



Adopting a Multi-Theoretical Framework to Explain and Understand the Impact of Traffic Police Corruption in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article examined traffic police corruption in South Africa through a multi-theoretical framework. It drew together the Theory of Reasoned Action, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, behavioural intention, control and social control perspectives, and General Systems Theory to explain why corrupt practices cannot be reduced to individual choice alone. The analysis indicated that behavioural intentions interact with workplace culture, peer solidarity, the code of silence, weak or inconsistent sanctions, managerial control, and wider organisational systems. It also showed that single-theory explanations leave important features of traffic-policing environments unexplained. The article therefore developed an integrated framework in which individual dispositions, social pressures, accountability mechanisms, feedback, and institutional conditions are treated as interconnected influences. It concluded that effective anti-corruption responses require both behavioural and systemic interventions, including credible sanctions, protected reporting channels, managerial accountability, and attention to both bribe takers and bribe givers.



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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, traffic police officers were seen as bribe takers, demanding cold drinks from motorists. Additionally, they were involved in several unprofessional behaviours and conduct, such as demanding bribes from motorists for various traffic violations (e.g., speeding, driving unlicensed vehicles, un-roadworthy vehicles, failure to display licensing discs, no display of car number plate registration, overloading, drunk driving, and failure to obey traffic signs). Traffic officers waived off traffic fines for bribes; roadworthiness certificates were issued to undeserving cars; applicants gave bribes to licensing officials to pass their driving tests, and prohibited vehicles were unlawfully recycled back on the roads.

The study aimed to develop a framework for effective traffic policing.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article employed a conceptual, theory-driven review design to develop a multi-theoretical explanation of traffic police corruption in South Africa. The analytical material consisted of the theoretical and scholarly sources already cited in the manuscript, particularly the Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Theory of Behavioural Intention, control and social control perspectives, and General Systems Theory. Rather than drawing on a statistical sample, the study treated these theoretical perspectives as analytical units and examined their explanatory relevance to behavioural intention, workplace culture, peer solidarity, sanctions, feedback, accountability, and organisational systems in traffic policing. The analysis proceeded comparatively and integratively: each theory was outlined, its limitations in the traffic-policing context were critically assessed, and

complementary insights were synthesised into a framework for effective traffic policing. No new primary dataset or statistical analysis was introduced in this article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The TRA and its extension, the TPB, are commonly used theories of persuasion that explain what variables predict behavioural intentions. Perceived behavioural control separates both approaches. The TRA was first propounded by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), who postulated that an individual's behavioural intentions directly determine behaviour. In other words, as individuals' preferences for performing a behaviour increase, they are more likely to achieve it. A line of argument is that both volition and intention predict human behaviour (Ajzen & Kruglanski, 2019).

According to Ajzen and Fishbein (2005), the TRA elucidates how the relationship between attitudes and behaviours interacts with human action. It considers how individuals will likely behave based on their pre-existing attitudes and behaviours. TRA is a mathematical model that helps psychologists understand human behaviour within a specific context or environment (Lucaille, 2020). TRA allows scientists to predict behavioural intentions employing both the functions of attitudes and subjective norms (Hagger et al., 2018). The main components of the TRA are beliefs, attitudes, subjective norms, and intentions.

Beliefs. When a person thinks, their action will have a specific outcome.

For example, if a person thinks that by smoking, they are likely going to have a cancer illness, they hold to the belief that smoking is dangerous for their wellbeing. If I Believe in God, I must worship and acknowledge God in my daily life because I believe in the existence of a supernatural being. Through my faith, I believe in the unknown.

