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Europe's Changing Police Forces

Comparative police studies in the European Union

The following paper presents the COMPOSITE (COMparative POlice Studies In The EU) project. It gives an overview of the project structure, the project partners and project goals, as well as preliminary findings. The COMPOSITE project, supported by the European Commission as part of the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, sets out to investigate change processes in Europe's police forces and to identify what factors contribute to the success or failure of such processes. Police forces in ten European countries are being studied in detail over a period of four years. The research findings are designed not only to serve the academic community, but also to find practical application in the implementation of training materials and diagnostic instruments.

INTRODUCTION

“Nothing is as constant as change” is a catchphrase that is particularly often heard in discussions about changes to public and private organisations and their management. Change processes in large organisations are usually extremely complex and related projects often do not run in the way that the initiators hoped. Police forces, in Germany and other European countries alike, are subject to constant change. However, it should not be forgotten that “the police is a highly unique organisation” (Christe-Zeyse 2006, 5). While comparable with other large organisations, the police has a culture all of its own and, unlike other organisations and companies, is not subject to market competition. General organisational science concepts and research findings cannot be directly applied for that reason. Police

forces are constantly confronted with changing conditions and diverse changes of a social, political, technical, legal and economic nature. The last 20 years have seen numerous in-depth and complex change processes carried out with varying success within Europe's police forces, including in Germany, ranging from new uniforms and technologies to changes in organisational structure.

COMPOSITE

The four-year research project COMPOSITE, which has been running since August 2010, is designed to research change processes in the police forces of ten European countries. These countries are Belgium, Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain and the Czech Republic. The consortium team consists of organisational



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scientists from prestigious universities and colleges, research institutions, the consultancy sector and the police. The project evolved out of intensive cooperation over several years among researchers from Germany, the Netherlands and Great Britain. A concept was developed to study which factors contribute to the success or failure of change processes in the police and whether factors capable of meeting with acceptance can be distinguished from factors that are prone to meeting with resistance. The identification of such factors is the chief goal of COMPOSITE. Thanks to its international approach, the project enables transnational comparisons. That is of increasing importance especially in the context of Europeanisation in a period of free movement within the Schengen Area, open borders, growing interconnectedness and modern technologies, particularly in order to understand why change processes are implemented and perceived so differently in the various countries of the EU.

It is a well-known fact that the German police force has a unique organisational culture and professional identity (cf. Behr 2000; Behr 2006; Ohlemacher et al. 2002; Christe-Zeyse 2006). If such factors are considered on an international level, the question arises as to the role played by the given police culture and whether factors capable of meeting with acceptance and factors prone to meeting with resistance are the same in each country. International comparisons also enable the identification and implementation of best practices from beyond the borders of one's own country. Especially with regard to change processes and their success, organisational culture and professional identity are key factors that should be studied in European comparison (cf. Christe-Zeyse 2006).

The aim of COMPOSITE is not only to generate relevant research findings, but

also to disseminate them to as wide a public as possible. Moreover, specific conclusions drawn from the project are intended to enable political and administrative decision-makers to design and implement future change processes with significantly increased likelihood of success. The findings are also intended to be of practical use beyond the project period itself, enabling diagnostic instruments and training courses to be developed on the basis of the research results.

PROJECT CONSORTIUM

The COMPOSITE consortium consists of the following 15 institutions (country teams), which, as can be seen from Figure 1 (see page 21), are spread out over the ten participating countries as follows: Erasmus University Rotterdam, represented by the Erasmus Research Institute of Management (NL, consortium leader), University of Antwerp (BE), University of Masaryk, Brno (CZ), Police College of the Federal State of Brandenburg (Fachhochschule der Polizei des Landes Brandenburg), Oranienburg (DE), Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology (Fraunhofer Institut für Angewandte Informationstechnik FIT), St. Augustin (DE), Capgemini Telecom Media Defense, Paris (FR), Centre for Sociological Research on Law and Criminal Justice Institutions (Centre de Recherches Sociologiques sur le Droit et Institutions Pénale), Paris (FR), Foundation for Research on the Migration and Integration of Technologies (Fondazione per la Ricerca sulla Migrazione e Integrazione delle Tecnologie), Rome (IT), St. Kliment Ohridski University, Skopje/Bitola (MK), University of Utrecht (NL), Police Academy, Apeldoorn (NL), Babefl-Bolyai University, Cluj (RO), ESADE Business School, Barcelona (ES), Durham University (UK) and the University of Sheffield (UK).

