

## **Enablers and Barriers to Change in Police Organisations**

Symposium submitted by:

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## **Abstract**

The policing sector is one of the most crucial parts of the public sector in the majority of countries worldwide. The work of policing organisations is highly salient as it has a direct impact on the safety and well-being of each member of any given society, and nearly everyone will at some point in their lives need to interact with their local police. The high societal and political cost of potential failures of police organisations has resulted in such organisations being relatively slow and ‘cautious’ to respond to external pressures for adaptation and change. However, the increasing predominantly economic pressures have resulted in more and more police organisations undertaking both small- and large-scale change initiatives, mostly aiming at reducing costs while preserving or improving the quality of their services and the overall organisational performance. With change being inevitable and its success critical, the five papers that constitute this symposium investigate the barriers and enablers of organisational change across various countries and using a wide range of methodological approaches.

## **Enablers and Barriers to Change in Police Organisations**

### **Symposium Overview**

The pressure on police organisations to implement organisational change has been continuously growing in many countries, due to various changes in their environment. Such environmental drivers for change include the need to serve populations of diverse demographic characteristics (e.g. Wilkinson, Fogarty, & Melville, 1996), technological advancements (e.g. Bayerl, et al., 2013), political pressures (e.g., Yilmaz, Ozgen, & Akyel, 2013), and legal trends, with economic pressures being identified as the strongest environmental factor impacting on police organisations (van den Born et al., 2013). In response, police organisations across Europe need to continuously strive to adapt to the environment and achieve a ‘fit’ between organisational characteristics and capacities, and the environment within which they operate (e.g. van den Born et al., 2013; Maguire, Shin, Zhao & Hassell, 2003). The complexity of planning and implementing change in police organisations is accentuated by the unique characteristics of these organisations; the multifaceted nature of the service they deliver, the often large size and highly bureaucratic and hierarchical structure, the political and social significance of the services they provide, the symbolic role played in the society and the unique organisational culture, to name but a few factors (see e.g. Bellingham, 2000; Clarke, 2002; Dunford et al., 2013).

In spite of the growing pressures and the intuitive appeal of the idea of organisational change in police organisations, the reluctance expressed by some policy makers and organisational members is not unjustified; change efforts are known to fail in the majority of cases, whether the interventions is of major impact or of a limited and narrow scope (Jacobs, van Witteloostuijn, Christe-Zeyse, 2013). It is becoming more and more recognised in the change literature that the context can play an important role in the success or failure of change

initiatives (e.g. Jansson, 2013). It is therefore crucial to incorporate considerations such as national context and industry characteristics in the study of organisational change barriers and enablers. Therein lies the unique contribution of the collection of research papers of this symposium – they focus on a very unique and specific ‘industry’ (policing) and provide insights from various national contexts.

The papers that form part of this symposium address various issues related to organisational change in police organisations, with a particular focus on enablers and barriers to effective change implementation. The first two papers deal with structural changes in the Netherlands and Germany respectively. The first paper takes a quantitative longitudinal approach to research design, and with an impressive matched sample of 851 study participants it explores the link between identification, a sense of continuity, and procedural justice and employee commitment to change. Concurrently, it investigates the role of the nature of the organisations involved in determining employee attitudes and reactions to change. The salience of commitment to change is convincingly demonstrated with the link between commitment and important work-related reactions, such as engagement and job satisfaction. The second paper deals with the implications of geographical distance for leadership following a centralisation intervention. Utilising a qualitative methodology involving both interviews and participant observation the authors retrospectively investigate the change management practices employed and how they could have overcome problems following the change by proactively dealing with barriers. For instance, they find that clearer role definition for the leaders could have resolved some of the issues that emerged from the restructuring.

The third of the papers employs a little-known methodology to analysing qualitative data that is suitable for the analysis of large quantities of qualitative data, namely ‘fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis. Analysis of 165 interviews from 10 countries reveals configurations of organisation and change characteristics that are more likely to lead to

successful change outcomes. The analysis is based on the basic premises of the cognitive approach to organisational change that captures the multi-layered values and cultural characteristics of organisations.

