities – or were expected to feel confident – even when they were much less experienced in criminal investigation.

Views on important competences

In this mode, the resilience of the investigator was stressed. Resilience meant being able to handle the unpleasantness of crime, criminals, and victims, and work as an active-duty police officer was believed to help with this. Such work gave officers a “tough skin” and, for example, taught them “how to talk to bad guys” [28, male police officer]. The abovementioned insight into police work in the field was also seen as an important competence.

Views on introduction and reception

Views on the introduction of civilians were mostly negative in this mode. The participants were sympathetic towards civilians who entered the police without training or the right tools for the job. The interviewed police officers, for instance, spoke about the lack of competence that the civilians demonstrated, and said that they were never given a chance since their introduction was so inadequate.

Contestation and possible outcomes

We interpret this mode as involving medium contestation to the police, since it expresses an inequality that needs to be addressed in the organization. We predict that this mode would result in a view of civilians as “second class citizens” that in turn would create dissatisfaction and high turnover rates.

Discussion

I remember a group manager in another group, we were talking, and then he kind of says: “Well, I don’t understand. When you meet people and you’re going to hold interrogations, don’t they say they’d rather meet a real police officer?” I went “No, no one actually ever said that to me.” And he said, “I think that’s really strange. If you get called in for questioning, surely you’d want to meet a real police officer?” [54, female civilian]

Views of what “a real police officer” is, and whether being a “police officer” is at all a prerequisite for criminal investigation, are central to the struggles surrounding learning and power in criminal investigation. This study sought to answer the question of in what ways, and in what modes of participation, civilians participate in criminal investigation practice. Our analysis resulted in four different modes of participation: civilians as different-better, different-equal, same-equal, and different-worse. We have also made analyses of how these modes relate to the social ordering in the police organization and the workplace. In this undertaking, we wished to contribute to the theorization of workplace learning and power from a practice theory

perspective. We conclude that the struggle over how to define competent practice is central to participation.

There are two important aspects regarding the concept of participation that warrant mentioning, both of which concern the relation between the individual and the environment. First, participation is simultaneously about the self and the surroundings. As a newcomer, a new agent in a practice, you are participating when there is a “possibility of mutual recognition” (Wenger, 1998); that is, a recognition between agent and practice, between the self and the work environment. Participation is then partly about the self and the self-work (e.g. Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) that civilians undertake, their view of themselves, and their views of barriers and possibilities. Simultaneously, and in an intertwined way, participation is also about how this self meets the practice of criminal investigation, including its people, its doings, its sayings, and its relationships. In the words of Pina-Cabral (2018), this constitutes the (ambivalent) encounter between the singular and the plural. A mode of participation should thus be viewed as a particular way of being viewed as a newcomer – simultaneously how you view yourself but also how others view you. Of course, these views are subject to revision as newcomers start to practice work – and are changing as participation changes.

Modes of participation as positions of power

Power comes into play in participation processes in two main ways. First of all, it is involved in the view of the *differentness* of civilians. Our material included different and non-overlapping views of what the civilians “are”. This was either a question of the skills that are central to investigative practice regardless of whether the investigator is a police officer or civilian (such as “academic thinking”), a view that civilians should contribute specific expertise, or simply the opinion that “otherness” is an asset to the organization. Simultaneously, we saw clear downplaying of differentness and the view that civilians and police officers are equally fit to investigate crime. Differentness is central to understanding power, particularly between groups, and employees have also been shown in previous research to be able to *perform* differentness. Here, theories of, for instance, doing and undoing gender, stress the importance of performing differentness (Kelan, 2018; West & Zimmerman, 1987). We also see gender differences in previous research on the police, where police men and women differ in terms of, for example, “caring” or “daring” (Fejes & Haake, 2013). While we did ask our participants about their experiences of gender and gender equality in the work, the issue was less prominent in their stories of introduction and competence. There were some examples of conflicts surrounding the doing of gender, and stories of (civilian) women being discriminated against, but these were less prominent than stories of how professional background affected work and learning. This result could be due to the nature of the material; participants in interviews seldom talk about the subtleties of doing gender and gender asymmetry, since these matters are mostly subconscious and hence unlikely to be aired in an interview. Further research should include observations to show how gender is done or undone (cf. Kelan, 2010).

The second way that power works is in views of competence, where the power to define competent practice is at the heart of a participation perspective (Farnsworth et al., 2016). This relational view of power entails an outlook where Schatski's (2005) teleoaffective structure provides the ordering of a practice by pointing out the "normal and valuable" (Fenwick, 2008). Similarly, participation does not necessarily require collaboration, but rather can consist of many relations, including conflict and competition. These conflicts and competitions can in turn constitute the grounds for why and how organizations change. In our case, we conclude that there are some important differences in the views of a competent investigator. Contestations arise from ideas of how and what civilians contribute. These struggles, in turn, can result in an *assimilative process*, where the organization strives to remain in status quo. This likely results in that the group that challenges the normal and valuable is constructed as subordinate. Conversely, a position challenging the organization with a high level of contestation leads to conflict or change. If the organization changes and the nature of work is changed, we can talk about an *accommodative process*.

