**SUMMARY**

*The desire to gain more insight into the actions of patrol officers*

Police work always needs to improve: to become more effective, more professional, more intelligent, et cetera. This process is driven by positive concepts like intelligence-led policing and problem-oriented policing. In the Netherlands, these ambitions to improve police work form an integral part of the way the National Police Force is currently set up. These ambitions aren’t new (Kramers, 2014). Those who are not blinded by the innovation speech as often used by police leaders and their policy advisors see that police work is relatively stable (see for example Stol et al., 2004; Van der Vijver, 2007; Hoogenboom, 2009; Kleier-Kool, 2013). This is particularly the case for local police work. Despite all attempts from ‘outside’ to change their working methods, these patrol officers do what they always have done: handle situations.

The reason for this study is my assumption that police science and its practice lack knowledge about why patrol officers do what they do. This kind of knowledge is essential for everybody who aspires to change the way patrol officers act; for everybody who wants to change police work. This study aims to gain a better understanding of the actions of patrol officers, so these actions can be influenced more effectively.

*Operationalizing the actions of patrol officers*

Our first ‘real’ knowledge of police work is grounded in observation studies from the United States and United Kingdom that hail back to the sixties and seventies of the 20th century (see for example Banton, 1964; Skolnick, 1966; Wilson, 1968; Bittner, 1967, 1970; Westley, 1970; Rubinstein, 1973). These studies provided us with a thorough insight into the reality of everyday police work. One of the outcomes was that patrol officers had a lot of autonomy when it came to making decisions: discretion. A short while later, studies in the Netherlands showed the same (see for example Junger-Tas & Zee-Nefkens, 1977; Punch, 1983). The way patrol officers use their discretion is reflected in the decisions they make while doing their job. These decisions shape their actions.

Traditional research on the actions of patrol officers pay a lot of attention to the decisions they make in encounters with citizens (see for example Piliavin & Briar, 1964;
Reiss, 1971). I call this *encounter acting*. These actions can be operationalized through two decisions. The first decision is related to the verbal and nonverbal ways patrol officers treat citizens (like the use of words and physical violence). I call this the *treatment decision*. The second decision refers to whether patrol officers enforce the law and, if so, what kind of enforcement takes place (like writing a ticket or making an arrest). I call this the *enforcement decision*.

After a while, researchers also paid attention to the discretion of patrol officers beyond encounters with citizens (see for example Alpert et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2005; Brunson & Weitzer, 2011). I call this *street acting*. These actions by patrol officers are also operationalized through two decisions. The first decision is related to where patrol officers go when they are not reactively called upon to handle trouble as defined by others. I call this the *destination decision*. The second decision refers to the ways in which patrol officers deal with what they observe and signal within their territory. I call this the *intervention decision* (like the stop-and-frisk).

*Existing perspectives for understanding the action of patrol officers*

Since the discovery of patrol officers’ discretion, researchers are looking to explain the ways patrol officers deal with their discretion. This type of research mainly takes place in Anglo-Saxon countries. In the Netherlands, research on why patrol officers act the way they do is a much rarer occurrence. Studies that describe police work are more common (see also Van Reenen, 2012a). While these descriptive studies are valuable because they provide more insight into the characteristics of patrol officers’ actions, they aren’t of much help when it comes to understanding these actions. In order to understand the actions of patrol officers, we have to focus on research done in Anglo-Saxon countries. Delving into these existing studies led me to discern three ways in which this understanding is presented: the factor perspective, the cultural perspective, and the style perspective.

The factor perspective is based primarily on quantitative research, and is characterized by pointing out certain variables that significantly impact the decisions of patrol officers. The fundamentals of the factor perspective are thoroughly explained in several articles (see for example Sherman, 1980; Riksheim & Shermak, 1993). These articles offer an overview of insights and discuss different decisions as made by patrol officers. For each decision, a list of variables is presented; each variable impacts the particular decision to a greater or lesser degree. Some examples of factors discussed are the age and ethnicity of the patrol officers, the attitudes of the patrol officers, and characteristics of the citizens and police organization involved.

