



EFFECTIVE CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN THE POLICE: INSIGHTS FROM A EUROPEAN RESEARCH PROJECT



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Abstract: The following article wants to introduce the COMPOSITE project (Comparative POLice Studies In The EU). It is intended to give an overview of the project structure, partners and its aims as well as to present general results. The COMPOSITE project intends to examine large scale change processes in police forces all across Europe and aims to find out what factors contribute to success or failure of these change processes. It explores such processes in ten European countries with 15 partners over the course of 4 years and will not only generate research results but also implement trainings and diagnostic tools for practical use.

INTRODUCTION

COMPOSITE — COMparative Police Studies in the EU — is an interdisciplinary and cross-national research project to investigate change processes

in Europe's police forces with the aim to identify critical success factors of change processes. COMPOSITE is supported by the European Commission as part of the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological



Figure 1: Map of Europe with countries involved in COMPOSITE
Source: COMPOSITE.



Development and runs from August 2010 to July 2014. The consortium of COMPOSITE consists of 15 research institutes from ten countries (see Figure 1): Rotterdam School of Management of the Erasmus University Rotterdam (the Netherlands, consortium leader), University of Antwerp (Belgium), University of Masaryk in Brno (Czech Republic), University of Applied Sciences of the Brandenburg Police (Germany), Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology FIT (Germany), Capgemini Telecom Media Defence (France), National Center for Scientific Research (France), Foundation for Research on the Migration and Integration of Technologies FORMIT (Italy), St. Kliment Ohridski University Skopje/Bitola (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), University of Utrecht (the Netherlands), Police Academy in Apeldoorn (the Netherlands), Department of Psychology of the Babes-Bolyai University (Romania), ESADE Business School (Spain), Business School of Durham University (United Kingdom), and Sheffield University (United Kingdom).

SOURCE: COMPOSITE.

In addition to the research teams, the project also includes an End User and Strategic Advisory Board from the participating countries to ensure a close connection to the police. The End User Board is an important part of the governing structure of COMPOSITE and is composed of police officers on a senior operational level. The members of the End User Board act as a sounding board for quality and relevance of the deliverables and are especially important for discussions on cultural and national differences in police work. The Strategic Advisory Board is a group of senior policy-makers and police chiefs from the participating countries who function as a consultancy and review board to ensure the strategic link between the project and the police forces in the respective country.

To move the comparative aspect of the research beyond written reports and empirical findings, COMPOSITE also initiated a photo project called COMPOSITE gallery which illustrates the similarities and differences in everyday working life of police officers in the 10 participating countries. Two professional photographers travelled all over Europe and caught remarkable scenes as well as insightful impressions of the inner workings of the visited police departments. The pictures can be seen online via www.composite.rsm.nl.

The goal of the COMPOSITE research project is not restricted to the extension of scientific knowledge and theory building, but it will also help improve management of police forces and thus save public funds by providing benchmarks and learning opportunities, increase the performance of police forces across the EU and help to deepen existing networks and inter- as well as intra-organisational ties between forces.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND WORK PACKAGES

COMPOSITE covers a wide range of research questions and objectives. It is divided into 11 work packages (WP), four of which deal with project management, academic integration, dissemination as well as an exploitation strategy. Seven work packages cover the empirical aspects of COMPOSITE:

- WP 1 looked at the relevant issues on the change agenda in European police forces, the opportunities and threats as well as the primary stakeholder of police forces (Van den Born & van Witteloostuijn, 2011; Van den Born, 2013).
- WP 2 investigated the ability of police forces to react to social, political and economic challenges and identified those police practices that serve as strategies to adapt to those challenges (Graham, Betteridge, Casey & van Witteloostuijn, 2012).
- The focus of WP 3 was on the description and comparative assessment of police communication while asking the questions of how information is distributed and communication is organised (Birdi, Allen, Turgoose, MacDonald & Vössing, 2012a; Birdi, Allen, Turgoose, MacDonald & Vössing, 2012b).
- WP 4 deals with technical trends and challenges to modern police work investigating the different ways of technological adaption (Denef *et al.*, 2011; Denef, Kaptein, Bayerl & Ramirez, 2012).
- WP 5 is designed to identify the influence of cultural factors on the ability of police forces to change and attempts to measure specific



norms that have an impact on change processes (first snapshot results: Elliott, van den Oord, Pólós & Betteridge, 2013). This work package also addressed the following questions: What kind of change processes were implemented? Which ones were successful and which ones were not? What were the success factors and which factors contributed to failure?

- WP 6 researches the organisational culture of police organisations and the professional identity of police officers in order to understand which parts of the specific police culture serve as facilitators for or barriers against change processes (first results: Horton, Bayerl & Jacobs, 2013; Bayerl, Horton & Jacobs, 2013a).
- Finally, WP7 looks at the aspect of leadership in change processes (first results see: Bayerl, Horton & Jacobs, 2013b).

The research process can be tracked via the project's website (www.composite-project.eu) where working papers, publications, presentations, and general news on the COMPOSITE project are released. Information on the on-going project progress is also given in a monthly COMPOSITE newsletter.