PROJECT STRUCTURE AND PROJECT STATUS

In addition to the 15 country teams, which are coordinated by a cross-institutional project management team at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, Durham University, the University of Antwerp and the Brandenburg Police College, the total project also includes a transnational end user board and a strategic advisory board. The end user board is composed of leading police officers and designed to provide the academic findings of COMPOSITE with feedback from police practice. To ensure that the legitimate strategic interests of the police organisations concerned are protected and the practical findings are used accordingly, the strategic advisory board functions as a consultancy and review board and is composed of members of the highest decision-making level from authorities and ministries. COMPOSITE is flanked by a two-year photography project, which is designed to provide insight into the everyday work of European police officers (see Figure 3, page 23).

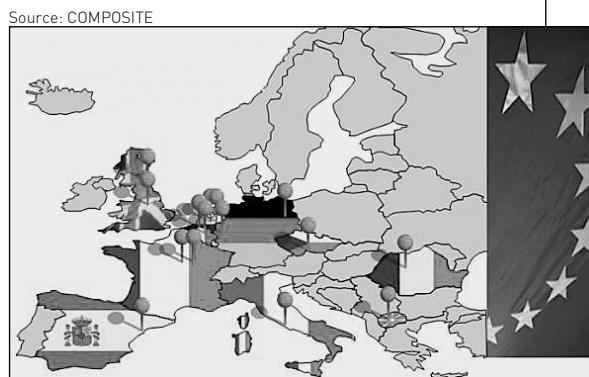


Figure 1: Distribution of the consortium partners in Europe

In terms of content, COMPOSITE is divided into seven empirically oriented work packages (WPs), which in part build upon one another, and four practically oriented work packages. As can be seen from Figure 2, the work packages are divided into three timelines, referred to as action lines.

WP 1, which has already been concluded, involved the analysis of necessary change processes in police forces (see Born/Witteloostuin 2011) and was coordinated by the project partners at the University of Utrecht. To discover whether there is a common understanding of modern police