The cultural perspective is grounded in the aforementioned first observation studies, conducted during the sixties and seventies of the 20th century. During that time, the general view was that the behavior of patrol officers was mainly determined by the values and norms held by patrol officers as a group (see for example Skolnick, 1996; Ericson, 1982; Holdaway, 1983). Over the course of time, this deterministic approach was increasingly criticized (see for example Brown, 1988; Shearing & Ericson, 1991;
Chan, 1997; Waddington, 1999a; Sklansky, 2007). Among other things, that criticism led to a debate about the relation between police culture and the actions of patrol officers – does police culture influence police work, or should it be viewed as a reaction to police work? A definite answer to this question has not yet been formulated. The style perspective is characterized by distinguishing between the different styles patrol officers use in doing police work. These styles are mainly influenced by patrol officers’ attitudes. The style perspective assumes that there is a relation between patrol officers’ attitudes and their actions (also see Brown, 1988). Unlike the cultural perspective, the style perspective focuses on individual variation. Explanations for the actions of patrol officers are individual and psychological in nature (see Herbert, 1998).

Every perspective has its strengths and weaknesses when it comes to understanding the actions of patrol officers, but there are some similarities. What the weaknesses have in common is that they all neglect the ways in which the actions of patrol officers are shaped under particular circumstances. For example, the factor perspective points out variables that significantly influence particular decisions made by patrol officers, but exactly what mechanisms are involved in that influence remains unclear. Each of these perspectives is only loosely connected to the actions patrol officers take in concrete situations. This is also made clear through the way the perspectives present insights into the actions of patrol officers: tables and figures, interview quotes, and theoretical reasoning are much more common than information on the interactions and practices of patrol officers. These kinds of studies are unable to grasp the dynamics and complexity that shape the actions of patrol officers. In my opinion, this is one of the reasons why existing perspectives for understanding the actions of patrol officers fail to provide proper guidance for influencing these actions.

Looking for a new way to understand the actions of patrol officers

This study proposes a new way of looking at the actions of patrol officers. This new perspective has to lead to better understand these actions, so they can be influenced more effectively. The concept of sensemaking played an important part in the search for this new perspective. I’m basing this on Weick’s ideas (for example 1979, 1995) about sensemaking in organizations. According to Weick, the environment in which people act is not objectively knowable. The environment doesn’t tell people what is going on out there. People create their own environment, and then act within it. They do so by extracting cues from the material world, and by linking these cues to parts of their knowledge that may be helpful in defining what is going on. This way, people reduce the ambiguity of the world ‘out there’. Most of the time, this is a matter of routine. Prior to my research, I assumed that understanding the ways patrol officers make sense of their environment was crucial in order to understand their actions. Manning’s research especially (2003, 2007) pointed me into that direction. However, at the start of my research, I wasn’t able to formulate an adequate research question. It was clear to me that researching the ways patrol officers make sense of their
environment required ethnographic field research. This kind of research enables researchers to be present when people make sense of their environment (see for example Van Maanen, 1988; Emerson et al., 1995).

Because the ethnographic method focuses mostly on doing field research, I needed an additional approach to analyze the results of my field research. During my search for an additional approach, the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) was brought to my attention, which supports researchers in making sense of the data they collect through field research. It’s a robust approach for conceptualizing data (Holton, 2007). GTM encourages researchers to constantly define what’s going on in data on different levels of abstraction (see for example Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This eventually leads to the building of a theory grounded in field research data. During the research period, the conceptualization of data provided me with a clearer idea of the kind of insights I wanted to gain through my research. This resulted in the following research question:

Which patterns of sensemaking underpin the actions of patrol officers?

The concept of patterns refers to the regularities in the way patrol officers make sense of police work. From their point of view, patterns of sensemaking help to create order in the contextual complexity within which they have to act. In that respect, these patterns of sensemaking can be seen as an expression of patrol officers’ craftsmanship (also see Pieters, 2010). Patterns are mechanisms hidden in patrol officers’ practices. This study aims to externalize these mechanisms, resulting in a conceptualization of the craftsmanship of patrol officers. In essence, this book is about that conceptualization.

In the previous texts, I have consistently used the term patrol officers. The term refers to those police officers responsible for the police work on the streets; those who are available 24/7 as first responders. These police officers are an essential part of the position the police force holds in our society (see for example Van der Torre, 2011). This study only concerns these patrol officers.

Ethnographic field research in two police teams, and data analysis
The ethnographic field research took place within two police teams: ‘Rivierstad’ and ‘Heuvelstad’. Each police team operates in a mid-sized city in the Netherlands. While the organizational structure of both teams was similar, the teams differed in size. The police team in Rivierstad consisted of approximately 45 police officers, while the Heuvelstad police team consisted of about 120 police officers. There were also differences in social structure: relationships between police officers in Heuvelstad were slightly more anonymous than those in Rivierstad, which could be partly attributed to the difference in team size.

