Thomas Feltes

Police: Culture, Education, Training and Leadership. A German Perspective

Stockholm, SÖDERTÖRNS HÖGSKOLA, March 12, 2026

A) Police in Germany

Germany is the most densely-populated country in the heart of Europe with 83,5 Mio. Inhabitants[1] and about 300.000 Police Officers.

I will talk about the institution police, and its members – not about "Policing Germany", what would be a quite different talk, bearing in mind the fact, that the number of private security personal[2] equals the number of police officers (290.000).[3]

The structure of the state stipulates that there is no single police force in Germany. Two federal police forces, the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) and the Federal Police (until 2005 the Federal Border Guard), and 16 state police forces form at least 18 independent police forces. If you add the German Bundestag police force, there are a total of 19 police forces in Germany.

The federal state police forces (Länderpolizei) are responsible for most police duties in Germany, e.g. fighting crime, ensuring road safety and maintaining public order.

The federal police are primarily responsible for border and aviation security and railway policing. The Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) coordinates cooperation in criminal matters between the federal and state authorities and with European and international security agencies, incl. Europol and Interpol. The German Bundestag Police is responsible for security and order in parliament.

If we add the federal and state constitutional protection authorities (Verfassungsschutz), we have 40 different police authorities in Germany – with, in principle, 40 different career paths and training structures.

In addition to federal criminal laws and road traffic regulations, 16 different federal state police laws plus two federal police laws (plus 18 laws for constitutional protection authorities) form the legal basis for police work in Germany.

You asked me to talk about police culture, education, training and leadership. These topics are closely related to each other.

---

[1] In 2024, 25 million people had a migrant background (immigrants and their descendants) – that's 30.4 percent of the total population. Of these, 13 million were German and 12 million were foreign nationals.

[2] https://ogy.de/ziai

[3] Police density is approximately 1:270, including federal police (excluding federal police over 300); for comparison: Sweden approximately 205.

But I will use the term “education” intentionally. Googles AI explains the difference between “education” and “training” using a dog (sorry!) as follows:

“*Education is a long-term, relationship-oriented process that teaches social rules, behavior, and trust in order to guide the dog safely through everyday life. Training, on the other hand, is short-term, goal-oriented, and teaches specific commands (sit, down) or tricks through conditioning. Training forms the foundation; training is the tool*”. Or: “*Training is the selective development of specific skills or commands (e.g., “sit,” “down”). Education, on the other hand, is a holistic, continuous process that teaches values, social norms, and harmonious coexistence without constant external commands. Education is the foundation; training is the tool*”.

But why is it important to have a well-educated police force, a well-founded one, with a holistic understanding of social norms and moral values??

Education is the foundation, but what should be the foundation of education?

Police work requires a solid foundation of moral values based on democratic norms. Only then can the population develop trust in the police and cooperate with them. However, this cooperation is necessary in everyday police work in order to solve crimes and maintain public order without getting into trouble themselves. Only when this is guaranteed, the police have the necessary legitimacy.

Trust in the police and their use of force is essential for a democratic state. Only when citizens trust the police and regard their actions as legitimate can the police perform their duties appropriately. The conviction that the police act legitimately can strengthen trust in the state, and vice versa.

At the beginning of 2024, 90% of Germans said they trusted the police. This meant that the police were and remain the security authority with the highest level of trust[4].

However, high average values should not obscure the negative assessments[5], e.g. of people with migrant background, in socially vulnerable situations or with negative experiences with police use of force. The values for certain population groups differ significantly. Trust in the police depends on individual, social, or socio-structural characteristics, and there are also various factors that influence satisfaction with or trust in the police.

But: Trust in the state is at an all-time low in 2025: More and more people in Germany doubt that the state is fulfilling its duties. A recent survey showed that only around 25% of respondents believe the state is capable of acting. 69% of citizens feel that the state is overburdened, a peak value that rises to 79% in eastern Germany. Only 17% of respondents expressed confidence in the federal government in a survey. The main

[4] https://ogy.de/p05y.