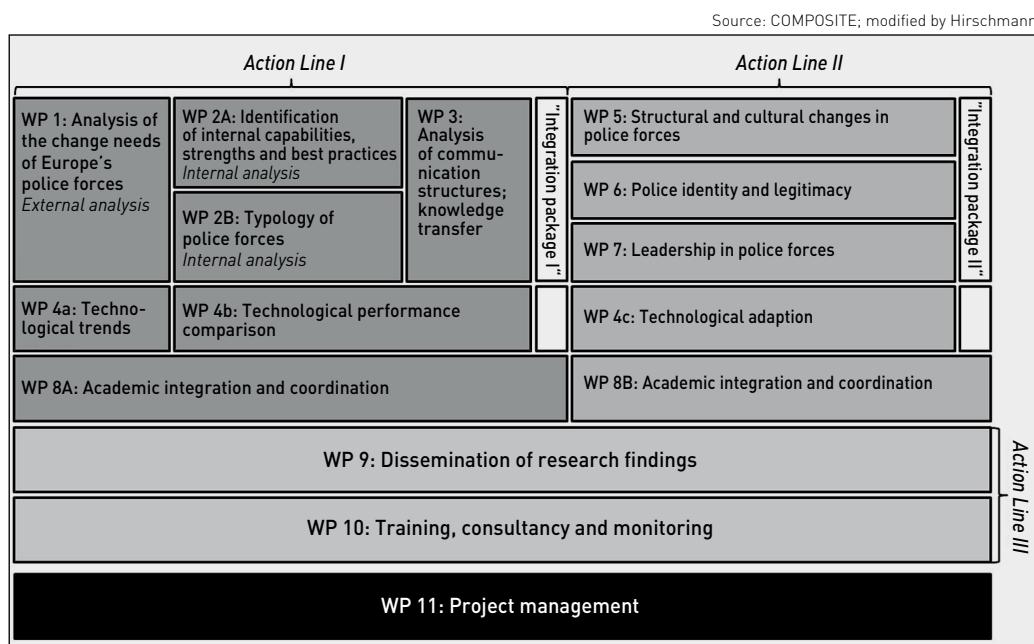


Figure 2: Time frame of the complete project

work in the police forces concerned and how changes are experienced, an analysis was made of topics of police policy under discussion in terms of political (P), economic (E), social (S), technological (T) and legal (L) trends (PESTL analysis). Based on the findings of this first work package, WP 2, coordinated by the project partners of Durham University, investigated the ability of police organisations to react to the social, political and economic challenges that they face and identified those police practices that serve as strategies to manage and adapt to such challenges. The findings of the second work package are also available. In WP 3, which is coordinated by the project members of the University of Sheffield, the focus is on analysis, description and comparative assessment of police communication structures with investigation of access to, exchange of, bundling of and processing of information and technical aids used to transfer information. The typology of communication strategies that will be drawn up is designed to assist organisations with a more precise classification of information. The findings of the third work package are expected in the middle of 2012. The fourth work package, which is coordinated by the project partners at the Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology (FIT), deals with the change processes to modern police work prompted by technical challenges and technological trends. The work package is designed to investigate how information and communication technologies are used in the police forces, what role is played by electronic media such as (mobile) telephones, the Internet and the intranet, digitalised forms of communication like e-mail, internet-based media portals like Facebook or Twitter and other forms of digitalisation, electronic recording and the storing and processing of data (e.g. automatic licence plate recognition)

in everyday police work and to what extent these influence the relationship between the police and their environment. Partial results of the fourth work package are already available (see Denef 2011). WP 5, which is organised by the project partners at Durham University, is designed to identify the influence of cultural (organisational culture) factors on the ability of police forces to change, and attempts to measure organisation-specific norms. In addition to the question of how contraventions of existing organisational cultural norms are dealt with, effects on police performance in response to social, political and economic change processes will also be considered. In order to gain a complete picture of police organisational culture, the description and analysis of identity-forming factors is also necessary. Work package 6, which is coordinated by the consortium leaders in Rotterdam, therefore sets out to describe and explain typical identity phenomena within the police and to identify and compare those factors that shape police identity. It will be interesting to learn to what extent the role of police officers is influenced by changes related to their environment and requires the police to rethink its role. In connection with WP 6, WP 7 will look at the degree of influence of police leadership by describing and comparing the leadership philosophies and practices of the police forces concerned. The consortium leadership at the Erasmus University Rotterdam is also responsible for WP 7. Academic (methodological) coordination is performed by the University of Antwerp in WP 8. WP 9 deals with the dissemination of the research findings, which is the core task of the project staff at the Brandenburg Police College. The project's own website, research reports, publications in (academic and police) periodicals and newspapers, conferences, symposia and professional seminars held or attended and talks to

public authorities and agencies are designed to make the findings accessible not only to the police organisations themselves, but also to a wide (professional) public. WP 10 focuses on the development of training and consultancy concepts by the business consultancy firm Capgemini for national and international use. The University of Rotterdam is in charge of overall project management, which is work package 11 (see Figure 3).

NEED FOR CHANGE

Change is a phenomenon that Europe's police forces have to actively engage with in order to be able to perform up-to-date police work. A PESTL analysis was performed based on the data from 382 interviews with police officers from all hierarchy levels of the ten countries participating in COMPOSITE (see Table 1). This shows the current political, economic, social, technological and legal environmental challenges and risks that Europe's

police forces face. The main change trends and their influence on police tasks are presented below. The focus is on Germany, supplemented by comparison with the findings of other countries.

Source: Gruschinske

Hierarchy level of interview partners	Number of interviews	Relative frequency (%)
Senior management level	129	34
Middle management level	67	18
Operative level	146	38
No level allocation ¹	40	10
Total	382	100

Table 1: Sample of COMPOSITE-PESTL analysis

Figure 4 (see page 24) shows all the environmental challenges surveyed in the German sample in terms of significance (on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1=insignificant and 7=very significant) and tendency (-1=negative, 0=neutral and 1=positive) of their impact on police work. It should be noted that the findings do not claim to be representative given the small sample