The field research consisted mostly of my accompanying two officers during their shift, for a total of 38 shifts. During these shifts, I observed the contexts in which patrol officers had to act, and how they acted. I asked questions related to my observations.
Besides their actions, I was also interested in the interactions between patrol officers regarding their work. While doing research on the Rivierstad police team, I also used videos of patrol officers in action, recorded by ‘body cams’. Those videos provided detailed insight into the encounters between patrol officers and citizens. The field research resulted in more than 420 pages of data, which were my starting point for developing a theory about sensemaking in police work. The process of grounding the data started at the beginning of the field research. During this phase, the grounding was characterized by ‘initial coding’. Initial coding means defining every part of the data by answering the question of ‘what is going on’. Each answer resulted in an initial code. In all, I created close to 1,300 initial codes. After about ten shifts, I also started coding on a higher level of abstraction: focus coding. This process resulted in almost 145 focus codes, which I analyzed on a conceptual level. This phase of conceptual coding resulted in 29 conceptual codes: the blue patterns.

Blue patterns as the outcomes of this study
The blue patterns show how patrol officers make sense of the world out there, which in turn enables them to act. This way, the patterns provide insight into how the actions of patrol officers are shaped. I differentiate between organizational patterns, street patterns, and encounter patterns. This differentiation is based on the type of environment (domain) in which patrol officers make sense. I define patterns and subpatterns of sensemaking for each domain. A pattern consists of different subpatterns. The organizational patterns are relevant to the ‘backstage’ part of police work; the area inaccessible to the public. This is where patrol officers make sense about police work. This kind of sensemaking consists mainly of interaction processes between patrol officers, i.e. while the briefing takes place or while drinking coffee in the cafeteria. In their interactions, patrol officers create and maintain practical knowledge that plays an important role in police practice. I call this pattern conditioning. Another part of the interactions of patrol officers revolves mainly around protecting their professional identity. I call this pattern defending.

The street patterns are relevant for the ‘sidelines’ of police work; the domain from which patrol officers regard the public. This is where patrol officers make sense in police work. Patrol officers watch over the course of events within their territory. Therefore, patrol officers first have to decide where in their patrol area their presence is needed. I call this pattern orientating. When patrol officers are in a particular place, they are observing the course of events. They see citizens who are in the middle of things. Their task is to select events interesting to police work. I call this pattern signaling.

The encounter patterns are relevant for the ‘onstage’ part of police work, where encounters with citizens take place. These encounters are a consequence of citizens requesting police presence, or of proactive mobilization. In both cases, patrol officers have to define what’s going on. I call this pattern diagnosing. A diagnose of the situation doesn’t tell patrol officers which course of action is appropriate; patrol officers
have to decide this by themselves. I call this pattern *judging*. The situation isn't over after patrol officers made their judgment. Patrol officers have to ‘translate’ the events that took place into the language of the legal-administrative system. I call this pattern *formalizing.*

These 7 patterns of sensemaking are divided into 22 subpatterns.

Figure 1. Blue patterns

*Organizational patterns for making sense ‘backstage’: conditioning and defending*

The ‘backstage’ part of police work is a world of narratives; a world in which interactions are characterized by telling stories. Through telling stories, street officers create and maintain a reservoir of common (practical) knowledge from which they draw on an individual level: *conditioning.* Patrol officers use three patterns for conditioning:

- **Cartographing** refers to the way in which patrol officers update the social map of their territory through interactions. By telling stories about people who are seen as ‘police property’, patrol officers create a continuous story to which new episodes are constantly being added (see Van Hulst, 2013a). During these interactions, knowledge is shared about the appearances, names, relationships, places, living conditions, and behavioral characteristics of these people. This kind of practical knowledge is important for when patrol officers are watching the streets (signaling) or when they encounter these people (diagnosing and judging).
• **Categorizing** relates to the language patrol officers collectively produce and reproduce in creating a structure of unknown citizens within their territory. When patrol officers encounter unknown citizens, they don’t know what they can expect. They have to make assumptions about the behavior of these citizens. These assumptions are organized in categories; labels they use to make sense of citizens. For example, ‘idiots’, ‘bad guys’, ‘frat boys’, and ‘decent citizens’. Patrol officers don’t learn this language at the Academy, but in police practice. This kind of descriptive knowledge is created and recreated through interactions with each other.

• **Normalizing** refers to the way in which patrol officers collectively create and recreate beliefs about ‘good police work’. During their interactions, patrol officers seldom make explicit what they define as good police work. Nevertheless, a certain perspective on police work emerges through the stories they tell one another, whether intended as such or by happenstance. This way, patrol officers implicitly define what actions are seen as ‘normal’. The beliefs that circulate among patrol officers are mainly related to which kind of police work is important and how patrol officers have to behave in their encounters with citizens.

