

Structural and Cultural Changes in European Police Forces

Summary of of COMPOSITE's Deliverable 5.1 First cross-country comparison: Structural & Cultural Changes in European Police Forces, 2013

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1. Introduction

European police forces are under pressure to change, and are constantly changing in order to react to political, social, technological, economic, legal and environmental factors. As part of exploring the theory of organisational change the aims of this deliverable were to offer an answer to the following key questions:

- *Why some change initiatives are successfully and efficiently implemented and generate support among employees and stakeholders?*
- *Why are there so many organisational change initiatives that fail to deliver?*
- *How can organisational change be managed to become a success?*

It is important to note that the analysis and results in this deliverable provide a 'snapshot'. The data and findings at this stage of the project should be treated as providing preliminary insights. Between September 2012 and January 2013, 465 structured interviews were conducted. 26 different police forces took part within 10 participating countries.

First we explored the relationship between the:

- *Features of the organisational change,*
- *Characteristics of the interviewee,*
- *Success of the process and the,*
- *Result of the change project.*

Second we tested:

- *What kind of changes challenge the taken-for-granted expectations of organisational members.*
- *Which changes lead to different kinds of opposition.*
- *How the opposition to change is resolved, and*
- *How the characteristics of the organisation (i.e., intricacy, opacity, and asperity) influence the*

success of organisational changes.

Finally, we will combine the information gathered in this deliverable within a core survey which will be carried out in September-October 2013.

2. Theoretical background

Organisation change processes and/or reorganisations distinguishes between ***content*** and ***process*** effects (Hannan et al 2007):

- ***Content effects:*** what state was the organisation in before the change and how it compares when the change is complete.
- ***Process effects:*** when an organisations performance is in decline. Response is to initiate a change project. Becomes the focus of leaders resulting in further performance decline. Improved performance only evident as a benefit at end of change process and only if clearly indicated as an outcome before change took place.

Scientific literature fails to explain why the vast majority of change projects are unsuccessful and remain incomplete and why they have failed to deliver all the expected benefits predicted at the outset of the project initiation (Hannan et al 2007). What factors therefore contribute to successful and unsuccessful organisational change projects? What are the pre and post stages of organisational change, the opportunity costs and how they connect with organisational characteristics, such as opacity, intricacy and asperity?

Organisational ecology literature provides strong deductive arguments as to why in more intricate organisations; even relatively simple reorganisations can be potentially fatal because high intricacy allows for a high centrality of the initial organisational change. Strong organisational or professional identity also impacts on the speed of change processes (Le Mens et al, 2011).

The three main observations of the ***nature*** of organisational change are:

- *That organisational change is a **risky strategy**;*
- *the organisational change industry is **dominated by consultancies that preach universal solutions to organisation-specific problems** (Sorge and van Witteloostuijn, 2004);*
- *In organisational theory and practice there is a tendency to ignore the major influence of cultural and institutional differences i.e. what works in one country (or culture, more broadly), may well produce disaster in another country (or culture).*

The three levels of ***influential*** factors are:

- *Character of the **organisation***
- *Role of **leadership***
- *Reactions of the **individual police officer** and other stakeholders.*

3. Data and methods - three interlinked stages:

- **Pictogram Data:** to explore the relationship between, the features of the organisational change, the characteristics of the interviewee, the success of the process and result of the change project
- **Interview Data:** to provide more insight into the process of organisational change, to provide input for the core survey and to test some of the basic relationships of our model.
- **Core Survey:** to understand the factors that impact on the likelihood of successful change outcomes, while adding to organisational change theory development.

Interview Data: Interviewees were asked to describe a change project. We were particularly interested in:

- **Organisational Intricacy:** the results highlight the complexity of the police in **Belgium** - 5 police forces. Compared to **Germany** - 2 forces, whilst in other countries there is one force.
- **Organizational Opacity:** formal structures and how much information is shared between different units.
- **Cultural Asperity:** the 'taken-for-granted' expectations. This is localised and decreases from the individual to the national level. Expectations mainly centre on **process**, **personnel** and **culture**.
- **Organisational Leadership:** Results show a high evaluation of the senior ranking officer – chief constable. Perceived to have all the characteristics of leadership i.e. role model, typical police man/woman, strong leader, clear vision, passionate, makes good decisions, team builder, has character.

Expectations Challenged

For each change project, we asked the interviewee to indicate whether the change project actually challenged the taken-for-granted expectations of him/her or his/her subordinates. **Cultural** and the frequency of **Technological** changes were low. **Personnel**, **Process** and **Culture** changes were highlighted as more likely to challenge expectations.

Opposition to Change considered the following reactions:

- **Active Resistance** - at national level countries reported protests and demonstrations by either Police Unions or 'off duty' police e.g. **Romania** and **France**.
- **Passive Resistance**
- **Compliance** - **Italy** stated that compliance is the most active form of resistance.

"It is all about method: when we meet resistance e.g. due to scepticism, we endure in implementing, we believe in the change and demonstrated its value with practical results."

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Cooperation - force wide this appears the dominant strategy. We believe this may reflect policing culture. Many interviewees commented that despite being opposed to the change there simply is no alternative but to cooperate, because "*it doesn't matter if we agree or not, in the end, we have to do our jobs.*"

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Championing – very little evidence.

Resolution - 2 routes:

- Individuals accept the changes or take action to deal with them.
- The organisation changes the goals of the change project or communicates the benefits of the change.