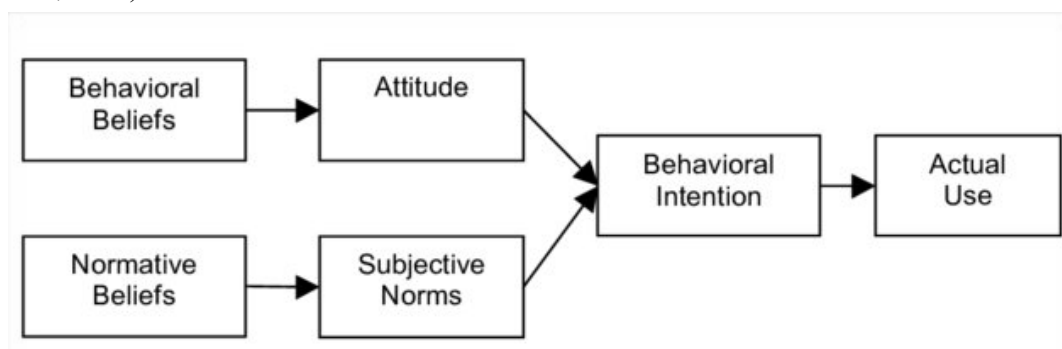
Attitudes: our thoughts on whether the intended outcome will be favourable or unfavourable. If I believe working hard at work will get a bonus, my attitude towards work will be more serious and dedicated.

Subjective norms: This can be understood from two models: Injunctive norms, which describe what people think others expect them to do;

Descriptive norms: perceptions of what other people think they should do. Sometimes, the outcome may differ.

Intention: the behaviour of one's response to beliefs and attitudes. Our choices can change when someone asks us about our preferences and when we do the behaviour.

Sheeran and Conner (2017) provide a helpful overview of this 'intention-behaviour' gap and salient contributing factors. Research has indicated several factors that might strengthen the intention-behaviour relationship. A fundamental hypothesis of the theory is that individuals with greater control over their behaviour will be more likely to carry out their intentions. A line of argument supported by (Rossman, 2020).



Picture 1 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

Source: Ajzen and Fishbein (1980)

Critical Analysis of the Theory of Reasoned Action

Although Ajzen and Kruglanski (2019) had previously proposed the argument that both volition and intention is one of the criteria available to predict human behaviour. This hypothesis with reference to traffic police officers' behaviour may not always be generalisable. First, corruptive acts of some

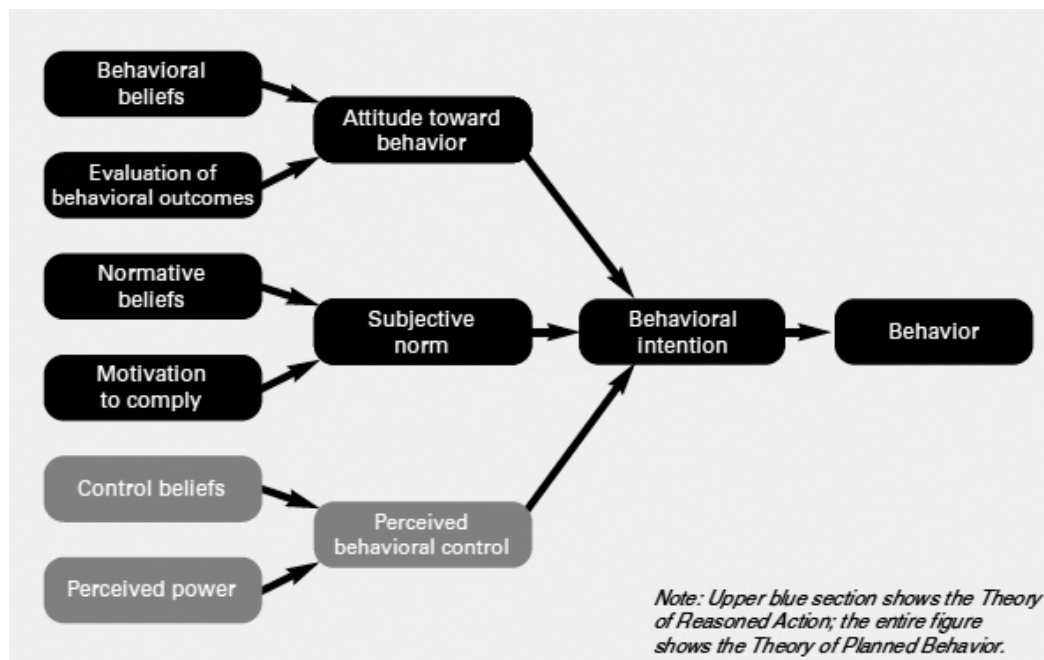
traffic police officers may not necessary be caused as a result of individual officer's own intention or volition. The researcher argued that the working environment and officer's socialisation process of wanting to gain acceptance or belonging to a group can exerts undue influence and pressure on some traffic police officers. In this trajectory, the impact of the traffic police culture is explained. The Traffic police culture promotes solidarity, unity, code of silence and undivided loyalty to the group. The exigencies of traffic police work encapsulated in the risks and dangers associated with it makes it operationally impossible for officers to work on their own without relying on the support of their colleagues. The dominant traffic police culture makes new entrants denounce their moral or family values for becoming part of the group, a survival strategy facilitated by teamwork desirable quality. The author argues that once any officer subscribes to dominant police culture, it becomes very difficult to report one's colleagues seen soliciting for a bribe. It also becomes a very high risk to report any of your colleagues for corruption. This does not that all traffic police officers are corrupt, a good number of them are not corrupt. Some became corrupt within a few years in their service. One can safely argue about the persistence of two diametrical choices to be made by traffic police. Loyalty to one call of duty, oath of allegiance and obeying traffic police code of conduct on one hand, and undivided loyalty to one's colleagues on the other hand. In some instances, as was well articulated by majority of the participants in this study, loyalty to one's colleague takes precedence over loyalty to employers, duty, legislative mandate or code of conduct. The TRA did not go far enough to explain that not all traffic police officers join because they wanted to become corrupt but, in some instances, the prevailing circumstances and working environment changed their moral values and become corrupted. Next, the researcher explained the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and critical analysis of it.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

