

# CLANDESTINE POLICE OPERATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

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Law enforcement intelligence and operational policing strategies are coming to the fore worldwide. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of chief intelligence officers in the province of Bohol, C.Y. 2023. To achieve the purpose of this study, the researcher employed a qualitative research method, using the descriptive-phenomenological approach, with the aid of an interview guide, questions, and a voice recorder, to delve into the life experiences of police chief intelligence officers. Phenomenological studies are particularly well-suited to addressing specific knowledge and informants' detailed subjective experiences. The study was conducted in the area under the jurisdiction of the Province of Bohol, Region VII, and included the selected municipalities of Tagbilaran, Carmen, Loboc, Ubay, Loon, Inabanga, Jagna, Baclayon, Dauis, and Panglao. Ten (10) police chief intelligence officers in selected municipalities in the province of Bohol have rendered service as chief of police intelligence unit for at least five (5) years in their respective police stations. Most importantly, the informants have completed the basic



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intelligence course, the advanced intelligence course, and/or other related training in intelligence work. The primary purpose is to assess voluntariness on the part of the informants and to ensure that the data gathered are free from coercion or duress. From the informants' experiences as chief intelligence officers, emergent themes were identified: Work Under Wraps, Service with a Heart, Down in the Dumps. For the contribution of intelligence operations to the quality of criminal investigation, the created themes were Embodiment of Esprit de Corps, Success is the Sum of Small Efforts, and Watching the Watchmen. Lastly, on the aspirations of the informants for their personal and professional life themes were created as follows: Beyond Wildest Dreams, Strength of Character and When Every Centavo Counts. An exploratory study of the lived experience of being an intelligence officer, especially in the conduct of operations, is suggested. For both chief and intelligence officers, future researchers will be focused on performance assessment and evaluation, and to delve into the problems encountered and conduct a feasibility study on a program for skill enhancement in drug operation surveillance preparedness for chief intelligence and intelligence officers.

## INTRODUCTION

Policing organizations across jurisdictions have gradually shifted toward more intelligence-informed approaches in responding to crime and security threats. Contemporary law enforcement practice increasingly recognizes that effective policing depends not only on reactive response but also on systematic information gathering, analytical processing, and coordinated dissemination. Criminal intelligence, in this context, refers to information that has been evaluated and transformed into actionable knowledge to support prevention, investigation, and strategic planning (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2011). This understanding positions intelligence as a structured process rather than merely a collection of data.

The development of intelligence-led policing (ILP) further formalized this shift. Ratcliffe (2008) describes ILP as a management framework in which intelligence analysis informs decision-making, resource allocation, and operational priorities. Rather than treating intelligence as a peripheral support function, ILP embeds analytical outputs into organizational strategy. Similarly, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2017) emphasizes that intelligence-led systems enhance inter-unit coordination, improve situational awareness, and promote evidence-based interventions. Within such frameworks, intelligence officers play a central role in shaping how policing organizations anticipate and respond to emerging risks.

The Philippine policing environment presents unique contextual considerations. Municipal and provincial police units operate in diverse social and geographic contexts that shape operational demands. Events such as the 2017 armed encounter involving Abu Sayyaf-linked elements in Inabanga,

Bohol, illustrate how timely intelligence coordination can shape operational readiness and inter-agency collaboration (Rappler, 2017). Recognizing these efforts can make officers feel valued and proud of their community impact.

This study is anchored on two complementary perspectives: **Intelligence-Led Policing (ILP)** and **Organizational Theory**. Intelligence-led policing provides the operational lens for understanding the strategic role of intelligence in guiding decision-making. According to Ratcliffe (2008), ILP positions intelligence analysis at the center of policing strategy, influencing resource allocation and intervention planning. The OSCE (2017) further emphasizes that ILP strengthens coordination and proactive problem-solving through structured information-sharing and analytical integration. Within this framework, intelligence officers are not peripheral actors; rather, they contribute directly to operational prioritization and situational awareness.

Organizational theory, particularly systems-oriented perspectives, complements ILP by highlighting how institutional structures, leadership practices, and communication flows shape role performance (Scott & Davis, 2016). Police intelligence units operate within broader organizational systems where clarity of authority, administrative support, and inter-unit coordination influence effectiveness. Shane (2010) notes that organizational stressors and institutional arrangements can significantly affect police performance, underscoring the importance of examining contextual and structural influences.

Beyond operational readiness, scholars have increasingly highlighted the organizational dimensions of police work. Police performance is influenced not only by frontline exposure to risk but also by leadership structures, administrative systems, and institutional culture (Shane, 2010). Acknowledging these challenges can help officers feel understood and supported as they navigate complex organizational environments.

Despite the prominence of intelligence-led frameworks in policy discussions, fewer studies have examined the lived experiences of intelligence leaders at the municipal level. Exploring these experiences can help policymakers and scholars develop empathy and a deeper perspective of the realities encountered by local law enforcement, resulting in more grounded, supportive policies. The findings of this study will help to advance organizational studies and policing practices by informing leadership development and institutional strengthening activities.