[5] Reuter (2025): Das Vertrauen der Bevölkerung in die deutschen Polizeien. In: Polizei aktuell, https://ogy.de/azan.

reasons for the loss of trust are the perceived inability to deal with crises, bureaucracy, and lack of efficiency.

A democratic police force must find its role in this context and must not succumb to anti-democratic and authoritarian temptations, e.g. from the right, even though this is difficult for an institution that is fundamentally based on authority.

According to the Edelman and Ipsos Trust Index 2025, high levels of "*social resentment (soziale Ressentiments) ... are putting pressure on trust*." The Edelman Trust Barometer shows "*a profound shift toward acceptance of more aggressive measures. Increasing political polarization and growing fears have triggered high levels of social resentment among many people*" [6].

A loss of trust and legitimacy threatens, if the police consistently fail to meet expectations and refuse e.g. to submit to external oversight. On the other hand, dealing with misconduct in a constructive and transparent manner can help build justified trust, as can appropriate police accountability mechanisms[7].

Trust in the police and the assessment of the legitimacy of police actions must be examined at the most granular, regional level possible and based on socio-spatial studies. In doing so, the wide range of relevant social, socio-structural, and individual influencing factors must be taken into account. In order to measure trust comprehensively, a distinction must also be made between (stated) subjective perceptions of trust and (actually practiced) trust behavior.

B) Training and Education

Education and training form the basis for police work. However, the first step is selecting the right candidates for the police profession. The requirements for becoming a police officer vary from state to state in Germany. Most but not all federal states require a high school diploma to join the police force[8].

The recruitment of police officers in Germany is organized by the respective state police and federal police authorities. The kind and duration of the selection process vary. It may be conducted by internal assessors or supported by external experts (e.g. psychologists, social scientists, human resources experts). It may consist of oral examinations, exercises in writing, sports and intelligence tests, typical assessment centers or other kind of exercises.

Police education is organized in special schools, colleges, training centers or (internal) universities, usually separate from other universities and under the supervision of the federal or state ministries of interior (not education or science).

---

[6] Edelman (2025): Trust Barometer 2025, https://ogy.de/0jcr.

[7] https://www.police-accountability-project.com/content/home/

[8] For more details see Feltes/Wimber (2010): Policing Germany. In: Cools et al (Eds.), Police, Policing, Policy and the City in Europe. The Hague, p 7 – 26, https://ogy.de/thq1

Most states require police officers to complete a degree in police studies (BA), with internship included. (see chart)

How long (months?	What?	Where?
9	*Pre-training*[9]	*Police School*
6	Basic internship	Police Headquarters
12	Basic studies	State Police University[10]
6	Main internship	Police Headquarters
12	Main studies	State Police University
(in total 36) for B.A.		
Between B.A. and start of M.A.-studies usually between 5 und 15 years of practical experience and at the end a “special” selection procedure		
24	**M.A.**	German (Federal) Police University
In total: 60 Months = 5 years		

At the federal level, training for senior police officers is provided exclusively at the German Police University in Münster (MA)[11]. Accounting for one to two per cent of all police officers, the latter are at the top of the police hierarchy.

Demographic change, with the baby boomers retiring from the police service and the low birth rate generations applying, combined with greater competition from other potential employers, is causing difficulties. More and more students and trainees are failing the police entrance exams (sport test included) or dropping out of training or studies.[12]

[9] Not applicable to those who are already in mid-level police service.

[10] University of Applies Sciences - Fachhochschule

[11] Whether the German Police University has the right to award doctorates is discussed, because the legal status as a university in Germany usually demands more than just one faculty (here: police only).

[12] Feltes/Marquardt/Schwarz (2013): Policing in Germany: Developments in the last 20 years. In: Meško/Fields/ Lobnikar/Sotlar (eds). New York, p 93-113 https://ogy.de/73mm

Police Education is a “closed” (hidden) system

Openness and reform of training is difficult, because of this ‘closed circuit’ system. Police education is organized from the beginning until the end in and by internal police training institutions, under the responsibility and supervision of the state ministries of interior. But police officers need education, which fulfills scientific requirements.

