Towards Improving Ethics and Governance in The Philippine National Police: A Critical Systemic Review

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Abstract

This is a critical systemic study on managing ethics and promoting better police governance. The case study is the Philippine National Police. Relatively little research on the Philippine National Police (PNP) could be found in the literature. This study aims to break new ground in the attempt to undertake research while also contributing to the PNP's better governance. It also seeks to contribute to the literature on policing, ethics management, and governance as well as to introduce the PNP to the wider community of scholars, researchers and academics who could be interested in studying this institution further. The PNP has had a long history of corruption, unethical behaviour, human rights abuses and internal institutional issues which have resulted in problems of unethical behaviour, bad governance and mismanagement. The study develops a model through which this institution could better manage ethics within and beyond in order to enhance policing. This model could be useful in other police institutions around the world dealing with similar issues about ethics management and governance because it seeks to develop a model based on broad principles in ethics management and improving governance which could be applicable in other contexts, even as it specifically deals with the PNP. As a critical systemic approach, it has broad application which could enable other researchers to modify them to suit their specific contexts. To sum up, this study has the following key findings:

1. The PNP suffers from various forms of unethical conduct among its personnel, including bribery, patronage politics, the cutting of corners around the criminal justice system, financial corruption, shortcomings in leadership and violations of human rights.
2. The PNP is a highly militarised, almost entirely masculine, and thoroughly politicised entity, and these factors contribute to its existing problems with corruption and unethical behaviour.

3. Police officers, particularly those in the lower ranks, are neither adequately paid, nor appropriately supported by the PNP, thereby contributing in part to individual unethical or corrupt acts among such officers.
4. Like many police institutions, the PNP has a closed culture which separates it from the wider society in terms of governance and management, even though most of its problems involving unethical conduct and corruption are merely part of a wider civic tolerance for corruption in the broader Philippine society.
5. The PNP admits to the existence of these and other problems, however, its main approach towards improving itself is through its own internal top-down institutional programs, believing that its problems could be best resolved by its own leadership and its own efforts. Many of these institutional programs are of a religious and moral character, involving the extensive participation of religious facilitators, such as the PNP's chaplains, thinking that the development of a more ethical PNP should start from a more religious and morally fit individual police officer. It formally acknowledges the desire to see the wider society participate in its attempts at resolving these problems, but it seeks to keep the mechanisms of such participation within its own control.

These have been the main themes which this research has developed as part of its qualitative analysis. These main themes revolve around the issues of the PNP's problems with patronage politics, corruption (both within the PNP and beyond it in the wider society), institutional problems within the PNP, and the PNP's own insistence on resolving its own problems through its own institutional efforts, most of which largely focus on spiritual, moral and religious approaches directed towards individual police officers in the hope to making them more morally, and thus more ethically upright persons.

In spite of the PNP's desire to reform itself through its own efforts, and the wider society's inclusion in these efforts is subject to the PNP's control or influence, it is nevertheless possible to develop a collaborative model for improving ethics management and governance in the PNP from the bottom-up. This study proposes that this could work at the municipal level of policing, which in the Philippines is the lowest level of policing. A tentative attempt had been carried out as part of this study to set up a collaborative inquiry discussion in a rural Philippine municipality involving the local police and non-police stakeholders within that municipality. This collaborative model, patterned after the Collaborative Inquiry Approach, is not intended to replace the PNP's institutional top-down programs, but rather to complement them and enable non-police stakeholders, such as ordinary citizens, to participate meaningfully in the governance of policing without having to come under the PNP's control. It could also spur further research on the ways in which police and citizens could work collaboratively as equals within an inclusive environment with a view to improving police ethics and governance.