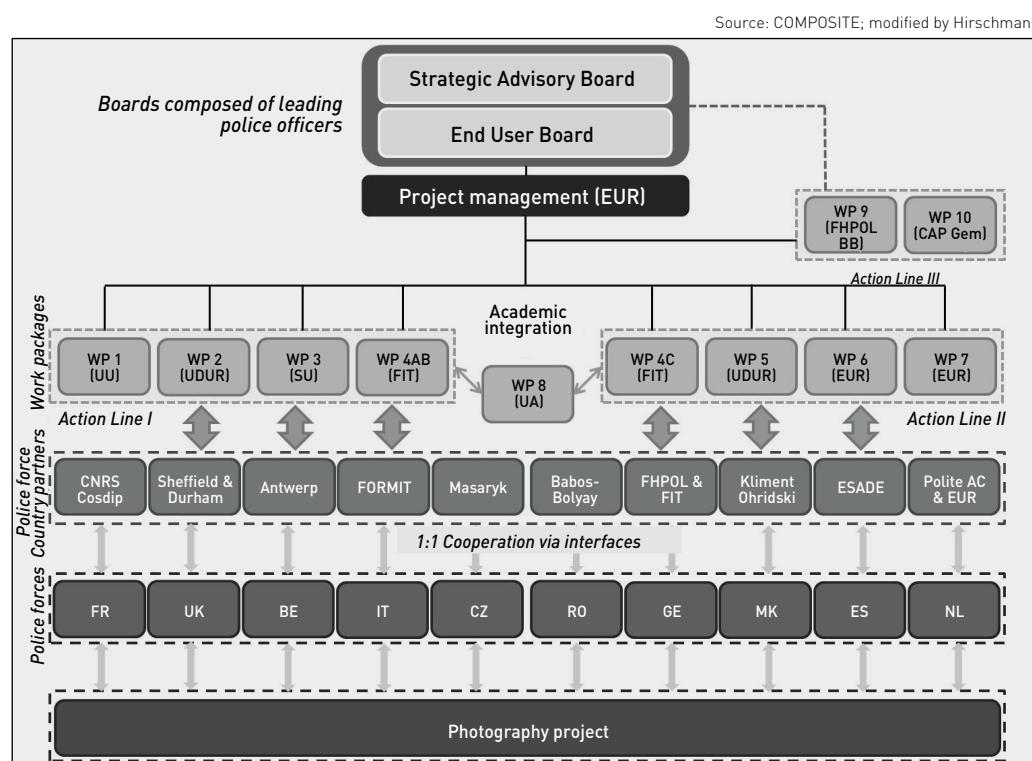


Figure 3: Project structure and functions of participants

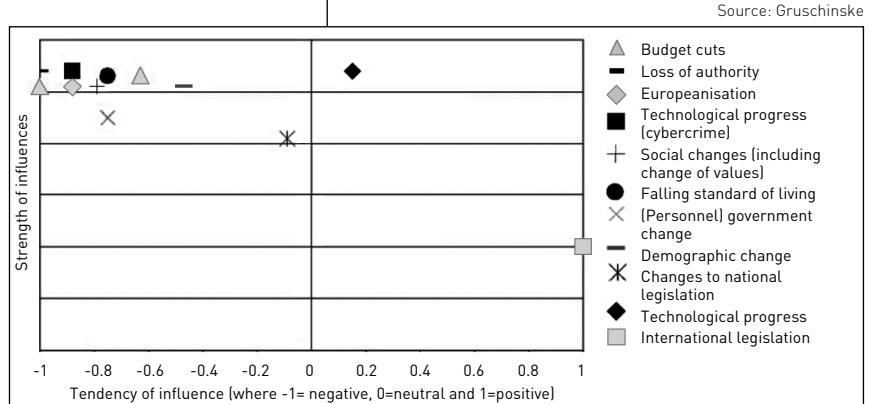


Figure 4: Strength of influence and tendency of environmental trends in Germany

size. Moreover, the results solely reflect the general perception of police officers and might present a different picture if the individual hierarchy levels are considered. Nevertheless, the findings can be interpreted as indicating reliable trends with regard to the perception of the changing environment.