This kind of ‘closed circuit system’ is also manifested by the fact, that only a few police officers or civil servants within the police service (e.g. experts for chemical analysis, DNA-tests, lawyers, psychologists) are employed with a degree from a ‘free’ university being entitled to enter the high career directly.

This self-contained, self-referential system (Niklas Luhmann)[13] create and maintain themselves through their own communication. Such systems are operationally closed, separate themselves from the environment through binary codes (e.g., right/wrong), and produce their own elements. The police are by definition closed off from the outside world (society), even though it operates within it and the actions of police officers have a sometimes massive impact on members of society due to the monopoly on the use of force.

The police institution is relatively resistant to change. Environmental conditions such as social conflicts or disputes are perceived, but how to respond constructively to them is determined by internal processing within the system, which is fundamentally negative. This institutionalized “Teflon quality” causes accusations and calls for change to roll off the institution, so to speak.

As a result of that closed system, apart from a few options within the private security system, the typical police career in Germany does not allow any other occupational engagement outside the police service.

Theory vs. Practice?

For many decades, the profession of the police was considered to be a job, which can be done and learned by experience only, and therefore, instructors (sic!) must above all have practical experience.

‘*Forget what you learned at university; we'll show you how things work here*.’ Many new police officers hear this or similar phrases in their early days from their superiors or so-called ‘bear leaders’, as more experienced colleagues are called, who are supposed to mentor and guide the newcomers – a rather informal part of the training over which the university has no influence, but in which crucial experiences are shared and knowledge, attitudes and practical skills are passed on. This makes it clear what is needed in police practice and what is not. Here, the so-called ‘cop culture’ is conveyed

[13] Luhmann (1984): Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie. Frankfurt/M.

in an action-oriented and group-dynamic framework. **Police officers learn from police officers who have learned from police officers**[14].

The idea that **science-based knowledge is required for knowledge-led actions**, was first coming up in the last third of the 20th century[15] (Feltes, 1999). One of the main developments in the last years was therefore the so-called “academization” of police education in Germany. In an ever changing and fast-pacing society, police officers need to understand the multi-complex requirements of the world to comply with the rule of law as well as to ensure freedom and security for citizens.

Psychological, sociological and legal knowledge and appropriate methods are necessary to meet those needs. Therefore, scientific foundation shall not only be an addition to practice-oriented training, but is an important basis for an education that leads to the necessary understanding of the role the police play in society and whether the police is responsible to the state or to the citizens. As Richards and Hammond in their recent published reflections from a police–academic partnership[16] pointed out, the police education and learning framework (in England and Wales) has changed dramatically over the past decade, with little empirical evidence available to understand how police officers learn and what pedagogies are most effective. By using innovative approaches, specifically relating to evidence-based policing (EBP),practitioners and academics can share and develop their knowledge and build networks to facilitate peer-to-peer support in understanding and implementing evidence-based practices. We also need further research to explore ‘what works’ in relation to police learning, building an evidence base to inform the development of more effective learning strategies and programmes for use with new and in-service officers.

C) Focus on Operational Situations and Interactions

In view of the time available, and to make clear what I mean, I will **focus on the issue of preparing for operational situations and interactions between police and citizens**. I do not focus on detectives, traffic police, riot police and so on, although this might be necessary to understand the relation between police and civil society in Germany.

There are the following **reasons for this focus**:

I deliberately choose the word ‘preparation’ instead of ‘training’. Why?

---

[14] Derin/Singelnstein (2022): Die Polizei. Helfer, Gegner, Staatsgewalt, p 99.

[15] Feltes (1999): Qualitätssicherung in der Polizeiausbildung: Brauchen wir eigenständige Polizeihochschulen? In: Die Polizei, p. 207-212; Feltes (1999): Improving the training system of police officials – Problems of creating an international standard for police officers in a democratic society (unpublished) https://ogy.de/8v9d

[16] Richards/Hammond (2026): Innovative approaches to embedding evidence-based policing, supporting police learning and continuing professional development: Reflections from a police–academic partnership. International Journal of Police Science & Management, 28(1), 3-12.