According to Conner et al. (2017), there is a critical difference between the TRA, which came first, and the TPB, which is the more modern, current version. The difference is adding to this idea of 'perceived behavioural control'. Whether I will do a behaviour depends on whether I think it will lead to good outcomes, whether people I trust, and value believe I should do it, and whether I can do it. Those three things influence my attention to do the behaviour, and then my intention typically leads to the behaviour itself (Sheeran & Conner, 2017).

The TPB posits that behaviour is directly determined by an individual's intentions and perceived behavioural control. As a rule, the stronger the choice to engage in behaviour, the more likely it should be its performance. It should be clear, however, that a Behavioural Intention can find expression in behaviour only if the conduct in question is under volitional control, i.e., if the person can decide at will to perform or not perform the behaviour and when behaviours pose no severe problems of power, they can be predicted from intentions with considerable accuracy (Nisson & Earl, 2020). The TPB states that behavioural achievement depends on motivation (intention) and ability (behavioural control). It distinguishes between three types of beliefs, namely behavioural, normative, and power.

The TPB comprises six constructs representing a person's control over behaviour. Attitudes refer to the degree to which behavioural circumstances or likely outcomes are evaluated favourably or unfavourably. Behavioural intention captures the motivational factors that influence whether a behaviour is performed, with stronger intention making performance more likely under prevailing conditions. Subjective norms concern whether important others approve or disapprove of the behaviour, while social norms refer to customary codes of conduct within a group or sociocultural context. Perceived power concerns the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance. Perceived behavioural control refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour. Human behaviour is therefore guided by behavioural beliefs about likely consequences, normative beliefs about others' expectations, and control beliefs about facilitating or constraining factors (Sonne-Ragans, 2019).