The third therefore focuses on internal communications in the context of organisational change in a police organisation in the UK. It takes a qualitative approach to studying the role of communication and direct supervision in change implementation. The primary objective of the study is to explore the role of communication and leadership as antecedents of employees' attitudes towards organisational changes that involve centralising and downsizing of a back-office in a police organisation. It therefore explores employees' attitudes and reactions to various communication efforts prior and during the implementation of the change initiative and it provides insights into the differing effects of communication on the attitudes of those who are directly affected by the changes (civilian staff) versus those who are indirectly affected (officers). The study reveals various factors that constitute ineffective and counterproductive communication during change, such as poor timing, lack of accuracy and consistency, and information volume. It further reveals the role of direct supervisors as central to providing social support and helping build emotional resilience among the negatively affected staff.

The final article addresses more systemic changes at the societal level which involve police organisations, among other institutions that provide public services. In particular, it focuses on the creation of public, interdisciplinary and interorganisational teams that provide a collaboration platform among various agencies with the objective of improving the quality of the public services that the various organisations provide. By means of a survey study barriers to effective interorganisational collaboration are identified. In particular, individual characteristics of team members, such as extraversion and professional autonomy, appear to play an important role for successful interdisciplinary collaboration, alongside wider

organisational factors, such as resistance from participating organisations to collaborative efforts.

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# **Changes in the Dutch national police – investigating the antecedents to change commitment**

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Organizational change is a risky endeavour. Most change initiatives fail to reach their goals, while process costs often far outweigh the content benefits of change initiatives (e.g., Faulkner, Teerikangas, & Joseph, 2012). One of the primary reasons for such failure is the inability to win over the hearts and minds of organizational employees and a widespread tendency to underestimate the importance of human factors for change success (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006).

In this presentation we examine employees' perceptions of change commitment and threat during a structural change in the Dutch national police. Specifically, we focus on two forces that were merged into a single unit as part of a nation-wide move towards nationalization. Within this context, we consider the effects of organizational climate (e.g., perceptions of procedural and information justice and organizational support), leadership and management (at both the force and team level) and identity processes (including identification and perceptions of identity threat and image) on employee change commitment. Data was collected from police officers at two time points before the change and following the first stage of implementation. Including a sample of 1793 at time 1 and 1369 at time 2; our analysis is based on 851 employees, whose responses could be matched over time. This includes 717 employees from a large urban force based in a large city in the Netherlands and 134 employees from a smaller regional force located in a nearby rural area.

Our analyses provide 3 important contributions. First, we identify key antecedents to change commitment, specifically demonstrating the role of identification, a sense of continuity, and



procedural justice in shaping employees' developing commitments to the change. Second, we demonstrate the stark consequences of negative change perceptions for key workplace outcomes, including engagement and satisfaction at work. Finally, we consider the influence of structural factors (including the differing natures of the two merging organizations) in shaping employees' developing perceptions and attachments over the course of the change. These findings have important implications for research and practice. Specifically, we offer insights into the facilitators and barriers of employee change commitment, with implications for the management of human factors during change initiatives. In addition, we enrich current research findings into the role of identity and image in determining change outcomes.

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**Effects of distance leadership on police performance – a case study within the Guard  
Duty and Policing on the Beat Unit of the Brandenburg Police (Germany)**

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**Introduction**

This study is part of the EU funded COMPOSITE project and is dealing with the perceptions of the police staff regarding personnel management and operational leadership within the German police force in Brandenburg. Here, severe cuts of the staff lead to a new management model: Since the 1st of November 2011 the existing 49 police stations were re-structured into 16 inspectorates and 33 related precincts.