SOCIAL THREATS

The declining authority of the police in society, demographic change, increasing social inequality and society's change in values have a strongly negative influence on Europe's police forces (cf. Born/Witteloostuijn 2011). The Brandenburg and Berlin police officers surveyed for the COMPOSITE project consider the declining authority of police forces in society as particularly negative and having a strong impact on daily police work. Society's change of values, which is perceived as a decline in values, is seen as similarly negative and having a strong impact. If we compare the findings of all ten countries participating in COMPOSITE, it can be seen that the influence of the declining recognition of police authority in society is on average regarded as high and having a particularly negative impact on everyday police work, while the change in values is seen as negative, but only having a moderate impact. That finding indicates that

the observed change in values seems to be particularly problematic for the police if it leads to lack of respect for and propensity to use violence against the police. Country-specific analysis of the results makes clear that, with the exception of Italy, where the officers surveyed reported an increase in the public's sensitivity towards and willingness to cooperate with the Arma dei Carabinieri and the Corp Forestale, there is an East-West divide in the social trends perceived in Europe. In Romania and Macedonia, society's change in values and the declining authority of the police in society are regarded as positive or neutral, whereas in the Western EU countries these are consistently regarded as negative developments. In addition to German police officers, French and Dutch police officers also perceive an increasing propensity for violence and lack of respect, as well as a decrease in the age of offenders. The young democratisation processes of Romania and Macedonia are a possible explanation for the observed East-West divide; in those countries the authority of the police is declining to a "normal level", which is perceived as positive in the two young democracies. The PESTL analysis shows particularly clearly that demographic change is perceived most strongly in Germany. The low birth rate and ageing society pose new challenges for the German police in particular. Since half of the German police officers surveyed are from the Brandenburg police force, the influence of demographic change should be qualified by the fact that not all German federal states are affected by ageing and a declining birth rate to the same extent as Brandenburg. Nevertheless, increasing ageing and population decline are perceptible in Germany as a whole too.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

The past economic crisis(es) has/have not been without impact on Europe's police forces. The declining or weak economic growth in the years 2009 and 2010 (cf. Eurostat, CIA World Factbook) led to budget cuts at state security institutions. It is therefore not surprising that the police officers surveyed for the COMPOSITE project consider that the economic crisis(es) has/have a strong and negative impact on daily police work. In addition to direct effects in the form of budget cuts, indirect effects of the economic crisis(es) can also be observed in the form of rising crime rates. Czech police officers complain of outdated equipment that cannot be replaced because of lack of funds. The Netherlands is already thinking about removing certain security tasks from the remit of the police, such as events security. In Great Britain, Spain and Romania, the economic crisis(es) have led to salary reductions and layoffs in the magnitude of five to 25 percent.

TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS: OPPORTUNITY OR THREAT?

Increasing advances in information and communication technology are regarded as having particular impact on police work, except for in Italy. The police offi-

cers questioned, with the exception of the German study participants, regard ICT advances as having a thoroughly positive impact on police work. In the case of Germany, there is also awareness of the growing use of ICT advances for criminal purposes, in addition to the benefits being perceived. There is also a feeling of powerlessness in the face of the complex field of cyber criminality, in part based on restricted access to modern investigation technologies. ICT progress, if its use for criminal purposes is left aside, is also regarded as having a positive impact on everyday police work in Germany (see Figure 4, page 24).

CHANGE AND FAILURE DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE PROCESSES

What do the success and failure of changes in a police organisation depend on? This is one of the key research questions of the COMPOSITE project. The findings of the second work package provide preliminary results. In Germany 54 officers from the police forces of the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg were asked about the successes and failures of change processes. A total of 139 inhibiting and 154 conducive factors were named by the respondents and were then ranked. The factors were placed in 23 informative categories using the inter-rater principle. Tables 2 and 3 (see page 26) show the categories

Source: Gruschinske

Success dimensions	Absolute frequency (f)	Relative frequency (%)	Ranking (\bar{r})	Ranking range
Success-conducive staff characteristics	36	17.73	3.75	1:7
Success-conducive working conditions	31	15.27	2.90	1:8
Transparency	27	13.30	2.70	1:6
Active staff involvement	25	12.32	2.68	1:9
Characteristics of change processes/ successful change management	19	9.36	3.79	1:7
Positive leadership	18	8.87	3.11	1:7
Communication	15	7.39	1.93	1:4
Manning levels	11	5.42	1.55	1:3
Further dimensions (f< 10 in each case)	21	10.34	-	-

Table 2: Success dimensions of change processes

of success-inhibiting and success-conducive factors (named dimensions below) that were created from the factors named. Dimensions named fewer than ten times are not listed individually because of their low informative value. Despite compressing the data to a few informative categories it quickly becomes clear that the factors determining the success and failure of change processes are diverse and highly complex: “people give multiple and diverse meaning to how they perceive, translate, react and feel about change initiatives” (Alvesson 2008, 34).