1. The well-known contradiction between theory and practice. My point is, that action in operational situations can be prepared for in training, but not really 'learned'. Example: The so called "slow" (rational) thinking vs. "fast" (emotional) thinking in operational situations. "Thinking, Fast and Slow" is a 2011 popular science book by the Israeli-American psychologist Daniel Kahneman. Its main thesis is a differentiation between two modes of thought: "System 1" is fast, instinctive and emotional; "System 2" is slower, more deliberative, and more logical[17]. It explains the cognitive biases and how decisions are made by police officers. In stressful situations, actions are not based on past training or education, but on emotional, instinctive decisions, behavior learned and internalized in practice.

2. What officers actually do in practice depends largely on their **training on the ground** (not in the training in schools or universities) and on **their superiors**. **The "leader of the pack" sets the tone**.

3. The "**local police culture**" plays an important role, and may even override education. Laws and regulations are often overridden by local police practice[18] - consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally.

4. One **negative experience or negative contact** with the police can wipe out dozens of previous positive contacts, and at the same time, future contacts with the police will be tainted with negative prejudice. Police work is an extremely sensitive job. Officers must be aware of this at all times. Police work is an extremely sensitive job. Officers must be aware of this and always be able to act accordingly. There is no "time out" for officers; you cannot look away. Only rarely can you wait and see; usually you have to act immediately or at least make a decision.

The **consequences** of these (empirically proven) assumptions are:

1. A close integration of school / university education and practical training.

2. The police school and/or university must be responsible for the structure and supervision of practical training. It must guide and supervise the practical trainers.

3. Among graduates of the degree programs, graduate and supervisor surveys should be conducted regularly (as specified by the accreditation agencies in Germany)[19]. The aim is to assess the importance of the skills taught in the

[17] Feltes/Jordan (2017): Schnelles und langsames Denken im Polizeiberuf. Ein Beitrag zu Risiken und Nebenwirkungen polizeilicher Sozialisation. In: „Handbuch Polizeimanagement" (hrsg. von J. Stierle, D. Wehe und H. Siller), Springer-Verlag Heidelberg 2017, p 255 – 276 https://ogy.de/pfcu

[18] Klukkert/Ohlemacher/Feltes (2009): Torn between two Targets: German Police Officers Discussing Use of Force. In: Crime, Law and Social Change 2, 52, p 181-206 https://ogy.de/jmtf

[19] The German Police University (DHPol) writes: "Feedback from professional practice is a particularly fundamental component at a practice-oriented university such as the DHPol to ensure that the tasks associated with the degree program or continuing education are also fulfilled from a professional

program for professional practice and to identify any gaps in the program (skills that are not taught or are not yet sufficiently taught).

4. With regard to teaching staff, this means: regular alternation between school and professional practice.

5. But equally important are the professional and academic qualifications and continuing education of the instructors.

6. Continuing education of police officers is at least as important as initial training. This further training must be offered and conducted on site, taking local conditions into account. Supervisors and academics must build a tandem for further education, including supervisors and coaches.

Examples

Let me illustrate what I mean with **a few examples**.

1. The risks of taser and pepper spray is often underestimated. There is initially a high level of trust in new technology and upgrading police equipment is a popular demand of police unions. But taser guns and pepper spray are ineffective in certain situations, and may even be contraindicated. A study by Williams et al. from 2022 shows that in the US, almost 50% of taser uses were ineffective, sometimes with fatal consequences for police officers[20]. If these risks are concealed, then the officers using them are being deceived. And the risk are huge, as the large number of deaths following the use of tasers show (Reuters identified more than a thousand deaths across the US that followed a police altercation involving Tasers[21]). These tools of police force are also ineffective, when used on individuals with mental health issues[22]. The risks and side effects of taser use for officers are difficult to calculate. The lack of oversight has also led to serious abuse by some officers in the U.S., as the New York Times reported in January 2025[23].