Learning in criminal investigation practice

Earlier research claiming that informal learning is the most important feature of workplace learning (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2007; van Dellen & Cohen-Scali, 2015) is affirmed by our study. In addition, we have shown why power relations are particularly consequential in informal learning. In our study, we see the importance of mutual recognition as well as when there is risk of non-participation. We conclude from our analysis that investigative work is a practical work, where notions of the normal and valuable to a great extent surround generic competences and capabilities. Furthermore, learning to be an investigator is a process of "learning by doing" with little or no formal introduction; and civilian investigators are reliant on benevolent colleagues to teach them the basics of the work.

Our material was extensive, and there are a number of issues that are worth mentioning but which were outside the scope of this analysis. First, there was a wide range of qualities that many participants agreed on. These are not covered here, but all of the qualities that were part of the initial analysis are listed in Appendix A. Many of the performance-orientated qualities as well as the socially-oriented qualities (cf. Lindberg & Rantatalo, 2015) were widely agreed to be important, and did not single out particular modes of participation for civilians. However, they were considered important for both civilians and police officers who want to fit in at the workplace and be considered a competent practitioner. As shown in Appendix A, almost all of these qualities describe different generic competences. Earlier research has shown that "talk" about what constitutes a competent professional seems to result in these kinds of qualities (see Lindberg & Rantatalo, 2015). Furthermore, the qualities considered "normal and valuable" are practical in nature, as opposed to theoretical or specialist knowledge. Thus, we conclude that what is "normal and valuable" in the work of an investigator is mainly practical work where generic skills are the most useful and valued (as opposed to theoretical or specialist knowledge). It follows from this that "learning the ropes" as an investigator means learning

practical work. Stories from the interviews stressed the importance of informal learning, practical learning (learning by doing), and tutoring by police colleagues.

Conclusion

Our results challenge the root assumption that learning is always “good” and that people in an organization also want others to learn. The civilians in one mode of participation were challenging the organization to a point where the organization – and views of what is normal and valuable – needed to change in order to accommodate this mode. Naturally, the status quo and the prevailing organizational ideas were the strongest in this struggle. On the other side we have a mode of participation where civilians were seen as less competent investigators, along with the view that police investigators should always be a first choice. These several modes of participation imply that there might be problems with talking about civilians as a (homogenous) group. Likewise, we also suggest that the process described as “civilianization” of the police (Atkinson, 2017; Kiedrowski et al., 2017) is not a single process. In contrast, we conclude that gaining participation is complex and dependent on different modes of participation. In the case we have described here, the integration of civilians is still underway, and the outcome remains to be established by further research.

Appendix A. Views of what is “normal and valuable” in a criminal investigator

Qualities	Examples	No of respondents
<i>Objective/neutral</i>	“We aren’t supposed to judge people. When you get home you can think to yourself ‘God, what a sh**head’... but it can never show or affect our work.” [17]	20
<i>Conscientious</i>	“It’s important to people, you can’t fiddle about with information, you have to take it seriously.” [30]	19
<i>Listening</i>	“A genuine interest in others, you want to hear them out.” Swedish Police Authority [38]	18
<i>Socially competent</i>	“You have to be able to make people confide in you and want to talk to you.” [20]	16
<i>Able to prioritize</i>	“It’s about forming an opinion about what’s important... If [the prosecutors] send us a bunch of directives that aren’t in any order, we have to understand what’s important or not.” [43]	16
<i>Cooperative</i>	“Getting the team to work together, completing the competence that you lack yourself.” [58]	16
<i>Curious</i>	“He really wants to know what happened, find things out. Doesn’t matter if someone stole the recycling.” [46]	14
<i>Get the job done</i>	“A good investigator is an effective investigator. Doesn’t matter who does the work, just as long as the work gets done.” [69]	14

Qualities	Examples	No of respondents
<i>Drive</i>	“Not be that guy who sits around waiting for someone to tell you what to do, you have to dare to push the investigation forward yourself.” [25]	13
<i>Knowledgeable</i>	“Knowing the area you are working in... Like in domestic violence, you should have insights in the process of normalization, vulnerability and suchlike.” [56]	11
<i>Humble</i>	“Open to input, listen, dare to talk about problems, show your flaws and vulnerabilities.” [46]	10
<i>Flexible</i>	“Like a chameleon. You adapt to the situation and the person you meet.” [36]	9
<i>Calm</i>	“She gets worked up and angry, shouting on the phone... that’s the opposite of a good investigator.” [9]	6
<i>Creative</i>	“For instance, how to get the information we need... how to get into that computer, where to find stuff.” [41]	6
<i>Integrity</i>	“Dare to stand your ground, dare to take your space.” [17]	6
<i>Resilience</i>	“It’s no advantage if you are afraid. You need to be brave.” [45]	5
<i>Balanced</i>	“You have to be both, both a team player and good individually.” [62]	4
<i>Respectful [to people in hardship]</i>	“He taught me that they aren’t convicted when they get here – just suspects. You have to meet them like you would like to be met yourself.” [34]	4
<i>Versatile</i>	“Has worked with different things and knows a little about a lot.” [54]	4
<i>Big-picture thinking</i>	“Can handle the whole picture, not working in the details but viewing details as part of a whole.” [57]	3
<i>Relaxed</i>	“He doesn’t take it that seriously... when he’s in interrogation with some hardened criminal it can be quite easy, like jokes and laughter.” [52]	2

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Declarations

Competing interests The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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