RESEARCH METHODS

The COMPOSITE project uses a multi-method approach. Over the course of the project, several hundred semi-structured interviews (qualitative social research) with police officers of all hierarchical levels — operational, supervisory, strategic level — were carried out in the participating police forces. In WP 1, a PESTL analysis was conducted examining the topics of police policy in terms of political (P), economic (E), social (S), technological (T) and legal (L) trends. As part of WP 2, a SWOT analysis was conducted, giving valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of police organisations, as well as the opportunities and threats they are faced with. This research also focussed on the dynamic capabilities of the police forces involved. In most work packages, also a case study approach was used to describe specific change processes in greater detail. In addition to the semi-structured interviews and the case studies, a core survey (quantitative social research) was conducted in all countries in order to test the hypotheses that were formulated on the basis of the previously conducted interviews. The

data was collected through an online and paper-based questionnaire distributed to the individual participants between September and October 2013. At the time of writing (March 2014), the analysis of the assembled data was still going on.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Police forces all over the world are constantly forced to change in order to react to political, social, technological, economic, legal and environmental developments (Van den Born & Witteloostuijn, 2011; Van den Born *et al.*, 2013). Most of these changes do not encounter significant resistance nor do they run into any kind of significant problems. Examples of routine changes may include the introduction of more advanced technologies, legal changes, or procedural improvements. But some changes can create significant irritation among the members of the organisation or major stakeholders, trigger criticism and resistance and may not yield the desired results. Particularly, changes that do not take into account organisational, professional, or cultural parameters, often turn out to be risky and prone to failure (Jacobs, Christe-Zeyse, Keegan & Pólós, 2008). Therefore, COMPOSITE focuses on organisational structures, organisational identities and cultures, leadership styles, and processes in the context of change.

In this respect, police forces to a large degree depend on their organisational environment. In order to be successful, police forces need to operate in networks and cooperate with different external stakeholders — municipal administrations; educational institutions; media; citizen; justice, to name but a few — in due consideration of their mutual expectations (cf. Gruschinske & Hirschmann, 2013, p. 187). As part of WP 1 and 2, the stakeholder management of the participating police forces was examined with respect to how important of the stakeholder is for the police and what kind of influence the stakeholder has upon the police (Barlage, van den Born & Jochoms, 2012).

There is strong evidence that in most police forces, there does not seem to exist a strategically oriented stakeholder management, meaning that many police organisations invest too much time and effort in stakeholders that are not particularly relevant for them, and at



the same time neglecting stakeholders that are or might be of critical importance. Thus, the researched police forces should monitor, reconsider, or change the way they deal with their external stakeholders (especially the ones they depend on) in order to improve their networking-performance.

This also applies to the management of citizens' relationship. The research reveals that in most police forces, citizens are seen as one of the most important external stakeholders. Consequently, citizens' expectations could and should be managed much more actively; this aspect of police work is more difficult than anticipated, however, because — from a police officers' perspective — the average citizen does not seem to have a sufficient understanding of police work. Still, increased communication and awareness training as well as a more professional information and communication strategy seems to be needed in most of the police forces that participated in the research. This also implies the use of social media.

The analysis of the way police forces use social media was part of a separate work package (WP 4) in which technological trends, performance, and technology adaption were analysed (Denef *et al.*, 2011; Denef *et al.*, 2012). Sebastian Denef *et al.* (2011) identified six major themes in the context of information and communication technology within police forces; one is about the emerging challenge of social media applications. In a second study, Denef *et al.* (2012) focussed on best practice in police social media adaption. Our data clearly show that the use of social media was significantly more advanced in countries such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom as opposed to most other European countries. In the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, social media are also seen as among the most effective ways to communicate with citizens and manage the public image of the police. This may lead to the conclusion that the organisational culture of the police forces in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands is more open to adapt swiftly to social changes such as the increasing use of social media compared to other forces (see: Denef, Bayerl & Kaptein, 2013). Our research gives clear indication that the use of social media is a highly relevant topic of organisational change and needs therefore — with all its benefits and costs — to be handled with a strategic perspective. However, Denef *et al.* (2013) emphasise that these findings

should not be seen as a blueprint or a step by step instruction of how to implement social media within the police. They rather illustrate best practice examples of the technological adaptability of European's police forces bearing in mind that different organisational cultures and different perceptions of the role of police in society have to be taken into account before police forces embark on a way to use social media as a means to communicate with the public.

As important as the issue of social media may be, it is embedded in a wider issue area that deals with information and communication in general. Here, the differences between police organisations in Europe are also striking. Birdi *et al.* (2012a; 2012b) focussed on the capabilities of police organisations to share knowledge within their own organisation, with other forces nationally as well as internationally, and also with respect to the public and other relevant stakeholders. Their findings suggest that the researched police forces differ strongly in their preferences regarding knowledge sharing and their method of communication. Even if one particular communication method is seen as most effective in one culture, it may play a significantly different role in another. One thing most police organisations had in common, however, was a clearly stated preference for direct personal contact and face to face communication whenever it was possible and justifiable (see Figure 2).