Patrol officers use knowledge typical to conditioning in their actions on the street and in encounters with citizens. That particular pattern of sensemaking influences their behavior indirectly. The interactions that take place ‘backstage’ are not just conditional, but are also a reaction to what patrol officers experience in their work: defending. Defending is a pattern of sensemaking that helps patrol officers unconsciously deal with the tensions that come with the job. Through their interactions, patrol officers collectively create realities that protect their professional identity. I differentiate between two patterns of defending:

• **Sensationalizing** refers to the interactions through which patrol officers dramatize their police work, as a reaction to the lack of action they experience in doing their job. Patrol officers generally appreciate events that involve action and adventure. These kinds of events don’t happen that often during a regular shift. This creates tension, because their identity is particularly defined by action and adventure. Patrol officers defend themselves against this tension by crafting the image of a risky job in a dangerous external world. They do this by means of telling sensational stories to each other and, in a more or less symbolic manner, by aggravating the circumstances in which they have to do their job.

• **Distancing** relates to the interactions in which patrol officers create distance between them and their environment, as a reaction to the way their environment judges the way they do their job. In the eyes of a patrol officer, police work is done at the front lines, in the spotlights. That’s a vulnerable position to be in. Their work involves permanent public visibility, expectations, and judgments. This creates tension in patrol officers. They defend themselves against this tension by emphasizing that police work can only be understood by the ones who perform the job. Through their interactions, they create an image of an unknowable and unreliable environment that doesn’t have a clue as to what police work is about. This
The environment consists of society, the broader safety and justice system that the police force operates in, police leaders, policies, and other parts of the police organization. They keep their distance from this environment and its judgments.

The images that are a part of this defending pattern are only loosely related to police practice. They have a life of their own, and aren’t intended to represent police practice as much as they are there to protect the professional identity of patrol officers. This seems to work out well: defending is characterized by stability rather than change.

*Street patterns for making sense on the sidelines: orientating and signaling*

The social control that is exercised by patrol officers is bound by the territory they bear responsibility for. Patrol officers have to relate to this territory from the perspective of their task: maintaining order. *Orientating*. In order to do so, it is essential to possess knowledge of this territory that partly stems from another pattern: conditioning. I differentiate between two patterns of orientating:

- **Predicting** relates to the way in which patrol officers assess where and when police presence is needed. In the eyes of patrol officers, police work is ‘at home on the streets’; there is a continuous flow of events, some of which require police interference. However, they know that this kind of police work isn’t evenly distributed between locations and timeframes. Patrol officers focus on certain locations and – to a lesser extent – on certain timeframes. In doing so, they mostly aren’t using information as offered by police organizations, but prefer to rely on their own knowledge. This includes knowledge about recent incidents and about which category of citizens is in which place at a certain time.

- **Navigating** refers to the assessments patrol officers make regarding which route to their chosen destination is fastest. When patrol officers have an idea of where to go (predicting), they have to determine how to get there. Although police cars are equipped with a navigation system, patrol officers’ own geographical knowledge still plays an important part in this process. Gaining geographical knowledge is the only way for rookies to stop feeling like they’re in a labyrinth. Lack of geographical knowledge is a real obstacle for doing police work. This is particularly true when it comes to a special way of navigating: catching a fugitive. In that scenario, patrol officers not only have to assume where a suspect is going, but how as well.

Orientating results in patrol officers mainly visiting locations that are frequented by certain types of citizens. They also visit the locations of recent incidents. When it comes to determining their destination, implicit knowledge based on the officer’s own experience is more important than police work based on existing police intelligence. Nonetheless, we have to realize that determining the destination of proactive police work is arbitrary as well. Patrol officers will also simply drive around, justifying this course of action by stating that, in the end, nobody can predict where they will be needed.
When officers are out on the streets, they have to pay attention to events that citizens can ignore. This comes with the task they have chosen to perform: maintaining the peace. In their own words, they have to ‘read’ the street. Certain events on the streets are picked up on from all that is happening, and are interpreted in terms of their relevance for police work: signaling. Signaling involves ambiguity, partly because it isn’t always clear what constitutes a disturbance of the peace. Besides, some events aren’t directly visible to patrol officers, but nevertheless may require police interference. For example, citizens don’t carry guns and drugs out in the open. In these cases, patrol officers may suspect that something is going on, but they can’t be sure in advance. I differentiate between five patterns of signaling:

- **Noticing** happens when patrol officers pick up on illegal behavior from the course of events, based on their knowledge of the law. The way this subpattern works is primarily determined by patrol officers’ observations and their knowledge of the law. Observing the streets is mainly a visual activity, and is much less reliant on other senses, like sound and smell. It requires extensive legal knowledge. A lot of citizen behavior is illegal, but goes unnoticed due to patrol officers not possessing enough legal knowledge.