This study investigates the lived experiences of police enforcement officers in certain municipalities in Bohol, who use intelligence-led policing concepts (Ratcliffe, 2008; OSCE, 2017) and organizational frameworks regarding institutional performance (Scott & Davis, 2016; Shane, 2010). The study aims to provide context-specific insights that will enable policymakers to improve leadership development and institutional strengthening initiatives by examining their understanding of responsibilities, management of operational realities, and perceptions of organizational support.

In this study, the lived experiences of police chief intelligence officers are

understood as situated within these dual influences:

- **Operational Intelligence Context (ILP Perspective)**
  - Information gathering and validation
  - Analytical interpretation
  - Coordination and dissemination
  - Contribution to investigation and readiness
- **Organizational Context (Organizational Theory Perspective)**
  - Leadership support
  - Structural and administrative conditions
  - Resource adequacy
  - Inter-unit communication

The intersection of these two domains shapes how intelligence officers interpret their professional roles. By examining their experiences through this integrated lens, the study seeks to illuminate how strategic intelligence frameworks are enacted in everyday municipal policing contexts.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in descriptive phenomenology. Phenomenological research is appropriate when the aim is to understand how individuals perceive and interpret a common professional role or phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978). Instead of measuring specified factors, this method allows participants to describe their experiences in their own words, adding depth, richness, and context to the interpretation. The research was carried out in specific towns within the Province of Bohol, Philippines, namely Tagbilaran City, Carmen, Loboc, Ubay, Loon, Inabanga, Jagna, Baclayon, Dauis, and Panglao. These places were chosen because they illustrate how varied policing and administrative settings can affect intelligence operations across different areas.

Ten (10) police chief intelligence officers from the chosen towns took part. Informants were chosen via purposive sampling based on certain criteria: (a) their present position in an intelligence leadership capacity, (b) their direct engagement in intelligence-related coordination and operational planning, and (c) their willingness to cooperate freely. In qualitative research, the sufficiency of the sample size is assessed by the depth and pertinence of participants' narratives rather than by statistical representation.

Data were collected via semi-structured, comprehensive interviews. An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed to learn about participants' professional backgrounds, their experiences as intelligence leaders, their views on intelligence operations' contributions to criminal investigations and operational readiness, and their career goals. The semi-structured method facilitated the exploration of emerging themes while ensuring uniformity among interviews.

Before collecting data, the study got formal approval through the right institutional procedures. Participants were made aware of the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the measures in place to ensure anonymity. With permission, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed word-for-word. Field notes were kept to record observations that could help with interpretation.

The data analysis adhered to Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological approach. This analytical method entails deep engagement with the transcripts via iterative reading, identification of salient statements, construction of meanings, aggregation of themes, creation of a comprehensive description, and delineation of the essential structure of the experience. Participants were consulted whenever possible to clarify interpretations and boost credibility. Using this strategy in a planned way helped make the analysis more open and consistent. To enhance trustworthiness, the study used methods consistent with qualitative research norms. Credibility was bolstered through meticulous inquiry during interviews and thorough examination of transcripts. Keeping well-organized records of coding and theme development strengthened dependability. Reflexive notes were kept to track any assumptions the researchers might have made. The Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) checklist, which sets requirements for openness in interview-based qualitative studies (Tong et al., 2007), directed the reporting.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After careful reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts, significant statements were identified and organized according to Colaizzi's (1978) method. From the initial clusters of meanings, nine broader themes gradually emerged. These themes are presented in relation to the study's guiding questions: how police chief intelligence officers understand their roles, how they describe the contribution of intelligence work to investigations, and how they view their professional and personal aspirations.

### I. Experiences as Police Chief Intelligence Officers

**Work Under Wraps.** Numerous participants characterized intelligence work as discreet. They discussed the importance of handling sensitive matters without attracting unnecessary attention, the obligation to verify information meticulously, and the need for discretion. Intelligence tasks were frequently depicted as indispensable, yet they were not always apparent to individuals both within and outside the organization.

This perspective aligns with depictions of intelligence-led policing, in which the majority of analytical and coordination work is conducted behind the scenes to support operational outcomes (Ratcliffe, 2008). The participants' reflections indicate that intelligence leadership necessitates a delicate balance between confidentiality in practice and transparency within the organization.

While such discretion is expected, it may also create a sense of working at the margins of recognition.

**Service with a Heart.** When asked to characterize the work, participants frequently referred to their own personal experiences, despite the fact that intelligence work can be technically demanding. A number of law enforcement officers stressed that their efforts were intended to ensure the safety and protection of the area. Their narratives not only demonstrated a sense of responsibility and loyalty but also went beyond mere adherence to the protocols.

Research on policing shows that officers' interpretations of their work are frequently influenced by their intrinsic motivation and attitude toward service (Shane, 2010). Within the scope of this investigation, intelligence leadership was not seen as a simple analytical endeavor but rather as a contribution to a broader purpose of protecting communities. Even as reports and coordination tasks were being discussed, police ensured these obligations were linked to concrete outcomes that would benefit public welfare.