Picture 2 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

Source: Adapted from Ajzen (1991)

Critical Analysis of the Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behavior's ability to predict actual behaviour has come under close scrutiny. All workplaces are not the same and the link between intentions and individual action varies. It is misleading to attempt to rely on a single theory to predict human behaviour. Individual traffic police officers have their own unique characteristics. We may sometimes adapt a tour working environment does not necessarily mean we have discarded our inherent norms and value. The distinction between the human ability to respond to his /her environment has been downplayed by TBP theorists. Some of the factors that may lead to individual changing circumstances at workplace have not been adequately addressed. The limited control traffic police officers may have over behaviour they subscribe to in some instances have been ignored. First, traffic police officers may not initially take part in corruption but may later be influenced by the lack of discipline within their working environment. For example, no sanctions are applied to errant colleagues reported to managers for corruption. In situations where punishment is absent, this may become a driven impetus for traffic police officers to become corrupt. Second, the TPB does not take sufficient account of cognitive and affective processes that are associated with human bias and judgements. Third, the TPB does not include unconscious, irrational and emotional influences that individuals have limited control over. Many intervening events can lead to changes in our attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Stickle, 2021). Fourth, the TPB does not make provisions for considering multiple behaviour associated with individuals at workplace (Bertalanffy, 1968).

Theory of Behavioural Intention

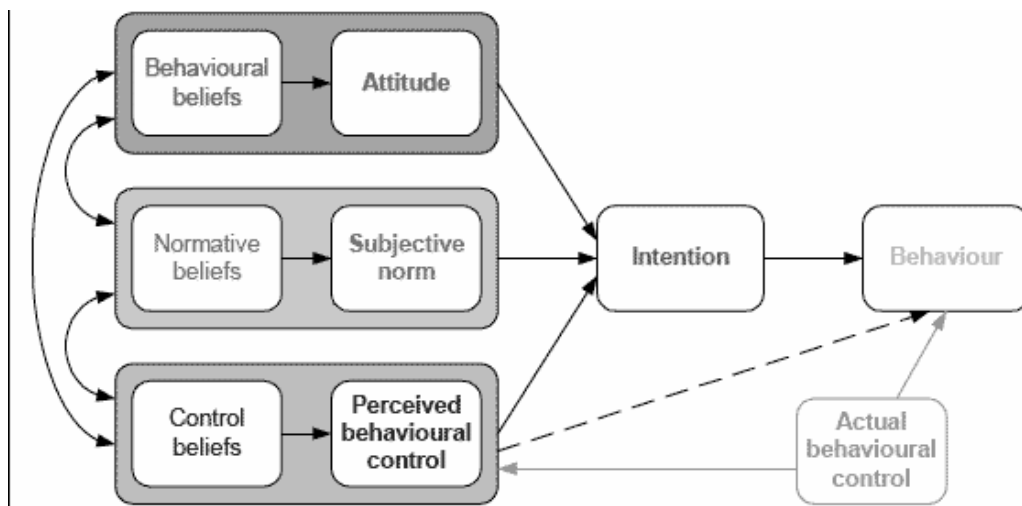
Behavioural intention measures an individual's choice to behave in a specific way. It is often problematic to alter one's choice to act in a particular manner. The Theory of Behavioural Intention introduces three concepts relating to technology implementation: Perceived behavioural control, Subjective norm, and behavioural attitude. Perceived behavioural control refers to the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour. Intention is determined by three determinant factors: Attitude, perceived control, and subjective norms(Wooten, 2020). Attitude is one's ability to evaluate ideas, events, people, or objects. The human attitude within a social context can be negative or positive. Perceived control is determined by one's level of influence over the ecosystem. It provides an idea of how easy or difficult an assigned task is to complete (Cubitt et al., 2020).

Norms are acceptable behaviour in any given society, an acceptable and collectively agreed standard of conduct. If one moves away from the generally good standard of behaviour shared by the majority in any organisation, they are seen as deviants.

Critical Analysis of the Theory of Behavioural Intention

To understand the Behavioural Intention of traffic officers, the researcher presents a hypothetical scenario as follows: when a traffic police officer has taken an individual decision to act in a certain deviant way, no amount of laid-down rules can alter their intention to act in that chosen specific way if the work environment allows it for the deviant act to happen without any repercussions or sanctions. The traffic officer is more likely to carry out the unlawful act. The influence of attitude, social pressure and societal norms on behaviour often mediates through one's Behavioural Intention (Momani & Jamous, 2017). Meaning captures the motivational factors influencing behaviour. The purpose is to measure the extent of individual determination to perform a specific task and the time the individual is prepared to carry out the job successfully. One can safely argue that the stronger a person's intention to engage in a particular behaviour or achieve their behavioural goals, the more successful they will be in performing or achieving that behaviour. If a traffic police officer's behavioural goal is to be corrupt from the onset, they must develop a solid Behavioural Intention to be dishonest.

