
Part-time leadership in the Baden-Württemberg police force: a qualitative study

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Abstract

Similarly to changes in the social work environment, the police force is faced with the request of its police officers to improve the combination of work and family life. This is accompanied by the request to take a family break or the request to work part-time. This study analyses the question of whether the existing frameworks are useful to the police of Baden-Württemberg in Germany to successfully implement part-time leadership positions. This was done by a qualitative semi-structured interview study. The sample included six experts from Lower-Saxony interviewed about their experience in part-time leadership at their police force, where part-time arrangements in leadership positions are already systematically organised. The sample also included six experts from Baden-Württemberg where systematic implementation does not yet exist. The current stage of development of part-time leadership is described and recommendations are given for successfully developing this instrument as a positive and reasonable way to accommodate personal or family needs with career and work life in the police.

Keywords:

leadership, part-time, police officers, job sharing, work–life balance.

Introduction

The aging population, the increasing scarcity of young, skilled and talented people, and the late family formation phase are modified factors that businesses and the public administration, and therefore also the police force, are faced with. In order to remain competitive and attractive for employees, flexible solutions for work organisations are needed. In this context, working part-time plays an increasingly important role. This is reflected in the constantly growing proportion of part-time employment in the labour market. In 2000, a total of 19 % of the workforce were in part-time employment in Germany;

this figure already amounted to 26 % in 2010. The proportion of women grew from 38 % to 45 %, and the proportion of men from 5 % to 10 % (Brenke, 2011). The increase is the result of the desire of workers and a process of rethinking in organisations. Policy is a crucial initiator for the realisation of part-time work since it has promoted the enhancement of work–life balance in recent years. Employers value the flexibility of part-time employment because they are able to respond quickly to personnel requirements and to changes in operating times (Wanger, 2011). Among employees, the reasons for taking it differ according to gender. Most of the women identify personal aspirations that include not only a useful and productive career but also a healthy family life. Among men, continuing professional development or the lack of appropriate full-time positions are responsible for part-time employment (Brenke, 2011). Furthermore, men also want to participate in family life more fully today and feel estranged from it by the all-encompassing demands of their work. These trends are also apparent in occupations such as the police force.

Childcare concerns have become a major issue, putting the subject of flexible and part-time work schedules, also among leadership positions, on the agenda. For years, the proportion of women in the police has continuously increased (11 % in higher intermediate and 6.1 % in higher grades of the civil service). As in the general labour market, part-time work in the police service is primarily associated with the employment of women (e.g. Silvestri, 2007). The introduction of part-time schedules was part of an employer strategy to attract and retain a female presence in the workforce and to comply with equality legislation (Edwards and Robinson, 1999).

Due to the developments it is expected that part-time arrangements are going to play an increasingly important role within the police service because they have to be aware of pressures mounting around lifestyle issues, which have been placed on the agenda by the growing numbers of young talented employees.

A current study (Jochmann-Döll, 2016), 'Part-time leadership: opportunities and limitations in the police service', is based on data regarding part-time leadership, which was collected in all of the federal states of Germany. The number of female executives in the state of Baden-Württemberg is very low (5.7 %) compared to the rest of the country. The same applies to the proportion of female executives working part-time to the overall number of executives at 2.3 %. The high proportion of male executives working part-time (nearly 60 %) is remarkable. The fact that executives in the police service in Baden-Württemberg are now able to delay the maximum working age limit for 1 year and thus gain 10 % more income is a possible reason for the high amount of male part-time leaders. Many civil servants use this opportunity to earn the same money and reduce their working hours without any loss. The possibility of reducing the working hours is practiced at all hierarchic levels. The fact that the Baden-Württemberg police force enables the reduction of working hours for any employee shows a high will to change. This great will should be used positively in the next few years.