Organisation Level - In *France* organisational goals were not modified because most of them were decided at a national level and there is no consultation or meetings. Informal communication was frequently mentioned *in France, Germany, Italy, Spain* and the *United Kingdom* as a way to resolve conflict, it was central to decision making, increased transparency and influenced those reluctant to accept changes, helped understand issues and overcome resistance. Training was the tool used in *Italy* to avoid or reduce possible conflict and to overcome resistance.

Success and Failure of Change Projects

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A high success rate was reported by all countries (i.e., well above 50%), given that, according to a recent survey administered by McKinsey & Company (Isern & Pung, 2006) approximately 70% of all changes fail. Possibly related to the command structure of policing – police adapt to make the changes successful.

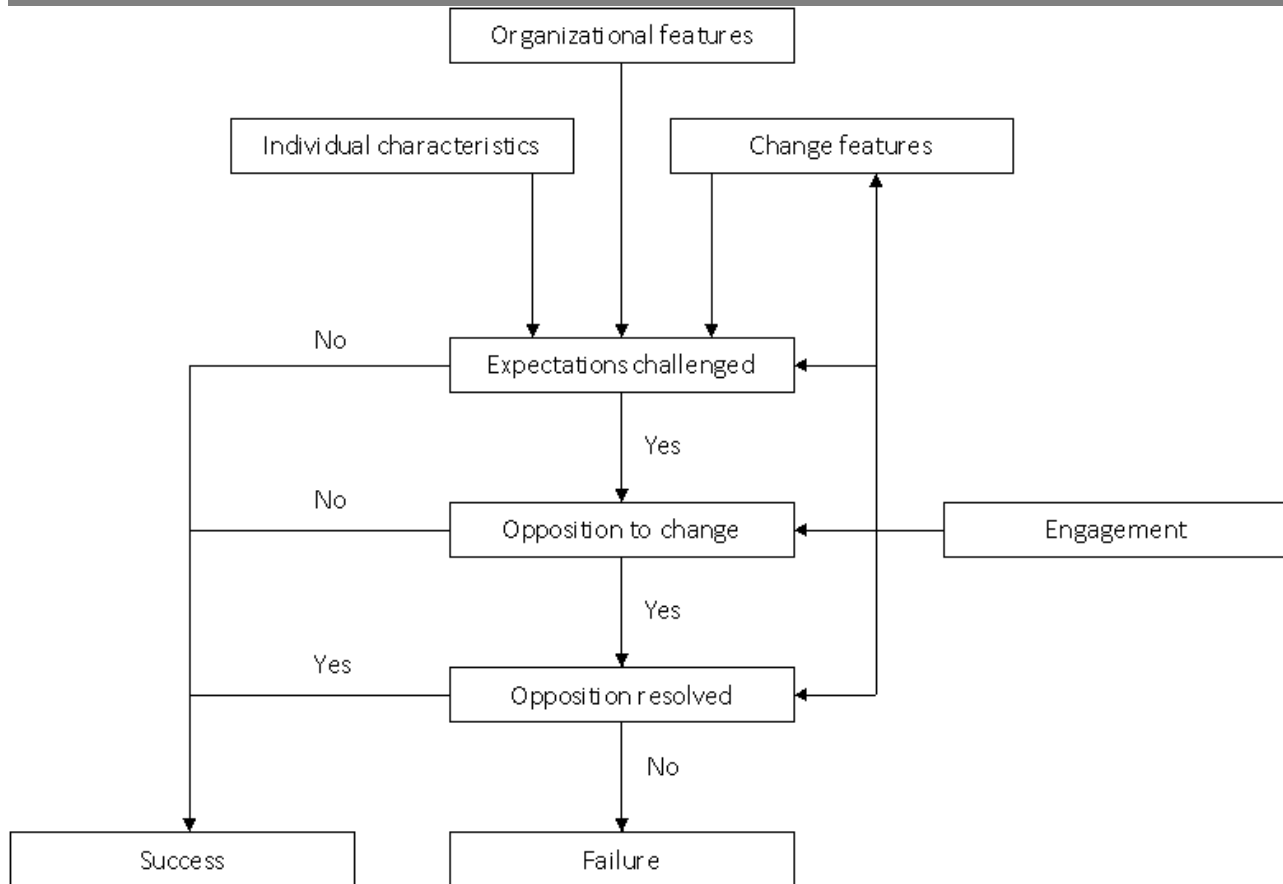
- Cultural changes appear to have the lower success ratio
- Interestingly while technological changes are most successful overall, technology is not the most successful type of change in every country.

4. Preliminary discussion

The *strengths* are the vocational nature within the police, the chain of command and the high levels of commitment and engagement. There are *expectations* within to provide basic conditions, which includes job security, pension and opportunities for growth and development. A *caveat* at this point would be that whilst strengths allow the police to implement changes and austerity measures in short-term...long-term implications could be that having stripped away the basic conditions underlying the vocational nature of policing the counterproductive effect on new recruits could mean they are less inclined to commit to policing due to the lack of security and reward (job and pension). Some police officers expressed their worries regarding the anticipated levels of 'stretching' in human resources, some even referring to this

situation as "*a disaster waiting to happen.*"

5. Core survey



The information gathered during the two exploratory phases of WP5 will be combined within the core survey. The survey, through the development of hypotheses, will examine the factors that impact on the likelihood of successful change outcomes, while adding to organizational change theory development. The survey stage will take place between September-October 2013 and the analysis of pictogram, interview and core survey data will be reported in deliverable 5.2, due date 31st January 2014.

**This study is exploratory in nature and the findings do not test hypothesis but rather present avenues for further research. The findings do not represent the view points of any police force or county involved in this study.*