- **Coupling** refers to those situations when patrol officers pick up on certain people or vehicles from the course of events, based on offered intelligence. Patrol officers receive intelligence about people and vehicles of interest through different channels. This intelligence creates a framework through which they view the streets. Selections from the course of events on the street aren’t guaranteed, because patrol officers don’t always remember or write down intelligence offered by the police organization. Technology can pose a solution in this case: police work increasingly uses automatic coupling, mainly by automatic license plate recognition.

- **Recognizing** happens when patrol officers pick up on certain people, apply their knowledge of these people, and become suspicious as a result. Patrol officers pay special attention to citizens in their territory who frequently disturb the peace and who are involved in criminal activity. Patrol officers often swap stories about these people (cartographing), and if they spot these known offenders on the streets, they will instantly become suspicious. This is particularly the case when these ‘permanent suspects’ behave in a way that differs from what patrol officers define as ‘normal’ for them.

- **Abnormalizing** refers to situations when patrol officers pick up on an event and become suspicious, because it doesn’t match their knowledge of what is ‘normal’. Patrol officers have implicit assumptions about what constitutes ‘normal’ for certain locations and at certain times. These assumptions aren’t always met, in which case a patrol officer develops the feeling that something isn’t right. That feeling is often caused by citizens behaving a particular way or by the presence of certain citizens in particular places and/or at particular times (‘people out of place’).

- **Profiling** happens when patrol officers pick up on unknown people from the course of events and become suspicious when testing that against their knowledge of relations between appearances (including the vehicle) and deviant behavior. In cases
like this, there is no disturbing of what officers define as normal (abnormalizing); the suspicion is purely based on the characteristics of these unknown people. Patrol officers assume that there is a relation between these characteristics and deviant behavior. These relations are part of experience-based knowledge.

What happens after patrol officers make these ‘selections’ from the course of events they encounter? During the field research, I noticed three variations of the ‘intervention decision’: ignoring it (letting it pass), recording their observations (mainly in their notebooks) and intervening in the life of citizens (stop-and-frisk). A lot can be said about the relation between the subpatterns of signaling and the intervention decision, but in this summary, I will cover just two key points.

The first point is that noticing is the most dominant practice within signaling. Profiling is the least dominant practice within signaling (see also Van der Leun et al., 2014). This may be a comforting thought, although we must realize that the difference between abnormalizing and profiling can be a fine line at times. Abnormalizing can serve as an excuse for profiling; a rationalization in retrospect that is hard to notice for researchers. The second point is that noticing – compared to the other subpatterns – most often leads to ignoring the event in question. In other words, observations of illegal citizen behavior are indeed the most dominant stimulus for signaling, but it is relatively rare for patrol officers to act upon these observations. Their own suspicions – recognizing, abnormalizing and profiling – lead to a stop-and-frisk relatively often. In most cases, the decision to stop-and-frisk is partly based on intelligence gathered following their suspicion. What is remarkable is that every now and then, these suspicions are confirmed by the behavior of the citizens concerned. In most cases, what is happening isn’t actually relevant to police work. In the eyes of patrol officers, this isn’t the measure of all things. The intelligence they gather regularly leads to a confirmation that they are dealing with people with a criminal history. Their gut feeling was right.

Encounter patterns for making sense ‘onstage’: diagnosing, judging, and formalizing

There are two scenarios in which patrol officers end up in encounters with citizens: when citizens call in a situation, or in the case of a proactive stop-and-frisk. During these encounters, they have to judge for themselves what actions are appropriate. In order to do so, they have to define what was or what is going on – at least temporarily: diagnosing. While diagnosing, they focus on handling the incident instead of resolving any underlying problems. What is the story here and now? In most cases, they don’t have much time to define the situation. Therefore, they strive for a probable rather than a factual story of what is going on. They use four patterns of diagnosing:

- **Integrating** refers to the use of intelligence to make sense of what is going on. This concerns intelligence about the citizens involved, any history of incidents, and the event circumstances. The intelligence used here is mainly gathered during the encounter. Patrol officers use it as a piece of the puzzle they have to solve regarding the situation. If possible, they also use intelligence to validate the stories citizens
tell them. They aren’t led by intelligence; it is integrated in the process of diagnosing, for which other subpatterns of sensemaking are relevant as well.