Different definitions for the term leadership can be found (e.g. Walenta and Kirchler, 2008). Following Yukl (1998, p. 14) these can be summarised as follows: 'Most definitions share the assumption that it (leadership) involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people in an attempt to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation'. Within this study the only positions considered are those which are referred to in police organisations as management functions and are also entrusted with personnel responsibility. Similarly to the general labour market, a significant proportion of employees make use of part-time arrangements. An employee is engaged in part-time work when the regular weekly working time is shorter than that of a comparable worker in full-time employment. Work packages are usually designed in particular for full-time job positions, therefore part-time employment often leads to the division of a position or a workplace by two or more employees — this is referred to as job sharing (e.g. Baillod, 2000). Job sharing can be configured in such a way that the tasks that are applied in a particular position are divided between employees. Each incumbent is responsible for their allotted tasks during their work schedule; another possibility could be that all tasks that arise when present are carried out by the employees who share a position. This requires a division of the attendance times instead, thus separating a full-time job purely by time and not by content. This is meaningful when a task needs to be implemented through shared responsibility. Intense and constant coordination between the partners is indispensable (Bordet, 2009).

A study shows that 94 % of female and 78 % of male managers wish for the opportunity to reduce their weekly working hours or make them more flexible (Coffman and Hagey, 2010). Despite the fact that this flexibility is offered in most companies, just a few of them use it. This is often due to the executives' lack of trust in the company or in the organisation.

Fears prevail that exploiting a reduction in or the flexibility of working time could have negative effects on their career. In many cases there are no role models in comparable positions that are not limited in their career despite a reduction in or the flexibility of working schedules. However, even working time models such as flextime can be proposed as an argument to recruit qualified and talented people and motivate them in the long term (Coffman and Hagey, 2010). Quantitative and qualitative data indicate the significant effects of a shared leadership initiative in a police department through improvements in employees' perceptions of work conditions, labour-management relations, commitment, community-orientated policing, and increases in discretionary police productivity (Steinheider and Wuestewald, 2008).

Police forces are exposed to ever-increasing challenges within their human resources. On the one hand, they have to cope with demographic change and expected large-scale retirements. On the other hand, a more liberal human resources policy is added that facilitates and promotes part-time work in terms of work-life balance. Low birth rates with a simultaneous increase in life expectancy, an expected shortage of skilled workers

but also gender equality demands need to successfully meet joint efforts at all levels. It is important that equal opportunities are no longer associated with women but that 'diversity management' in companies and organisations arrives and is practiced.

Diversity management aims at the many specific and different experiences of employees and adjusts and emphasises the value of individuality in order to make it available for organisational success (Hasebrook, Dohrn and Jablonowski, 2011). Working for the police can be difficult and its leadership could make demands upon physical and mental capacities, but 'although the 'natural' capacity to lead varies from individual to individual, the qualities required by police leaders can be developed by proper education and professional training' (Adlam and Villiers, 2003, p. 14).

In this study, an answer to the question should be found as to why part-time work is only marginally applied within leadership positions and to what extent the existing framework conditions in the police force are appropriate to successfully implement part-time leadership. The main emphasis will be, independent of gender, on the specific characteristics, substantial organisational demands and requirements of the framework of part-time leadership. Furthermore, an answer should be found to the following questions. What are the critical success factors for part-time leadership? Who desires this model and who is it promoted or rejected by? Are positions in the higher intermediate and higher grades of the civil service basically suitable for part-time work in the occupation? And is the acceptance of part-time leadership essential for their success? A lack of framework conditions and necessary organisational changes will be discussed and suggestions for improvements worked out. To answer the above-mentioned questions twelve experts from two police forces (from Lower-Saxony and Baden-Württemberg) were consulted about the framework for the management of part-time work in the police service, using a qualitative semi-structured interview method.

Method

Sample and data collection

The questions relating to part-time leadership positions address individual experiences; therefore this issue has been studied with the use of a qualitative method of semi-structured problem-centred interviews with experts (Helfferich, 2009).

This interview technique allows, depending on the course of the conversation, a flexible ordering of the written questions. Twelve experts were selected; each one has comprehensive experience in part-time leadership in their police work and different perspectives.

In the selection of experts it was noted that both part-time leaders and their supervisors were included in the sample in order to get multiple perspectives. The sample included six experts

from Lower-Saxony, interviewed about their experience with part-time leadership at their police force where part-time arrangements in leadership positions are already systematically organised and six experts from Baden-Württemberg where systematic implementation does not yet exist. Among the experts (35-58 years of age), there are seven men and five women. Three female and four male experts are police officers of the higher grade, and two female and three male experts are of the higher intermediate grade of the civil service.