The researcher argues that it will be misleading to conclude that Behavioural Intention is only subject to individual behavioural purposes. The traffic police culture of solidarity also pressures the officer to be corrupt. The exigencies of traffic police work do not allow traffic police officers not to be influenced by their colleagues and always to maintain a code of silence, especially when faced with external threats from members of the public (Tzafestas, 2022; Gul, 2023).



Picture 3 Theory of Behavioural Intention

Source: Fishbein and Ajzen (1975)

Control Theory

Control theory is a branch of applied mathematics that deals with the use of feedback to influence the behaviour of a system to achieve a desired goal. Control theory is critically important because it describes the models the dynamic systems that enable control to occur (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). (Frank, 2018). Control theory is usually equated with the following: the feedback process, which often involves both the transmission and return of information, control and regulation of machines, muscular coordination, optimisation of businesses, metabolism in the biological sense, design of prosthetic devices, control of both economic and governmental policies and the modification of the environment.

The best hypothetical analogy to describe the essence of the control theory can be summed up by explaining how a car's cruise control works. The cruise control autopilots the speed of a vehicle without the driver having to accelerate the car. The rate of the car is programmed and set into action with the push of a button. It allows the driver to stop controlling the vehicle manually through automation-assisted driving. One can safely argue that the car's cruise control goal is to keep the car at a constant speed. The output variable is the speed of the vehicle. Consuming fuel becomes the primary means to control the car's speed, measured by the power being fed into the engine. An open loop controller controls this process because it does not directly connect the system's output and input. The cruise control device is referred to as the controller in the system (Rabenstein & Maximillian, 2023).

Goals and Feedback

In psychology, control theory is conceptualised within an established hierarchy of systems and from this configuration, some of the most exciting phenomena arise. Control theory's most prominent presence is in organisational psychology, which postulates that motivation and goal-striving behaviour are often at play in organisations. Control theory explains how individuals achieve and what drives them to achieve, considering their level of motivational differences. The goal of A differs from that of B, but interestingly, both have the same purpose to aspire to. The feedback process will enable A and B to steer in the right direction to achieve their goals. We can also have multiple plans to aspire to simultaneously. The critical question becomes how do we prioritise our goals without external interference? (Sepulveda et al., 2022).

A long-held view on feedback is that most interventions that increase the opportunity to use feedback boost performance. In this regard, the control theory has been used as a vehicle to enable us to better understand the processes by which feedback has its effects (both positive and negative). The researcher opined that feedback may indicate some discrepancies between perceptions and goals. These discrepancies, in turn, drive behaviours in a working environment.

In looking at control theory through the lenses of a sociological perspective, the researcher relied on the work of Travis Hirschi, who helped to develop the social control theory of crime. Hirschi postulated that the inner and outer controls constitute what is commonly known as 'self-control'. Deviance, in its simplest form, means not controlled. An individual's bond with society is what determines deviant tendencies. Thus, less deviance occurs when solid social bonds exist between the individual and the community. Proper socialisation during childhood leads to strong bonds between the individual and his family and society. The bond of affection is a significant crime deterrent. The stronger the bond, the more likely the person is to consider it when and if he contemplates a criminal act.

Costello and Lamb (2019) present several key arguments in social control theory. The moral bond with society helps determine deviant tendencies, while social bonds constrain deviance by inculcating controls in the individual. Weak social bonds are understood as creating greater room for crime, and people are assumed to be capable of offending by default, with the social costs of crime deterring many would-be offenders (Costello & Lamb, 2019).

Four types of social bonds are emphasised: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment concerns bonds with parents, schools, and significant others; commitment reflects the conventional investments a person risks losing through offending; involvement in conventional activities can reduce time and opportunity for deviance; and belief concerns the extent to which a person accepts normative rules and values that restrain criminal conduct.