- **Comparing** takes place when patrol officers cross-reference citizens’ stories in order to gain better insight into what is going on. The stories people tell the police are often related to their interests, and because people’s interests differ – particularly if there’s a conflict of interest – their stories differ as well. Patrol officers use these differences to determine the similarities and differences between stories, in order to try to make sense of what is going on.

- **Extracting** relates to the use of indicators from the physical environment in order to define what is going on. In some situations that require police interference, indications may be visible that can be used by patrol officers for creating their story about what is going on. These indications relate mainly to the bodies of the citizens concerned (like wounds and nonverbal behavior) and a variety of other ‘things’ (like objects and animals). Patrol officers select the relevant indications and interpret them within the context of the situation. The first impression of this situation defines how indications are interpreted.

- **Reasoning** refers to the way patrol officers connect the different pieces of the puzzle they possess. For a probable story of what is going on, coherence is of great importance. They use assumptions to fill in the missing pieces, drawing from their past experiences in similar situations. These past experiences are also used to put all the pieces of the puzzle in the right place, in order to create their story about what is going on.

Once patrol officers have defined what is going on in a certain situation, they must make judgment calls about it in order to act upon that situation: **judging**. Which course of action is appropriate here? The decisions they make can have radical consequences for the citizens concerned. When making decisions, patrol officers look at the issue from different angles for the sake of determining which action is appropriate. This process isn’t as rational as we might think. Intuitions and emotions play an important role as well. I differentiate between four patterns of judging:

- **Moralizing** refers to the way patrol officers make sense of citizens’ behavior towards other people. Patrol officers view the situation through a moral frame of reference, using it to decide on the degree of morality of the citizens concerned and their behavior. In this respect, the difference between citizens who behave badly and citizens who are inherently bad plays an important role. Mainly, ‘bad guys’ are treated harshly by patrol officers. The moral frame of reference is built out of a complex whole of moral beliefs that is a consequence of experiences from life and police work.

- **Positioning** happens when patrol officers make sense of citizens’ demeanor, towards them. For this, patrol officers take the fact that citizens respect their authority as a starting point. Citizens have to recognize their relative status in relation to the patrol officer. Patrol officers measure the amount of respect a citizen has for them, using different indicators in the process. Indicators of mild disrespect are
discourtesy to patrol officers, interrupting patrol officers, and trying to be cleverer than patrol officers. Indicators of serious disrespect are neglecting orders issued by patrol officers, insulting or belittling patrol officers, and spitting on patrol officers. Patrol officers believe they have to act upon both kinds of disrespect.

- **Protecting** relates to the way patrol officers make sense of the risk to their own safety. Patrol officers know that citizens may use force against them. They know it’s uncertain they finish their shift unscathed. Using their experience-based knowledge about any risky characteristics of a particular encounter, they select and interpret certain indications in that encounter and adapt their actions accordingly. They rate the appearance of the citizens they encounter in terms of physical ability, paying specific attention to their hands and the potential risk of weapons. In addition, they are aware of their position in relation to the citizens and bystanders involved. Patrol officers prefer to obtain and maintain an overall view of the situation, and are always looking out for escape routes.

- **Anticipating** happens when patrol officers make sense of the internal consequences of their potential actions. The consequences of the decisions patrol officers make go beyond the here and now of the encounter. These consequences concern both themselves and the broader justice system they are a part of. Patrol officers think ahead and estimate their own responsibilities following potential actions, the risk of internal trouble, for example by the use of force, later judgment on whether said action was justified, and the (final) legal feasibility of possible action.

*Anticipating* makes it very clear that the situation often isn’t over when patrol officers leave the scene. Patrol officers have to fill out paperwork for the sake of their own organization as well as for external partners. Their experiences on the street and during the encounter have to be ‘translated’ into the language of the legal-administrative system: **formalizing**. I differentiate between two patterns of formalizing:

- **Pasting** takes place when patrol officers apply a formal label to a situation they have dealt with. In this respect, patrol officers have both legal labels and additional administrative labels at their disposal. In most cases, patrol officers know which label they will apply to the situation before they act upon it. In some cases, they think about after acting. This mainly happens when patrol officers want to take repressive action against the citizens involved – often, these will be ‘bad guys’ – no matter what. In cases like these, formal legitimation is of later concern.