The experts were initially contacted by phone to find out whether they were willing to participate in the interview study. During this call, an appointment for the implementation of the interview was agreed. Beforehand, the experts were prepared for the subject with a cover letter sent by email and asked to complete the social data sheet and return it before the appointment. The interviews were conducted with the help of the software Skype for internet telephony and electronically saved with the recording tool 'MP3 Skype Recorder 3.1'. The duration of the interviews amounted to 40-92 minutes, added to the time of the preliminary talk. The interviews followed the sequence of the primary questionnaire guidelines. Consequential and deeper questions were flexibly installed at appropriate points in the interview. Any comments and questions of the experts and the interviewer beyond the questionnaire were allowed at any time.

Instrument

The interview guidelines contain 11 concrete questions with follow-up and deeper questions about part-time leadership in their police force (e.g. 'To what extent has the need and demand for part-time leadership changed in your organisation in recent years?'; 'Does part-time leadership influence the performance of the organisation?'; 'What, in your opinion, are the most critical success factors for part-time leadership?').

The experts' personal data were queried with the help of the social data sheets. After the interviews, an interview postscript sheet was filled out (there, the essential core elements and specificities of the interviews were noted). The interview instruments were pilot tested beforehand by another expert. Therefore, pilot results were analysed to improve the clarity and readability of questions.

Analyses/transcription

The transcription was done by the verbatim transcript of the spoken word. Long breaks or other interruptions, such as by laughter or by disturbances in the physical environment, were marked in the text. Anonymity was assured to the experts prior to the interview. The contents of the interviews were reproduced under the thematic codes in their original wording with the corresponding reference number and the respective underlying interview number (1-12). A systematisation and reduction of information was supported by the software MAXQDA 11. MAXQDA 11 is a programme for computer assisted qualitative data analysis by means of which the interviews were analysed with a code system (Gläser und Laudel, 2010). The code system was created after the evaluation of the first four

interviews and adjusted or extended with every interview when needed. After evaluating all interviews, the code system was retested on validity of all 12 interviews. The 631 codes were assigned to 18 codes, separated by codes and exported to Microsoft Excel. These were then verified for validity and completeness. Falsely interpreted statements were reassessed. At the end, the correct allocation of all interview segments could be ensured.

Results

Assessment and application procedures

The respondents from Baden-Württemberg indicated that the existing assessment procedure will be questioned in that order if a comprehensible performance feedback is delivered. Agreement exists among experts from Baden-Württemberg and Lower-Saxony that part-time workers are disadvantaged in the evaluations of their performance compared with full-time workers. Therefore awareness-raising activities were initiated to curb discrimination and disadvantages in both federal states. The interviewed experts of the higher intermediate and higher grades of the civil service that employed part-time employees in leadership positions were all of the opinion that a suitably qualified candidate could prevail against candidates in full-time arrangements in an application process. In contrast, the employees with a part-time management position held differing views. According to the experts from Baden-Württemberg, the application for a part-time leadership position a priori hardly has any chance. Regarding the implementation of targeted procurements for leadership positions, even part-time leadership, experts from Lower-Saxony expressed positive experiences about the chances in their own federal state. The meaningfulness was emphasised by the majority of part-time leaders. In Baden-Württemberg the existing lack of human resources as a barrier to part-time leadership was repeatedly commented on, especially with regard to smaller departments. Part-time leadership is often the result of family-related time-outs (parental leave, care leave) of executives in full-time employment, who then carry out their tasks part-time. It is essential for the experts to generate role models in order to increase the implementation of part-time leadership. Clear signs and targeted communication of the organisation regarding part-time leadership cannot be recognised, which is why a claim to leadership of part-time workers is not often invoked.

Suitability of positions for part-time leadership

Part-time positions are more likely to have been carried out in Lower-Saxony, therefore the following findings mainly relate to these experts. The answers from Lower-Saxony on the question regarding the suitability of positions is characterised overall by a great openness with respect to different work schedules, flexibility and creativity. For example, there is the possibility to adapt the monthly allotment of hours to the volume of work. In general, the majority of experts estimate that almost all positions are appropriate for part-time leadership. It is therefore necessary to allocate such functions into work packages and the

delegation of work packages, which are not originally managerial responsibilities, into the organisation.