SUCCESS DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE PROCESSES

A total of eight success-conducive dimensions can be identified (see Table 2, page 25). Despite the low number of cases, a reliable trend with regard to the success of change processes in police forces can be identified through the repeated mention of the same dimensions.

Staff characteristics

From the perspective of the Berlin and Brandenburg police officers surveyed, staff characteristics play a major role in the success of changes within the police, although other dimensions are considered even more significant (see Table 2).

General openness to innovations within one's own organisation is essential for successful change. According to the offi-

cers interviewed, such openness includes willingness to recognise the necessity of change processes, to embrace the aims and reasons of the targeted change process as well as one's own professional role in the context of such change. A balance of improvisation and organisation abilities in everyday work is also regarded as a success factor for change processes. Both abilities help in creating uncertainty zones (Crozier/Freidberg 1979), which is primarily important in the transition phase from old to new during reform processes. The (perceived) sense of community in the police, which is particularly strong among groups in service, i.e. predominantly at the operative level, is also regarded as conducive to success. According to Behr (Behr 2009, 33), the police-type risk-bearing community is reliant on “evidence of loyalty and dependability”. It is probably such loyalty and dependability among colleagues that helps change processes and the associated risks to be anticipated in a positive way. Colleagues embark on a journey towards the new and uncertain together, rather than alone. In addition, flexibility, creativity, professional and social competence and a high degree of professional motivation are also described as staff characteristics that are conducive to success. To summarise the characteristics mentioned, the “ideal police officer” for successful implementation of changes in the police force is motivated, open to innovations, flexible and

Source: Gruschinske

Failure dimensions	Absolute frequency (f)	Relative frequency (%)	Ranking (\bar{r})	Ranking range
Change mismanagement	37	22.42	2.49	1:6
Success-inhibiting staff characteristics	29	17.58	2.52	1:6
Success-inhibiting working conditions	28	16.97	2.46	1:5
General political and economic conditions	18	10.91	2.83	1:7
Negative leadership	18	10.91	2.39	1:4
Lack of staff involvement	10	6.06	2.1	1:3
Further dimensions (f > 10 in each case)	25	15.15	-	-

Table 3: Failure dimensions of change processes

creative, has a high degree of professional and social competence, organisational and improvisational talent and is loyal to his/her colleagues and dependable. However, the variety of success dimensions shown in Table 2 (see page 25) shows that the existence of an “ideal police officer” alone is not regarded as sufficient for the success of change processes.

Working conditions

The police officers surveyed attribute greater importance to the given working conditions, with an average rating of 2.90, than to staff characteristics (see Table 2). Since working conditions vary based on the different duties in the various service units of the police, at this stage it is only possible to make general comments about working conditions conducive to change, rather than workplace-specific comments. The data collected indicate that working conditions conducive to change include better staff development opportunities in the sense of a constant and predictable promotion model and qualification opportunities provided by the employer, a leisure time-oriented and family-oriented working structure in the form of a healthy life domain balance (cf. Ulich/Wiese 2011), as well as the prompt implementation of change plans within the working structure. The last point makes clear that desired and agreed changes are often only perceived as successful if they perceptibly become part of daily working life.