Now, the latter have no organisational autonomy any longer and are managed over distance by the inspectorates. Respectively, the number of leaders of the unit for standby duty, radio car duty, emergency call service and operative police service of the former stations were reduced from 500 to 192. This organisational change has an impact on the policing tasks and processes, which until then were clearly defined. In our study, we conducted interviews with a total of 30 police officers of all hierarchical levels and from different inspectorates that cover the geographical and structural differences within the Brandenburg police. Participant observations followed the interviews to interrelate the interview responses with the actual daily routine of police officers. Based on the interview transcripts and on the observations, we carried out our analysis of the perceptions of the changes regarding the responsibilities and further of the change of the traditional understanding of the police officers' role and identity. In our presentation we will specifically focus on the aspect of leading over distances, thus, on the role of the sub unit leaders. Our data reveal that the new role of the sub unit leader has not yet been clearly re-defined, which can be seen in the different expectations of

the sub unit leaders themselves, of their superiors as well as of their operational staff. In addition to this, we could identify which aspects of leading so far still have short-comings. Based on these findings, we will discuss the implications with special focus on what was missed out during the implementation of this change process, how a clearer role definition could be achieved in the future and how this could reduce the so far perceived short-comings.

# **A Cognitive Theory of Organizational Change in EU police forces**

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## **Introduction**

A cognitive approach to understanding organisational change argues that organisations are governed by two sets of codes – architectural and cultures (explicit or implicit) that play a highly important role (Hannan, Pólos, & Carroll, 2007). Architectural codes are defined as “rules that state which units have authority over which units” a code that “discriminates between the allowed and disallowed feature values for the organization”, in essence architectural codes are free (Hannan et al., 2007, p. 235). However, cultural codes are more complex because they begin as architectural codes which become infused with moral values and norms transforming them into value-laden cultural codes (alternatively, cultural codes develop which are tied to certain architectural codes). In the context of organizational change because architectural codes are free, changing these codes is generally less problematic whereas, cultural codes are more resilient, and difficult to change. Hence, in this paper, we refine Cognitive Organization Theory (COT) by investigating the factors which can influence change as it cascades through an organization and challenges members’ taken-for-granted expectations or creates “code violations” effecting the success and failure of the change project. Using data from over 165 interviews focusing on 180 change projects (316 evaluations) conducted at 15 police forces in 10 European countries (in the context of the EU COMPOSITE project), we empirically investigate organization-change configurations using fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA). Our findings demonstrate support for COT, and identify how code violations in relation to organizational and change features influence the success or failure of organizational change projects.

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# **Communication and supervisory leadership as antecedents of employee attitudes toward organisational change: A case study of centralisation in a UK police force**

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## **Introduction**

Under the current financial austerity measures, the police in England and Wales are being asked to reduce costs by 20% by 2015 and this has led to extensive activity to cut staff and introduce widespread changes. One major direction for change has involved UK police forces centralising services and functions as a means of streamlining activities. The case study reported in this paper discusses the centralisation of an intelligence service within one of the major UK police forces.

The paper explores two important factors that affect employees' attitudes toward organisational change. It has been suggested that employees' attitudes toward change are important to the success or failure of change efforts (Elias, 2009; Lines, 2005; Piderit, 2000). An individual who holds a strong positive attitude toward a change effort is more likely to show support for the change and may engage in behaviour that facilitates the change (Chih, Yang & Chang, 2012; Lines, 2005). Conversely, an individual with strong negative attitudes is more likely to not support the change (Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1997), resist the change, or even attempt to sabotage the change initiative (Lines, 2005). Hence, understanding and managing employees' attitudes toward organisational change is important if organisations are to successfully implement changes.

The conceptualisation of leadership in the context of organisational change has tended to focus on the top level management or the change implementers (Bommer et al., 2005; Gill, 2002; Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006; Oreg, 2006). However, less attention has been given to

understanding the effects of more direct individual-level leadership processes and interactions between direct supervisors and employees in the context of organisational change. In fact, it has been suggested that leaders at the supervisory level have a greater impact on employees' attitudes and behaviours than leaders at the top management level (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). The research presented here therefore considers the role of direct supervisors in the transition process.