Nearly all experts were in agreement that the suitability of a position does not depend on the number of employees. Part-time experts in leading departments have 4 to about 100 employees. On the other hand, departments with many duties of representation and functions with ad-hoc operations are judged as less suitable for part-time leadership. The experts have considered all kinds of shift work as very well suited for part-time leadership. In demand-driven shift-work models, which partly apply in Lower-Saxony, the fixed work arrangements are dissolved. Therefore the distribution of different allotments of hours is easily possible.

The effect of part-time leadership on the performance of an organisation

The experts agreed that part-time leadership does not affect the performance of an organisational unit. However, this assessment was linked to various conditions. The deputy in particular plays a key role, without whom it is difficult to implement part-time leadership successfully.

The communication, delegation and high level of motivation of the leadership partners compensates for the reduced presence at the workplace. It was further noted by all experts that accessibility, even outside office hours, plays a central role. Before entering into part-time leadership, intensive preparation of executives for their future responsibilities should be ensured. All experts who work part-time considered that they have a more effective way of working, that they are able to distinguish between important and unimportant things very well and can recognise and eliminate redundant processes.

Operational aspects of the implementation of part-time leadership

For the parent who is primarily responsible for childcare, it is essential to find a workplace that is compatible with childcare hours. For most of the experts, the collaboration of the police force with on-site childcare facilities would be an important signal to actually encourage work-life balance. To successfully implement part-time leadership, further flexible working measures on the part of the organisation are required, but also flexibility on the part of the executives. In some parts, the departments already allow very flexible work schedules, for example, the possibility to change the hourly rate monthly, depending on workload. The results of the interviews showed that permanent presence at the workplace is not associated with higher efficiency and performance. In contrast, flexible work schedules using demand-driven shift-work are evaluated more positively. Likewise, there is agreement that it is necessary on the part of the part-time leaders to be approachable and accessible beyond the regular office periods.

Regarding the issue of job sharing, experts have different opinions. A number of respondents have an open attitude toward this type of part-time work, even in leadership, or have

already worked in such a model. Other respondents evaluate this model very critically. Key points of criticism are the different abilities of supervisors who cannot be competent in all main subject areas in the same way; therefore achieving a uniform approach within a police department is ultimately not possible. In contrast, an expert considered that job sharing results in better management decisions because outside of ad-hoc operations a vote may be taken under both incumbents. In addition, no one was able to contribute his/her specific expertise at the appropriate point. However, the following disadvantages were mentioned: high communication and coordination efforts; positions with corresponding external visibility; additional costs in terms of equipment and training; and an increased amount of time for the necessary arrangements.

There is agreement that compensation measures are required to fulfil the tasks in changed work schedules such as job sharing. The part-time experts agreed that regular and intensive communication with their employees but also with the deputy is important. Despite the intensive involvement of the deputy, the part-time leaders emphasise that they have acquired a more rapid and effective way of working. Nevertheless, the majority of experts emphasised the necessity of consequently allocating responsibilities or work packages.

Organisational culture

The majority of experts mentioned there being a strongly pronounced presence at the workplace in police forces. Looking at work performance, four experts stressed that there was a culture of mistrust against part-time employees or employees who claim flexible working hours or telework.

According to one expert, the police are very well positioned to implement part-time leadership positions because of the legitimately regulated right, the good technical equipment, the necessary size of the organisational unit and the political commitment to work–life balance; however, traditional role models complicate the implementation or simply appear as barriers.

An unbiased approach to part-time leadership (especially by men in part-time work) would be desirable in terms of a cultural change. Openness and communication and establishing role models are essential elements to successfully implement part-time leadership. It was noted that physical presence is not dependent on the acceptance of leadership performance. The competence would not be limited by part-time work. Important frameworks for part-time leadership were the accessibility and flexibility of executives at significant events and explicit deputation regulations in the organisation.

Most of the experts made the clear positioning of supervisors and the organisation responsible for the acceptance of part-time leadership. Two experts indicated that they had the impression that the acceptance of part-time leadership was higher than for part-time work without managerial responsibilities.