---

perspective and that the objectives are achieved (...). In this context, the focus of interest is on, among other things, employability and the needs of stakeholders in order to ensure the best possible outcome of the study program." Evaluationskonzept der Deutschen Hochschule der Polizei (Übersetzung TF), https://ogy.de/8jpb

[20] Williams/Reinhard/Oriola (2022): Fatal officer involved shootings following the use of TASER conducted energy weapons. The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles, 95 (4), p 713-733. https://ogy.de/rvdg

[21] The Taser Cases: Explore 1,005 fatalities documented by @Reuters; https://ogy.de/drmv

[22] Feltes/Alex (o.J.): Polizeieinsätze in Verbindung mit psychisch kranken Menschen, https://ogy.de/tq07; Feltes (2023) Polizeilicher Umgang mit psychisch beeinträchtigten Personen – Risiken und Nebenwirkungen. Vortrag an der DHPol, https://ogy.de/1n8k ; Feltes (2025), Zum Taser. Stellungnahme zur öffentlichen Anhörung zum Gesetzentwurf der Bundesregierung, BT-Drucksache 21/1502, https://ogy.de/qpsb

[23] https://ogy.de/tzfq

2. The risks of a sudden death during fixation (“prone restraint”, “excited delirium” or “positional asphyxia”; Lagebedingter Erstickungstod) is usually part of the training in police schools and universities. Nevertheless, many people died after hold in a prone position for too long. In the U.S., there were more than 740 cases between 2012 and 2021 registered after “prone restraint” and 142 after “excited delirium”[24]. We can trust that US police is trained for such situations. So why these numbers?

3. In Germany about two out of three people who were shot by the police were in an exceptional psychological situation, with increasing figures[25]. Dealing with people in exceptional psychological situations is part of police training, and most situations are resolved without the use of force or coercion. But why do situations get out of hand?

4. In many areas, there is a lack of a reasonable “Error Culture” (Fehlerkultur)[26]. According to police superiors in Germany, mistakes must not be made, and if they do occur, they must be covered up. The problem is quite complex and is rarely discussed transparently and openly. If we had enough time, I could tell you about two cases in which young people were killed by police gunfire and in which I represented or am representing the surviving relatives[27]. Drame in Dortmund, Lorenz in Oldenburg). I can talk about the role of local, regional, and political leadership in this context. Connection between leadership failure and a lack of culture of error as an institutional risk factor. Can this be influenced by training?

5. Compliance-Management: Leadership failure plays a significant role in the emergence of and handling of mistakes. Inaction leads to a spiral of tolerance. What were initially ‘bad habits’ become manifest negative behavior and attitudes. Yet supervisors know their employees and are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. A lack of error culture in the police force goes hand in hand with a lack of a culture of support: officers must function and are not allowed to have (or cause) problems. Help is only provided, if at all, when it is too late.

---

[24] Lethal Restraint: An investigation documenting police use of force (2012-2021) https://ogy.de/wl8p

[25] Feltes/Mallach (2024): Der lagebedingte Erstickungstod. Ein bekanntes, aber unterschätztes Problem. In: Polizei & Wissenschaft 2, 2024, S. 39 - 51 https://ogy.de/x9an; Feltes/Dettmeyer/Roos (2026), Der lagebedingte Erstickungstod (LET). Aktuelle polizeiliche, medizinische und rechtliche Aspekte. In: Kriminalistik (in print); Roos/Feltes/Dettmeyer (2026), Der „Lagebedingte Erstickungstod“ bei der polizeilichen Festnahme. Interdisziplinäre Probleme und Handlungsempfehlungen. In: Notfall & Rechtsmedizin (in print). In Germany, we do have only numbers for people shot by police (between 6 und 20 per year) https://polizeischuesse.cilip.de/.The use of firearms and other forms of force by the police in Germany are not documented in a sufficiently transparent and detailed manner. Schmitz et al. (2025), Stärkere Transparenz und Evidenz beim polizeilichen Schusswaffengebrauch und anderen Formen der Gewaltanwendung gegen Personen. In: Kriminologie - Das Online-Journal | Criminology - The Online Journal, 4(7), p 534-543, https://ogy.de/os3j

[26] Kai Seidensticker (Ed) (2025): Fehlerkultur in der Polizei. Ausprägung, Einflussfaktoren und Möglichkeitsräume Deutschland, Wiesbaden.