**Down in the Dumps.** In addition to loyalty, participants recognized instances of exhaustion and discouragement. They discussed the pressure to produce precise intelligence within constrained timelines, along with the tension caused by staff shortages and administrative obligations. Occasionally, police perceived that resource limitations hindered their ability to offer suggestions. These narratives align with research indicating that organizational factors—such as structural pressures and administrative processes—can affect police well-being (Shane, 2010). Participants frequently characterized these encounters as hard yet manageable components of the job, rather than overwhelming. Their thoughts expressed realism and resilience.

## II. Contribution of Intelligence Operations to Criminal Investigation

**Embodiment of Esprit de Corps.** Participants emphasized the importance of working together as a team and coordinating their efforts as a key component of successful intelligence operations. The work of intelligence was described as being intertwined with the activities of command staff, investigators, and patrol police. Officers highlighted that significant achievements do not depend on individual effort but rather on the collaborative effort of multiple individuals. (OSCE, 2017; Ratcliffe, 2008) Frameworks for intelligence-led policing emphasize the importance of integration and information-sharing as essential elements of efficient application of the discipline.

The accounts gathered in this study reflect that understanding. Intelligence officers see themselves as part of a broader operational system in which communication and trust play significant roles.

**Success Is the Sum of Small Efforts.** Another common theme was that intelligence outcomes are rarely the result of significant discoveries. Instead, participants viewed intelligence work as incremental, grounded in routine monitoring, recording, and follow-up. Small pieces of verifiable information,

when combined, often lead to breakthroughs in broader investigations. This progressive approach is consistent with the view that intelligence functions rely on long-term pattern recognition and cumulative data analysis (Ratcliffe, 2008).

Participants seemed aware that their work may not always produce immediate results, yet they recognized its long-term value in strengthening investigations and preparedness.

**Watching the Watchmen.** Participants also emphasized the importance of authenticating sources and ensuring that intelligence methods are ethical and truthful. Several officers emphasized that intelligence work necessitates sound judgment and adherence to professional norms. This emphasis aligns with broader issues in the policing literature regarding accountability and legitimacy (OSCE, 2017). Participants defined intelligence leadership as not only acquiring information but also ensuring its proper use. Officers appeared to understand the importance of maintaining trust within the organization and community.

### III. Aspirations and Professional Outlook

**Beyond Wildest Dreams.** When discussing aspirations, participants expressed interest in further training, professional advancement, and improved intelligence management systems. Some mentioned hopes for enhanced technology and structured capacity-building programs.

Goal-setting research suggests that clear professional aspirations can support sustained motivation and development (Locke & Latham, 1990). In this study, aspirations were often framed not only in personal terms but also in relation to improving institutional effectiveness.

**Strength of Character.** Participants almost always mentioned personal integrity, discipline, and resilience as necessary attributes for smart leadership. Given the secret and sometimes delicate nature of their roles, they saw character as critical to preserving professional credibility. Organizational perspectives emphasize that leadership responsibilities often require both competence and an ethical foundation (Scott & Davis, 2016). According to the officers' views, personal values define intelligence leadership just as much as statutory requirements do.

**When Every Centavo Counts.** Finally, participants were open about resource restrictions. Budget limits, equipment requirements, and personnel shortages were identified as recurring issues. Despite this, officers frequently discussed efforts to adapt and maximize available resources. Recent research indicates that organizational resources have a substantial impact on police efficacy. Communication tools and logistical assistance are particularly important for intelligence-led systems. Participants' opinions indicate that, while there are restrictions, incremental improvements could enhance operational efficiency. Overall reflection. Taken together, the themes indicate that police chief intelligence officers see their roles as both hard and meaningful. Intelligence



work is regarded as discrete yet influential, collaborative but occasionally confined by structural realities. The findings indicate a balance between commitment to service and recognition of institutional difficulties. The lived experiences presented here, viewed through the lenses of intelligence-led policing (Ratcliffe, 2008) and organizational theory (Scott & Davis, 2016), demonstrate how strategic frameworks are translated into regular/everyday practice at the municipal level. These accounts suggest that intelligence leadership is shaped not only by formal frameworks but also by personal dedication and adaptable problem-solving strategy.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined how law enforcement intelligence officers across municipalities in Bohol view their responsibilities. According to the findings, intelligence work is often conducted quietly, despite its importance in supporting investigations and operational readiness. Participants defined their responsibilities as cautious information management, communication with other departments, and ongoing documentation of advances.

At the same time, the function appears to be influenced by organisational realities such as workload, resource restrictions, and administrative demands. Despite these restrictions, the officers displayed remarkable dedication and a desire to keep improving their work.

Overall, the findings suggest that intelligence leadership is both demanding and deliberate, operating within larger institutional frameworks.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the data, the following are recommended:

1. Regular training in intelligence analysis and information management can promote professional development and operational consistency. Strengthening communication and coordination across units can also foster the collaborative nature of intelligence work.
2. Modest enhancements in logistical or technical support can alleviate operating restrictions. Attention to workload and organizational support may also help maintain morale and effectiveness.
3. Finally, further studies in other local settings may provide additional insight into how intelligence leadership is experienced across different contexts.



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