Critical Analysis of Control Theory

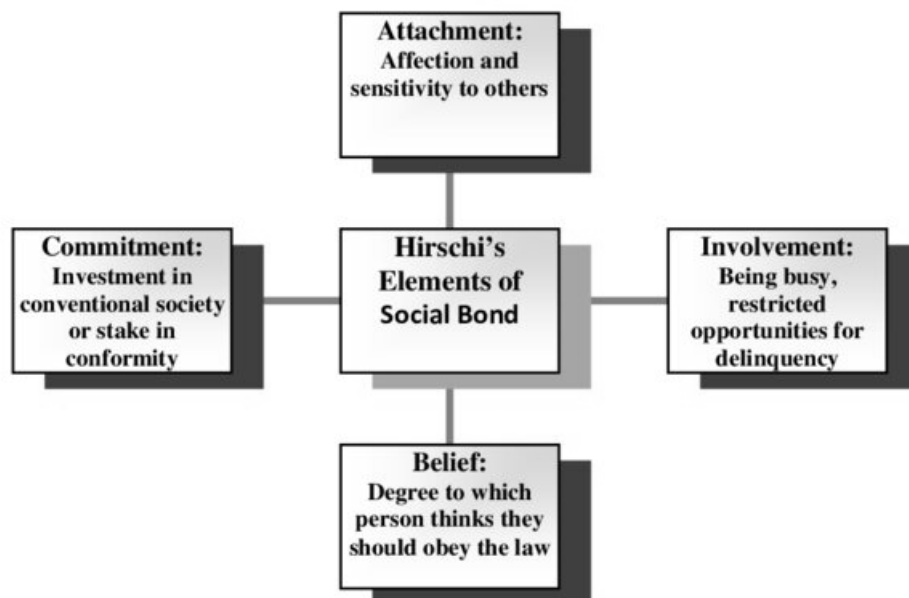
The researcher agrees partially with the control theory presented above. The researcher agrees with the following conclusions drawn by control theorists as follows:

People, by default, can commit crimes. The social costs of committing crimes deter the most would be offenders from deviance. This is persuasive for two reasons. First, note that crimes are premeditated. Some people commit crimes not out of their own volition but due to peer pressure in the form of wanting to fit in with the crowd. The traffic policing environment has a culture of wanting to belong to the majority. Traffic officers sometimes go with the flow to avoid being seen as outsiders or trusted. Officers who do come to the party in solidarity often face isolation. The dominant culture provides traffic police officers with two choices: you are either for us or against us. The author argues that the high risk associated with traffic policing does not allow officers to do the job without the support of one's colleagues. In some instances, one is forced to look at the other side instead of reporting colleagues seen committing crimes.

The researcher disagrees with the idea of power consolidation in the hands of a few individuals. He argues that it is dangerous to put control in the hands of individuals or managers. In some instances, when this is done, it may lead to abuse of power. The researcher believes that the manager needs to be monitored to ensure accountability. The internal complaints system must be designed in such a way as to protect traffic police officers who want to complain officially about their managers. Traffic Officials who do so must not be victimised by their colleagues. Power cannot be self-regulatory in any organisation where there are sex, class, race, religion, sexual orientation, and age differences. It must be complimented with a protective mechanism as well.

On goals and feedback, the author agrees and disagrees with the issue of goals and feedback. It is a good idea for employees to have a system that rewards handwork and promotes efficiency. Sometimes, managers do not approve performance bonuses to deserving traffic police officers. This becomes one of the motivating factors affecting officers because some are not rewarded or recognised for their handwork and dedication to duty. They argue that the criteria for given bonuses must be transparent enough and not be subjected to manipulation but solely based on meritocracy. Any manager /found bending the rules should be subjected to a disciplinary hearing.