- **Reconstructing** refers to the way patrol officers formally describe their actions and the situation in which these actions took place. These descriptions are mutations or complaints, and are mainly a consequence of earlier signaling, diagnosing, and judging. They aren’t representations of reality, but representations of their reality. When looking back on what happened, patrol officers are selective, choosing their words in a manner that illustrates their competence and lines up with their interests regarding what should be done with the case (see also Komter, 2006).
The treatment decision and enforcement decision (together: encounter acting) are mostly determined by the judging patterns. The diagnosing patterns precede these decisions, influencing them through judging patterns. Formalizing patterns follow previously taken decisions, and sometimes play a part in the decision-making process through anticipating. A lot can be said about the relation between judging patterns and the encounter acting, but I will cover just two key points.

In the first instance, patrol officers treat citizens generally in a friendly and dominant manner. It’s their basic attitude. Over the course of the encounter, their attitude often remains dominant, but their friendly attitude can change quite significantly. Positioning is most important in this. Generally, patrol officers adjust the way they people to match the way they are being treated. Other patterns also play a part, but to a lesser extent.

In case of the enforcement decision, moralizing and positioning are the dominant patterns of sensemaking. In these situations, moral judgment is often secondary to position judgment. To be concrete: a patrol officer who isn’t really concerned about the offense a citizen committed and is planning to let them off with a warning can easily change his mind when this citizen is disrespectful towards them. Patrol officers attach value to the respect citizens display towards the police. To a certain extent, this measure of respect is the only long-term effect they can strive for (Bittner, 1990).

Professional intuition is at the core of the blue patterns
The blue patterns are ways patrol officers create order within the complexity of their environment. Like chess players who recognize situations overlooked by amateurs thanks to thousands of hours of practice, patrol officers making sense of what is going on are guided by all kinds of hunches that can’t be reasonably explained. Patrol officers possess a professional intuition. Most of the time, this professional intuition enables them to act while taking into account the circumstances. Patrol officers respond to situations while always keeping in mind the fundamentals of police work: normative restriction (Boutellier, 2011).

This normative restriction focuses on both incidents and people. Patrol officers don’t reduce crime. They restrict citizen behavior during specific incidents. Patrol officers focus on answering the question of what is going on here, and on which course of action is appropriate now. The underlying problems related to these incidents aren’t very important for the way patrol officers make sense of police work. Patrol officers are treating symptoms instead of fighting the disease, and they know it. This is not a matter of disqualifying, but a consequence of the task they are expected to perform (see also Rood, 2013).

Patrol officers’ professional intuition enables their actions, but it would be one-sided to only recognize this appreciating view. That same professional intuition also constrains the actions of patrol officers. Sometimes their professional intuition guides them onto the wrong track. At other times, their emotions get in the way, leading to actions that aren’t professional. This kind of behavior is understandable. Patrol
officers aren’t robocops; there is a human being underneath that uniform. The need to be professional in playing their part as a police officer sometimes clashes with the failures that make us all human. The humanity of police work sometimes leads to patrol officers who act creatively, considering the consequences, while at other times, their emotions causes them to belittle citizens. These are two sides of the same coin, and that will not change.

The professional intuition patrol officers possess constitutes both their strength and their weakness. The question is how patrol officers cope with the constraining side of their professional intuition. The answer is that they don’t really face this constraining side. They know that experience is the source of their professional intuition, and they believe gaining experience is enough to develop that professional intuition. This is a misapprehension. The development of professional intuition is gained through questioning existing practices and trying out new courses of action. I barely saw this notion of craftsmanship while carrying out my field research. Patrol officers take more responsibility for doing their craft than for developing their craftsmanship. This limits their professional intuition, because it blocks any possibilities of further developing this intuition. This always has consequences for someone’s quality of work, particularly when their ambition is to do better than yesterday.

*The impossibility of influencing police work based on concepts*

This study is primarily about gaining a better understanding of the actions of patrol officers. The secondary goal is to gain insight in order to more effectively influence these actions. At the start of my research, I assumed that effective ways of influencing would derive from better understanding. While doing research, I had to adjust my assumptions. My increased understanding of the actions or behavior of patrol officers made me cautious about influencing these actions, because they can’t be influenced easily. On the contrary; it is very hard to influence the action of patrol officers. The system of the ‘front line’ sustains their reality, by constantly making sense of their environment in a taken for granted way. The system is self-referential (see for example Luhmann, 1984; Von Krogh & Roos, 1995; Hernes & Bakken, 2003). You can also call it ‘robust’: capable of forming and protecting their own identity (see for example Van Oss & Van’t Hek, 2008).