The findings by Birdi *et al.* (2012a; 2012b) are integrated into a conceptual framework of 10 types of factors found to influence knowledge sharing effectiveness in different domains. Based on these findings, a diagnostic tool (EKSPD-DI) was designed specifically for police organisations in order to help benchmark knowledge sharing performance in different domains, identify and underline major barriers for knowledge sharing and offer strategies to overcome these barriers (Turgoose *et al.*, 2012a; Turgoose *et al.*, 2012b).

A first data analysis regarding organisational culture, identity and leadership illustrates that successful change processes have several factors in common: they are usually originated from within the police forces, the need for the change can be expressed in police terms, and good leadership is critical (Bayerl *et al.*, 2013b). Despite the seemingly wide-spread assumption

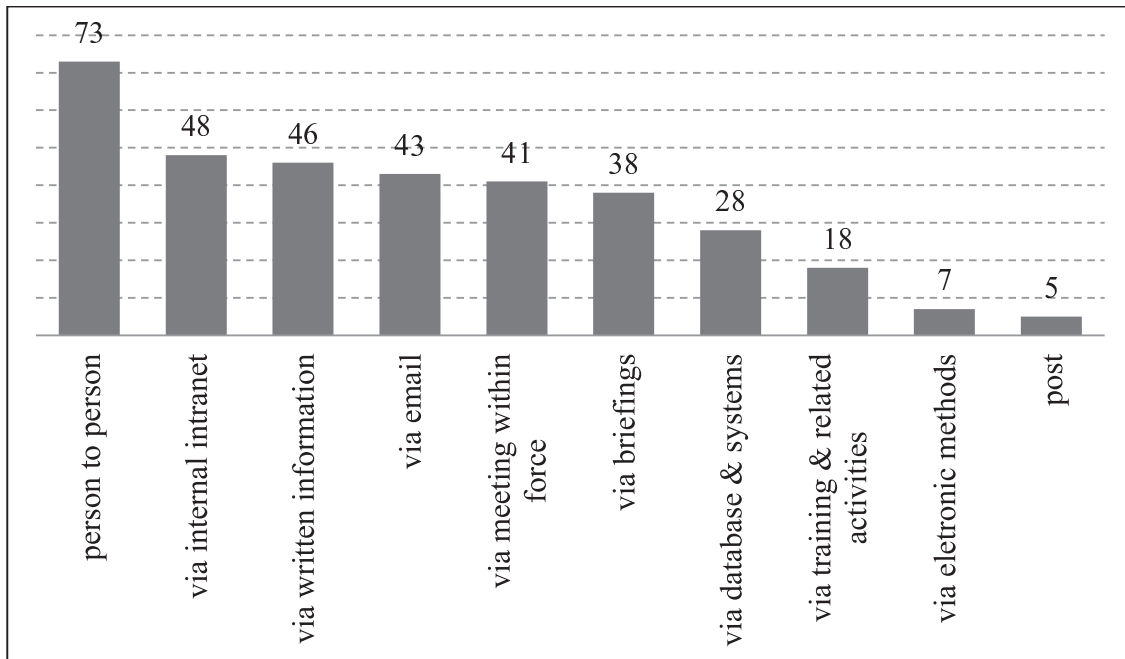


Figure 2: Top ten most effective methods of knowledge sharing within forces across all ten countries (number of references made; total no. of references made: 389)

Source: Birdi et al. 2012a.

that all police officers are ‘somehow the same’, our data clearly show that organisational cultures and professional identities in the police are vastly different (Bayerl et al., 2013a). Furthermore, the data analysis explored different reconciliation strategies which may be used to tackle identity threats and conflicts to maintain commitment among the members of the organisation (Horton et al., 2013). At the time of writing (March 2014), the analysis of the identity and leadership issues is still in progress. The final results promise to be highly relevant and insightful.

CONCLUSIONS AND CHALLENGES

Very often we try to change organisations although we hardly understand how they work. Very often we dream of improving things by changing the organisational architecture. Very often we touch upon cultural identities without being aware of them. Very often we trigger resistance against change and do not know where it comes from. And very often we falsely assume that police cultures and practices are basically the same all over Europe. Moreover, we often try to improve things by looking for best practices without taking into account the cultural

and organisational context. The COMPOSITE project attempts to shed light upon these issues using a multi-disciplinary, multi-level, multi-method and multi-country approach.

But COMPOSITE also provides valuable insights into the specific problems one may run into doing research in the police. As we have seen so far, most European police organisations are subject to permanent change. This makes the analysis of the impact of individual change processes highly complex, because there are always several change processes going on at the same time that influence each other and lead to interference effects that make it hard to isolate consequences of the change. In addition, research methods developed in the private sector are of limited use in the police. Police performance cannot be measured the same way as the performance of a company, critical statistical data and key performance indicators are hard to come by or often unreliable. This issue turned out to be one of the major problems of doing research in the police. Moreover, the political leadership is often reluctant to have politically difficult change processes evaluated scientifically. As one of the interviewed police officers said poignantly: ‘Most police organisations are still ruled by two simple principles. 1. Don’t do anything that might question the impression of organisational rationality and, 2. Never let the chief look bad’.



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