Another disagreement between the author and control theorists referred to above is where Costello and Lamb (2019) argued that the weak bond in a society creates room for crime to occur.' The researcher's disagreement arose from the following: first, crime can occur in any society, either strong or weak. A strong, bonded society still has its crime statistics. No society is immune from crime if humans want are many and insatiable. Second, the researcher disagrees with using a monocausal explanation of crime. There are plausible reasons why people commit crime; weak societal bonds cannot be the sole factor of the causes of crime. Other causes of crime may include some of the following: unemployment, social and environmental situations, peer pressure, alcohol or drug influences, individual or group criminogenic needs, lack of education or knowledge of the consequences of crime and opportunistic situations.



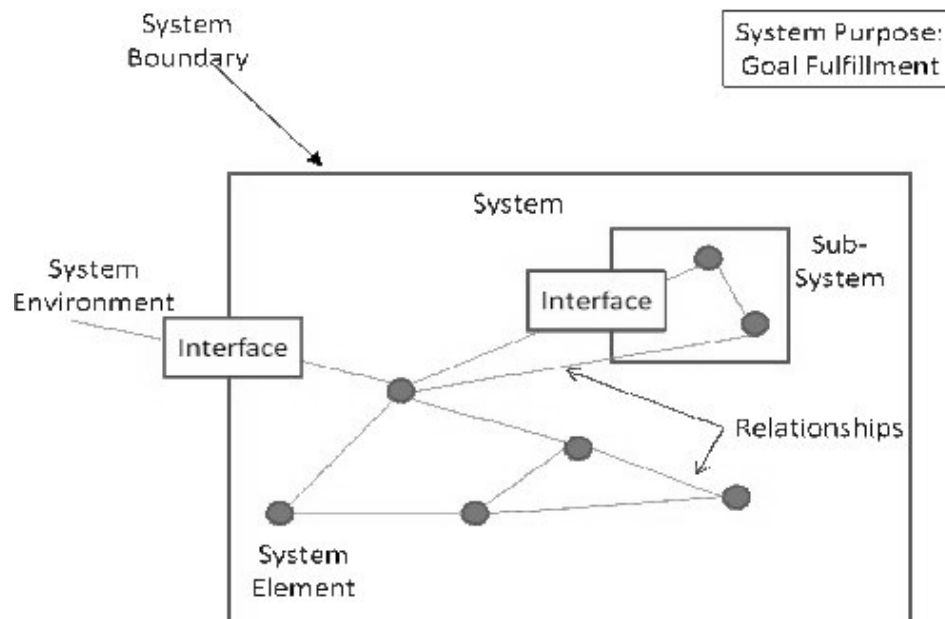
Picture 4 Elements of Social Bond

Source: Hirschi (1969)

General Systems Theory as the Conceptual Framework

The researcher intends to utilise the General System Theory propounded by (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) as the conceptual framework to ground the research study on the behavioural intentions of Traffic Police Officers in developing socio-economic contexts in South Africa. The GST should allow the researcher to engage meaningfully with different systems and subsystems impacting and influencing the work of Traffic Police Officers. Bertalanffy's basic idea was that the strategies analysed in various branches of learning share several features that can and should be the subject of a science of systems as such, as a set of elements standing interaction. According to Tzafestas (2022), each system has at least two interconnected elements surrounded by system boundaries. The boundaries separate the elements from their system environment (Tzafestas, 2022). Although the system boundaries are objective entities, they show a notion of subjectivity insofar as observing individual's point of view and interest impacts the boundary definition (Tzafestas, 2022). The relationships among the elements support connectivity and enable them to bridge the system boundaries via interfaces to ensure the parts are

responsive to environmental changes. The relationships also explain how the system elements interact and fit together (Turner & Baker, 2019).



Picture 5 General Systems Theory

Source: International Conference on Information Systems (2008)

Consistent with the systems approach discussed by Jost (2020), organisms are open systems which cannot survive without a continuous exchange of matter and energy within a given ecosystem. Open systems interact with other systems externally for survival and growth. The interaction process has two levels: input, which enters the system from the outside, and output, which leaves the designs from the environment. To understand how a system operates, we must first understand the environment under which the system works. Two fundamental ideas were advanced to deal with the problems associated with order and organisation. One was a comparison between man and artificial machines. The other was to conceive of order as a product of chance. Scientific exploration of the whole and wholeness has transcended the boundaries of science, creating a platform for understanding interdisciplinarity and applying its principles to systems.