Another important factor that has been identified in the literature as salient in determining attitudes toward change is communication of change-related information (e.g. Daly, Teague & Kitchen, 2003; Elving, 2005). The case study therefore attempts to further extend our understanding of communication factors (e.g. quality, clarity, media, timing) and their role in determining employees' attitude toward change.

## **Method**

Eight police officers and 8 police civilian staff were interviewed, using semi-structured interviews during the implementation stage of a centralisation of a back-office function in a UK police force. The interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was conducted in order to explore the effect of leadership and communication in on employees' attitudes toward change. The codes used were driven by the theoretical framework and further extended and refined based on the themes that emerged from the data.

## **Results and Discussion**

Leader-follower relationship appeared to have little or no influence on participants' attitudes toward the change in this particular context, and neither did day-to-day leadership styles or behaviours. Overall however, the relationship quality between the participants and their direct supervisors appeared to be good for the majority and unaffected by the changes. Some

participants reported that their supervisors demonstrated understanding and empathy with regards to the possible negative effects of the changes and were a source of social support. It appeared that there was no best method to communicate the changes as different individuals had differing preferences about whether they preferred emails, intranet announcements, meetings with the implementation team or directly contacting members of the implementation team for information. Particular issues that compromised the effectiveness of communication include: quantity of information, information leaks, poor timing of crucial information dissemination, and poor information reliability.

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## **Characteristics of members in public interdisciplinary interorganisational teams**

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Policy makers are increasingly confronted with ‘wicked problems’ that demand collaborative actions from public networks, collaboration is however challenging when organizations from different disciplines have to produce a public good. Much scientific work has been done on all sorts of collaborative efforts and teams, but to our knowledge there is little information available about teams that are in public, interdisciplinary, and interorganisational (PII) efforts.

In this study we ask how the characteristics of individual members of PII teams can facilitate interdisciplinary cooperation between team members, and how this influences performance. We have studied the case of safety networks in the Netherlands, where professionals from different disciplines work together in a team on a regular basis to combine legal, social, and healthcare procedures to create personalized, innovative and optimal interventions for multi-problem offenders.

The main theoretical framework has been taken from the field of interdisciplinary cooperation (such as Bronstein, 2003), but has been complemented with scientific evidence from the field of psychology and management and organisation studies. The main conceptual foundation for this study is that by nature, it is very difficult for organisations from different disciplines, and their related professionals, to collaborate. The different (hidden) agendas and clash of professional cultures may cause conflict and distrust. The value of public goods can be difficult to determine, making organisations doubt whether their participation in the collaborative effort is useful. Bronstein (2003) suggests that the right personal and professional characteristics of professionals in these PII teams will enhance cooperation in the team. Also, structural characteristics, like having time and freedom to collaborate, and a

history of collaboration will enhance collaboration. In turn, there is scientific evidence that interdisciplinary collaboration is positively related to the performance of interdisciplinary teams. The characteristics suggested by Bronstein (2003) entail many different variables that can be included into the model, hence we have strategically chosen a limited number of variables for our model.

We use self-reported data from a survey of PII team members to investigate our theoretical model. We have made use of regression analyses with robust standard errors to analyse the data. We find that the professional autonomy (professional characteristic) and extraversion (personal characteristic) of individuals in PII teams contribute positively to interdisciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, the degree of resistance that professionals experience from their own organisations (structural characteristic) is negatively related to collaboration.

Interdisciplinary cooperation is not of such great relevance for performance, but the team members are. Extravert team members make the team perform better; however, autonomous professionals do not. Autonomous individuals find it easier to make decisions by themselves, which is of great importance in the PII team, where they represent their organisation. It is however not always easy for them to have the organisation execute these decisions, as they are used to working autonomously, rather than with their colleagues. Implications for the successful setting up and configuration of PII teams are discussed.

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