Transparency, staff involvement and communication

The dimensions of transparency, staff involvement and communication conducive to change processes should be discussed here together because of the intersection between them, despite being ranked differently by the police officers surveyed (see Table 2). Although communication

can be viewed as an independent success dimension for successful change processes, it is also an element that is related to the other two dimensions. The respondents make clear that in their view, transparent communication between the hierarchy levels, especially between the operative level, “street cops” (Reuss 1983), and the management level, “management cops” (Kamsteeg et al. 2010), contributes considerably to the success of changes. Police officers also want to be actively involved in open communication of the need for change and change goals by asking questions, providing criticism and influencing decision-making processes. The communication dimension with the highest ranking ($\bar{x} = 1.93$) after manning levels ($\bar{x} = 1.55$) provides preliminary insight into the forms of communication that contribute to successful change. In addition to the general criterion of more communication, exchange between the hierarchy levels of arguments put forward with regard to upcoming changes and the definition of arguments shared across hierarchy levels are seen as factors conducive to success. Our surveys indicate that communication, transparency and staff involvement are strongly interrelated. A lower degree of staff involvement and transparency probably also entails a significant decrease in the degree of communication.

Characteristics of change processes/ successful change management

The police officers surveyed regard the characteristics of change processes in themselves as conducive to success, i.e. an appropriate number of changes, a healthy cost-benefit balance, improved working conditions as a result of change processes, process monitoring and evaluation of results, quick implementation of changes with visible success and use of successful models as a point of orientation. How-

ever, with a ranking of 3.79 (see Table 2, page 25), this dimension is not regarded as being as significant as the other dimensions indicated.

Leadership

With a ranking of 3.11 (see Table 2), relatively little importance is attributed to leadership, although it is relevant to the success of change processes according to the police officers surveyed. The leadership dimension includes the expectations that the operative level and the middle management police level have of the senior management level, which, if met, can lead to successful implementation of change processes. These are: valuing employees and their day-to-day work, honesty towards subordinate hierarchy levels with regard to change processes, respect and sensitivity to the needs of employees and their experiences of change processes and constancy in the staffing of leadership positions.

Manning levels

The last dimension was named by only eleven of the 54 respondents in total, but with a ranking of 1.55 (see Table 2), it stands out significantly from the other dimensions and is also the clearest in content: sufficient manning levels and staff satisfaction are seen by those surveyed as success factors for change processes. However, the survey performed did not make it possible to establish conclusively what level of staffing can be described as adequate. From the interviews conducted, however, it was clear that assessments of this differ widely between the operative and the management level.

FAILURE DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE PROCESSES

The failure dimensions presented in Table 3 (see page 26) can all be regarded as the

counterparts of the success dimensions with the exception of general political and economic conditions.

Unsuccessful vs. successful change management

The police officers surveyed understand change mismanagement as a lack of communication of the reasons for change, change steps and change consequences, and thus as a non-transparent change process. In addition, it can be noted that change processes are often regarded as too lengthy, with the implementation of specific change decisions taking too long.

Success-inhibiting vs. success-conducive staff characteristics

In addition to low work motivation, the lack of willingness for change and lack of professional knowledge, the officers surveyed see the high number of years in service and age of many police officers and high rates of sick leave as inhibiting the success of change processes.

Success-inhibiting vs. success-conducive working conditions

According to the officers surveyed, the success of targeted changes is hindered in particular by the large, frequently slow and highly complex administrative apparatus of the police. In addition, the very high workload of individual officers, the lack of clear competence divisions and the lack of staff development opportunities also play a role.

Negative vs. positive leadership

According to the respondents, a change-inhibiting leadership style is characterised in particular by the lack of practical experiences of decision-makers and ignorance of the needs of the operative level through top-down decision-making processes. Here, too, the disparity between

cop culture and police culture (Behr 2000) mentioned above is clear.

Lack of staff involvement vs. active staff involvement

A lack of staff involvement in change processes is regarded by the police officers interviewed as a success-hindering factor. The criticism is made in particular that decisions are made by individuals and the involvement of staff in decision-making is often perceived as "pseudo involvement".

SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

The findings of the first two work packages show that Europe's police forces are currently facing and will continue to

face in the future the challenge of reacting to major social, legal and technological changes with a smaller staff. That can only succeed with change management tailored to the given police organisations and requires from the outset, *inter alia*, the consistent use of factors that are conducive to the success of changes and the recognition and avoidance of factors that hinder success. The future work packages of the COMPOSITE project² building on the findings to date, will ensure that the significance of the special and unique organisational cultures and identities of Europe's police forces is incorporated into future change projects in the form of specific tools.

¹ The French interview data were not classified by hierarchy levels.

² Further information about the COMPOSITE project can be found on the website www.composite-project.eu.

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