The robustness leads to an (operational) system that is largely immune to attempts to influence it when these attempts are initiated from outside of the system (see for example Manning, 2010). This is particularly the case for attempts that don’t fit the patterns of sensemaking as described in this study. Examples of this kind of attempts are ambitions regarding problem-oriented and intelligence-led police work (see for example Meesters, 2014; Van der Sluis et al., 2014), implementing operational concepts through education (see for example Van Reenen, 2012b), and implementing knowledge management through a knowledge management system (see for example Struijsma & Winter, 2008). This kind of ideas for change don’t have much impact on police practices. Because of this, they mostly remain just that: ideas.
The previous statements are the cause of the large gap between the world of concepts and the world of daily practice. Nevertheless, the change approach concepts are still seen as a starting point. They must be ‘implemented’, and as mentioned before, this process of implementation fails more often than it succeeds. Change agents see this as a problem that must be fixed. This way of looking at the issue preserves the concept and doesn’t take the signals of robustness seriously. Therefore, the actions that change agents take to reduce the gap between concept and practice are once again at odds with the characteristics of these practices. It is more of the same. If it would work, it would have worked by now.

Three points of action for influencing police work
Those who want to influence police work (in this case: patrolling) would be wise to connect to the patterns of sensemaking that are dominant in the system of the ‘front line’ (see also Van Twist & Schaap, 2001; Homan, 2013; Van Oss & Van ‘t Hek, 2014). There are two related consequences to this statement. The first one is that the world of concepts and the world of daily practices can only be better connected by taking the world of daily practices as a reference point for change. The second one is that change agents must be cautious about expressing major ambitions. Because attempts to change police work must be grounded in daily practices, these major ambitions are quite naive. Changes in police work only can be made one small step at a time.

Taking the abovementioned as a starting point, I have formulated three courses of action to influence sensemaking in police work: organizing small into large, intelligence-using police officers, and practical professionalization.

Organizing small into large is aimed to encourage relational proximity in an organizational context that is characterized by continuous upscaling. Relational proximity has a positive effect on both the circulation of practical knowledge between police officers and on what patrol officers know about each other. Both kinds of knowledge have a positive impact on the quality of patrol officers’ decision-making using patterns of sensemaking. Considering the organizational upscaling that is already taking place, it’s essential to organize small working communities within existing police teams. It is important to maintain an integral working system: a group of people who need each other to do the job well (see Vermaak, 2009).

Intelligence-using police officers represent the idea that supplying intelligence for the decision-making process in police work can improve the quality of the resulting decisions. It is important to distinguish intelligence for making decisions in police work from intelligence for making decisions about police work (see also Den Hengst et al., 2011). The first can contribute to patterns of sensemaking. The second can hardly do that. There are two promising developments going on when it comes to supplying patrol officers with intelligence to help them make sense: real-time intelligence, and mobile technology. Those who want to influence the behavior or actions of patrol officers should make an effort to continue these developments in a way that aligns with the interactions and practices of patrol officers.
Practical professionalization refers to a way of professionalizing that takes into account the fact that police work isn’t a full-blown profession, but that patrol officers nevertheless have to take responsibility for developing their craftsmanship. This responsibility involves maintaining their explicit and implicit knowledge, which they use to make sense of their environment. This maintenance contributes to enriching the inner worlds of patrol officers, so they are capable of different ways of making sense of their environment (see Hoebeke, 1995). Exercising their skills to make sense is key, because in doing so, they can create more or other courses of action. This may sound abstract, but it’s actually very concrete. Think of patrol officers who possess more knowledge of modus operandi and are more vigilant about indications of crime. Alternatively, consider patrol officers who act in a more uniform manner, because their collective beliefs are made explicit.

Practical professionalization is characterized by learning on and around the job. It demands that patrol officers adopt a doubtful and curious attitude when regarding the craft of policing. Doubt means that patrol officers allow a measure of ignorance, that they become aware of the fact that their routines might also put them on the wrong track. Curiosity means being open to their experiences and the lessons that are hidden within. It’s about the willingness to keep digging into the secrets of the craft of policing (see Nap, 2012). The development of practical professionalism takes place in the daily interactions and practices of patrol officers. It is necessary to eliminate obstacles in order to clear the way for learning processes, and to experiment with new ways of learning on the job (see also Vermaak, 2009). I hope I can contribute to this kind of social innovation within the police force.