Discussion

The present study concludes that according to the experience of experts from the police service in Baden-Württemberg, there is currently no comprehensive concept for part-time leadership in the Baden-Württemberg police. From the interview study it can be deduced that it was never clearly postulated on the part of the management that part-time leadership is a desirable or at least possible option; consequently it was not experienced in the workforce and thus seemed to be impossible and was accepted by the organisation and the immediate supervisor only in exceptional cases. In contrast, positive remarks about developments in human resources are mentioned from experiences in the police service in Lower-Saxony where part-time arrangements in leadership positions are already systematically practiced. In the case of the situation in the police service in Baden-Württemberg, these changes in Lower-Saxony could be seen as a motivating role model for the inevitable developments in the police service in Baden-Württemberg. Therefore, working part-time is no longer an atypical or non-standard form of employment (e.g. Brewster, 1996; De Grip, Hoevenberg and Willems, 1997). The study shows that part-time executives are perceived differently. According to experts, awareness activities are sufficient to counteract the disadvantage of part-time employees.

The experts agreed that being present at the workplace is not considered to be a suitable measure of performance. Nevertheless, the prevailing presence culture in the police was emphasised. Ultimately this is because good performance does have a better chance of being perceived in the organisation if more time is spent at the workplace. The part-time leaders' great organisational skills and effective work methods are witnessed. Although these are important characteristics for the smooth operation of organisations, their effect is less visible and often unnoticed.

While supervisors think that good applicants can be successful in the application process for part-time leadership positions, the potential applicants are more sceptical, and often do not dare to apply because of actual or invisible barriers (e.g. Charlesworth, Keen and Whittenbury, 2009). Female officers often lack the confidence and question their ability to fill a leadership position with a reduced amount of work. This could be a reason for them not to apply for such a position. Furthermore, it is argued that successful role models to which one can orientate oneself are missing (e.g. Silvestri, 2006). Although the occupation of part-time positions is unusual today, the experts agree that almost all management positions can be occupied part-time. Only specific departments are excluded, such as equestrian or dog units (because of the relationship between the dog and the dog-handler, also living together at home); positions in the highest hierarchical level with a large amount of representation duties; and positions with ad-hoc operations. A good organisational foundation and a division of positions in fixed and flexible work packages appear as particularly important, which may optionally be displaced away from the leadership to representatives or to other departments in the organisation.

The study reveals that the performance of an organisational unit does not suffer with part-time leadership. Rather, special organisational and coordination skills and the role of the deputy are emphasised, with accessibility outside regular working hours deemed essential. In order to bring back primarily female police officers after parental leave as quickly as possible, organised childcare seems indispensable. Since part-time leadership is often taken in the context of family circumstances and home care situations, they mostly deal with a double burden. But even minor reductions in working hours can be satisfactory in order to cope with this double burden. Flexibility is necessary for successful performance in part-time work, both by the executives and the supervisors, for example through adaptable weekly working hours or demand-driven shift-work models. On the operational level, part-time leadership can be organised through job sharing or the reduction of weekly working hours with the use of other compensatory opportunities. Nevertheless, a readiness to be accessible in case of emergencies outside actual working hours must exist in part-time leadership positions, as already applies to full-time leadership positions.

Handling the work-life balance of the employees as well as the increasing number of well-trained young talented people in the police is a major challenge that requires further studies. It would be worthwhile to look at (some) police forces where part-time leadership has already been institutionalised and examine whether the desired effect has (already) been achieved there. Quantitative studies would complement this study and deepen the findings obtained. In order to successfully implement changes in an organisation, a range of barriers have to be broken and resistance has to be overcome. Should part-time leadership be implemented in the police service to help employees combine work and family life, a consistent concept has to be developed. There must be a clear commitment from the head of the organisation, combined with a broad communication on this issue. Based on the results of this study, the concept should contain the following issues: which positions are suitable for conversion into part-time? how a specific change in the performance of tasks can be optionally reacted to by shifting work packages; how working time and work organisations can be configured more flexibly; how successful role models could be created; how calls for tenders can be indicated; and how personnel planning must be adapted.

Based on a well thought-out concept and modern circumstances there will be the chance that the issue of part-time work in leadership positions as a key component for a better work-life balance will be a feasible vision instead of an illusion. This is because such evaluation means that not only a tiny proportion of police officers will see part-time work as positive and as a reasonable way to accommodate personal or family needs with their career within the police force.

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