The organisational implications of the systems approach include the following characteristics. The subsystems: Each organisation is a unique system made of a combination of many subsystems. These subsystems are interrelated. Holism: Each sub-stem works collectively to make the entire system, and decisions taken in any subsystem affect the whole system. Synergy: The whole system's collective output is greater than its subsystems' outputs. Closed and open systems: The whole organisation consists of an open system comprising a combination of open and closed systems. System Boundary: The organisation is separate from the external environment made up of other systems.

The system approach also views the organisation through inputs, transformation, outputs, feedback, and environment. Inputs - Raw Materials, Human Resources, Capital, Information, Technology A Transformational Process - Employee Work Activities, Management Activities, Operations Methods Outputs - Products or Services, Financial Results, Information, Human Results Feedback - Results from output influence inputs. The Environment - These components comprise internal and external factors affecting the system.

General Systems Theory is based on the premise that only one universally applicable principle of organisation holds them all together. These principles can be found in the following: physical, chemical, biological, mental, or social. General Systems Theory is a broad view that transcends technological problems and demands, a re-orientation that has become necessary in science and the gamut of all disciplines (Walker, 2019). The aims of the General Systems Theory are as follows:

To explore the integration of sciences (natural and social), To develop a unifying principle through the universe of individual sciences. The student found the seven principles of Indira (2016) very useful in understanding the General Systems Theory because it simplifies the General Systems Theory's General principle. They are as follows: Systems refer specifically to self-regulating systems.

Systems are corrected using feedback. Systems have a structure defined by their process and part. Systems are generalisations of reality. The various parts of a system have functional as well as structural relationships between each other. The system tends to function in the same way. Every living organism is essential to an open system.

CONCLUSION

Traffic police corruption can no longer be contextualized from a mono causal lens of crime and deviance nuanced in the theory of criminal behaviour alone. There are several multi theoretical explanations to explain why traffic police officers are reportedly involved in the solicitation of money from motorists. Human greed and avarice play a pivotal part, in the same way, errant officer's behavioural intention is very difficult to measure. Corruption done in the open is limited due to consequences in relation to the crime. The punishment is designed to hold both the giver and the taker liable for the crime. The traffic police culture of closing ranks and not wanting to report one's colleague found taking bribes has made corruption very difficult to eradicate. You hardly find traffic police officers wanting to report their colleague for fear of victimization and isolation. This article invites a multi-dimensional theoretical approach to understanding traffic police corruption. It also highlights why it has become so difficult to get rid of corruption both in the wider and within a policing context.

Traffic police officers by their constitutional mandate are meant to be free and beyond reproach because of their role in society. The government must also look at the givers of these bribes to the police. They are sustaining a corruptive environment. If an officer asks any motorist for money and they do not give, that officer will think objectively next time not to ask. Any citizen who gives a bribe to the police must be arrested and charged to court. There is plethora of evidence to suggest that the author has persistently placed police corruption within academic domain in South Africa and globally. In 2012, the author presented a paper at the Commonwealth lawyers association hosted by the law faculty of the University of Kwa Zulu Natal South Africa. The author wrote an article in 2013 about Police corruption (with over 14000 reads) as evidenced in www.researchgate.net entries. In 2017, the author also dedicated chapter 4 of his book titled 'The Reality of Crime and Policing in the United Kingdom and South Africa. The author has written extensively on police corruption and police accountability several years before the state capture saga in South Africa. The author is opined that Lt Gen. Mkhwanazi public declaration of institutionalised corruption within the South African Police Service is the right step in the right direction if we are to regain back the lost trust and confidence of citizens back. Corruption retards human development and destroys not only the social fabric of society but also our democratic system government. Corruption hinders police effectiveness and challenges police legitimacy to protect and serve. The author calls for a zero tolerance to police corruption in South Africa.

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