[27] Mouhamed Drame https://ogy.de/jyly and Lorenz A., https://ogy.de/g1l3

Leadership behavior is important for the police, both internally and in terms of their external image. Disciplinary or even punitive measures are the wrong response to misconduct. Supervisors must also show moral courage and exemplify ethical and human rights standards. Methods of compliance established in the private sector as an early warning system for identifying risks to the organization can also be adapted in the police if there is an awareness of the need for this and corresponding support from political and police leadership[28].

6. In many situations, police officers are just bystanders. Officers witness misconduct by their colleagues and are confronted with the question of whether to interact, to report to their superiors or the public prosecutor's office. Police bystanders can make an important contribution to the development of a culture of accountability within the police force. This requires recognition of both the normative components of cop culture and the criminal consequences of failing to comply (see the George Floyd Case, where the other three officers were later convicted although they were not directly involved in the killing by Derek Chauvin[29]). But: The unyielding legal demand in Germany[30] (“prinziple of legality”) for immediate reporting of police misconduct can lead to the closure of spaces for reflection and thus promote a clandestine culture of error[31].

D) Conclusions

Training and education is good, but not enough. On-site supervision and coaching in connection with police operations are just as necessary as ongoing training on site. The latter is necessary, because, regional conditions, social structures in the community, and the internal constitution of the police unit (e.g. working in “high-risk areas” results in blunt actions without empathy) influence police habits and it is important to include this into ongoing training.

Political leadership plays an important role. In Germany, „eager obedience“ is closely connected to political positions, e.g. police recruits are meant to be too lenient due to their socialization as middle class people with no experience in violence (so the

---

[28] Feltes/Schulz (2026): "Compliance-Management für die Polizei: Der Zusammenhang von Führungsversagen und mangelnder Fehlerkultur als institutioneller Risikofaktor". In: Seidensticker, Kai (Hrsg.), Fehlerkultur in der Polizei: Ausprägung, Einflussfaktoren und Möglichkeitsräume, Springer-Verlag Wiesbaden, 2025, S. 211 – 228 https://ogy.de/hm09

[29] https://ogy.de/u3mu

[30] The principle of legality obliges the German police and public prosecutor's office to initiate investigations in all cases where a criminal offense is suspected (Sections 152 (2) and 163 of the Code of Criminal Procedure). This is a legal obligation to prosecute offenses prosecutable ex officio as soon as there is initial suspicion. This serves to prevent arbitrary prosecution.

[31] Ruch/Feltes (2026): Strafvereitelung im Amt und Police Bystander. Warum Sanktionsandrohungen einer positiven Fehlerkultur im Wege stehen können. In: Seidensticker, Kai (Hrsg.), Fehlerkultur in der Polizei: Ausprägung, Einflussfaktoren und Möglichkeitsräume, Springer-Verlag Wiesbaden, 2025, p157 – 168 https://ogy.de/wa6m

Minister of interior of NRW in an internal paper). They have to learn to be tougher, and more prepared to use explicit force (e.g. in context with painful holds[32]).

As Frade and Walsh point out in a recent published review of articles on police training and education, there is a „*need for treating education and training **not as standalone interventions**, but as components of **a broader ecology of police learning and development**. Such an approach reveals how individual dispositions, instructional designs, institutional structures, and cultural logics co-produce the meanings and effects of professionalization. Importantly, doing so can assist in exposing the multiple, interacting factors that shape whether learning persists and influences practice, illuminating both how professionalization occurs across different domains and the conditions that strengthen or blunt its impact. In this sense, the framework, not only clarifies existing research patterns, but also identifies where gaps remain and where efforts to strengthen professional competence are most vulnerable to breakdown*“ [33].

