

An Exploration of European Police Professional Identities in COMPOSITE Countries

Summary of WP6.2 Results (Identity), 2014

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WP6.2 examined the professional identity of the police and the link between identity and change acceptance. In particular, we took a stakeholder perspective, considering how changes are influenced by different stakeholders (within and outside of the police) and how the attitudes of these different groups contribute to the successful implementation of change initiatives.

Within this context, we aimed to investigate 3 key questions:

1. First, how do different stakeholder groups view the professional identity of the police (i.e., what do they think are the central norms and values of the police profession?) and do citizens, media representatives and the police themselves hold different perceptions regarding what it means to be the police?
2. Second, what types of changes in policing would different stakeholders like to see implemented? Specifically, how do police, citizens and the media feel about changes to the police, which would see more citizen oriented or crime fighter oriented forces, or which would see more or less involvement of the public in policing matters?
3. Third, how do stakeholders' perceptions of police professional identity affect their acceptance of change? We predicted here that individuals would be more accepting of a proposed change if it was in keeping with their understanding of police professional identity (i.e., if it promoted norms and values that they regarded as important for the profession), while a change would be resisted if it was perceived as incongruent with key norms and values.

Methods

This research was based on surveys and interviews conducted in the 10 COMPOSITE countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Macedonia, The Netherlands, Spain, Romania and the United Kingdom) in September-December 2013. In each country we assessed police officers' perceptions regarding a wide-range of issues, including organizational change and police culture and identity. In addition we interviewed, citizens and media representatives, to glean their attitudes towards change and their understanding of police professional identity. These interviews also captured the public's trust in the police and their perceptions of police performance. Participants in both police surveys and citizen/media interviews were asked to evaluate their acceptance of 4 different police change scenarios. These scenarios all included a technology focus, involving change initiatives aimed at the use of social

media, online tools and mobile technologies. The total sample size for our analyses (across countries and sample groups) was 10207.

Results

Consistent with our expectations, we found that there were differences in perceptions of police professional identity across countries. In addition, we found that there were often discrepancies in perceptions of police professional identity within the same country, where police, citizens and the media demonstrated unique perspectives on the importance of key underlying identity values.

Similarly, we found that attitudes towards change were shaped by national context and stakeholder affiliation. In general, police officers across our participant countries were most supportive of a move towards more crime-fighting and exclusive patterns of policing. In contrast, media representatives were most supportive of a move towards citizen-service and inclusive forms of policing. Citizens' were equally accepting of all proposed changes, except for a crime-fighting inclusive form of policing, which would see members of the public playing a greater role in law enforcement. Participants from all 3 types of groups (police, citizen and media representatives) were broadly unsupportive of this proposed change model.

Finally, we found that professional identity values shaped individuals' change scenario acceptance. More specifically, we found that a proposed change was more strongly supported where it was closely aligned with an individual's identity values concerning the police profession.

Discussion and Recommendations

WP6.2 has a number of key implications for the implementation of change in police organizations. We next outline the main implications of our findings, together with recommendations for change managers.

Insight 1: There is little agreement in the desired change directions in European policing advocated by different stakeholder groups (but citizens/media are important for change).

- Recommendation: Change managers may benefit from considering the differing priorities, expectations and preferences of different stakeholder groups when delivering change initiatives. By understanding the underlying concerns, points of resistance and desires of key stakeholders, change leaders can better understand, pre-empt and respond to the unique concerns of these different groups.
- Recommendation: Societal and policing leaders should also discuss and, where possible, agree changes with key stakeholder groups in order to enhance support for the change and gain change acceptance.

Insight 2: There are national differences in the acceptance of different (technology-based) change scenarios.

- Recommendation: This finding speaks to the context dependence of technological changes. The

broad acceptance of new technologies thus requires designs and implementation strategies that are closely targeted to the expectations and values of a particular police force. More particularly, change managers should consider the differing norms, values and contexts of different police groups when delivering change initiatives at both a national and a European level.

Insight 3: Professional identity values shape individuals' change scenario acceptance.

- Recommendation: It is important that proposed changes are aligned with key norms and values of policing and/or that change communication strategies are tailored to emphasize the benefits of the change. More specifically, change managers should reconcile the differing perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups and adopt communication strategies that clearly document the links between a proposed change and the core values of the police profession.