Therefore, it is necessary to link pedagogical content with organizational practice, educational theory with occupational culture, and short-term instructional outcomes with long-term institutional change[34].

A recent study in the US examines the cultural orientations of mid-level police supervisors based on how they prioritized different aspects of the police role, including law enforcement, order maintenance, community policing, and procedural justice. All supervisors had attended the FBI National Academy. Cluster analysis identified five distinct groups: New Traditionalists, Peacekeepers, Law & Order Professionals, Procedural Justice Oriented, and Lay-Lows. Supervisors’ emotional intelligence (EI) was a key predictor of supervisor types, with higher EI associated with more balanced, positive orientations. This research contributes to the understanding of how police culture varies across rank and highlights the potential benefits of incorporating EI into research on police supervisors[35].

The impact of police first-line leaders seems clear, as is the need for the leaders to be developed for their role and engage in some way in lifelong learning. The concept of leaders requiring the development of technical, human and conceptual skills is important. The knowledge development in the classroom is important, but also (or even more) the importance and challenges of transferring such knowledge in to professional

[32] Instructions on how to apply pain holds can be found here for the Berlin police: https://fragden-staat.de/artikel/exklusiv/2026/01/eine-anleitung-fur-schmerzgriffe/ ; a critical comment here: https://verfassungsblog.de/schmerzgriffe-als-technik-in-der-polizeilichen-praxis/

[33] Frade/Walsh (2026): Police education and training: A scoping review of the research literature, The Police Journal Vol. 0(0) p 1–21, https://ogy.de/e8v4

[34] Frade/Walsh, p 15

[35] Ingram/WhiteSchafer (2025): A View From the Middle: Police Supervisors’ Cultural Role Orientations and Emotional Intelligence. Police Quarterly, 29 (1), 98-126. https://ogy.de/l7ue

practice, through which experiences of leadership can be reflected upon and developed. New police officers learn best when pushed beyond their comfort zone[36].

Lifelong learning and standardization through external quality assurance of such workplace learning is important[37]. An evidence-base needs to be evolved much further using a range of research methodologies to inform what does and does not work for the career and lifelong development of police leaders. This is an important task of police universities.

The recent discussion in the United States following the death of George Floyd about 'defunding the police' has shown that the division of roles, in which the police are responsible for virtually all everyday problems around the clock, needs to be questioned. This excessive burden on the police, which is currently the subject of intense debate in the United States, also plays a role in Germany, for example when it comes to dealing with mentally disturbed individuals.

Alex Vitale comments on the problem as follows: "*We are told that the police are the bringers of justice. They are here to help maintain social order so that no one should be subjected to abuse. The neutral enforcement of the law sets us all free. This understanding of policing, however, is largely mythical. American police function, despite whatever good intentions they have, as a tool for managing deeply entrenched inequalities in a way that systematically produces injustices for the poor, socially marginal, and non-white*."[38]

One has to ask whether the police are more concerned with protecting themselves and the status quo than identifying, let alone addressing, the fundamental problems in our society. Alex Vitale's thesis that it is not enough to tweak aspects such as police training, operational methods or diversity training, but that we must fundamentally question how the police force has developed over the past 40 years, could be the starting point for a genuine discussion on structural optimization and also serve as the basis for a new code of conduct and leadership ethics for the police – included in and mirrored by police curricula[39].

---

[36] Hoel/Christensen (2020): In-field training in the police: learning in an ethical grey area? Journal of Workplace Learning 32(8): 569–581. https://ogy.de/eci5

[37] Pepper/Jaramazovic (2025): The development of police first-line leaders: An international comparison between Australia, England and Wales. The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles, 99 (1), 103-121. https://ogy.de/siq1.

[38] Vitale (2017): The End of Policing, p 28.

[39] Feltes (2022): Entwicklungen und Wandel polizeilicher Ausbildung in Deutschland. Eine Betrachtung vor dem Hintergrund der aktuellen Diskussion. In: Recht der Jugend und des Bildungswesens 4, p 494–515 https://ogy.de/ma2v