Reactions to Organizational Identity Threats in Times of Change: Illustrations from the German Police

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ABSTRACT

Change projects can affect core features of an organization's identity, because changes made to the managerial practices of an organization can result in misalignments with existing organizational culture. Such misalignments produce threats to organizational identity generating uncertainty and evoking distrust among members of the organization. Faced with projects that introduce changes to managerial practices, people engage in search-and-adjustment processes in order to confirm that organizational identity is intact, producing second-order changes, the pathways of which cannot be predicted and might also undermine the intentions of change leaders. Using case-study evidence, we show how change projects in the German police force produced violations of cultural norms that were central to the continuity and stability of the police. We argue that the change enthusiasm of organizations be tempered given the potentially negative outcomes for individual employees faced with excessive change, and also because of the threats to organizational identity that can result from inherently unpredictable change processes.
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INTRODUCTION

Organizations need to change in order to cope with turbulence in their external environments and to meet the changing demands and expectations of external and internal audiences (Gioia *et al.*, 2000). Based on case-study evidence of far-reaching change processes in the German police force, we describe the characteristics of those changes that members of an organization perceive as a threat to their organization's identity. We look especially at the lack of alignment between newly introduced

management practices and the existing organizational culture as a source of identity threat and examine how organizational members react to perceived threats to organizational identity. Our study provides evidence for a dynamic relationship between the introduction of new management practices, organizational culture and organizational identity. Our main argument is that organizational identity defines a certain range of acceptable or unacceptable behavior (taken-for-granted norms) and that problems with change processes, including resistance from change recipients, arise when change processes lead to culturally unacceptable behavior and practices. In this paper, we use empirical evidence to examine in more detail the behavioral consequences of violations of organizational identity that flow from the introduction of new managerial practices that jar with the existing organizational culture.

CHANGE AND IDENTITY

The increasingly turbulent, diverse and dynamic business environments we witness today may explain, at least in part, the increased interest shown by scholars in the stable and enduring aspects of organizations. Managing stability may even be as important as managing change, especially in the area of organizational identity. Research shows that threats to organizational identity generate intense reactions from organizational members who are highly motivated to protect and affirm positive perceptions of their organization's identity (Dutton et al., 1994). For example, Elsbach and Kramer (1996) revealed the creative and sophisticated social comparison and categorization processes that members of top-tier American business schools deployed to restore their positive organizational identity following what could only be considered a mild threat to their organizational identity as a result of a lower (or higher) than expected ranking among these business schools. The rather intense and

pervasive reactions that Elsbach and Kramer describe shed light on the importance of organizational identity for organizational members.

The crucial role that organizational culture plays in identity threatening (and identity preserving) dynamics has been discussed by Ravasi and Schultz (2006). They trace the effects of the disruption of external images, and the generation of discordant external claims, on the fate of organizational identity. Based on a longitudinal study of Bang and Olufson, a Danish high-end producer of audio-visual systems, they showed that organizational culture can preserve a sense of continuity during periods when organizational identity undergoes explicit re-evaluations as a consequence of competitive threats and environmental changes.

Scholars differ in their assumptions about the degree to which extant organizational identity can change (Corley et al., 2006). Ravasi and Schultz (2006) distinguish between two theoretical streams engaged with this issue, namely those based on institutional theory on the one hand, and social constructivism on the other. The oft-cited definition of organizational identity from Albert and Whetten (1985) is rooted in the former perspective. According to this definition, organizational identity provides the answer to the basic question 'who are we as an organization?' Organizational identity needs to satisfy three criteria: first, the definition of the *central character* of some features that are seen as essential for the organization; secondly, the *temporal continuity* of these features; and thirdly, their *distinctiveness*; thus, the degree to which these features distinguish the organization from others. These central, enduring and distinctive elements of an organization's identity constitute the requirements for a shared belief structure that makes consistent and coherent organizational action possible (Van Rekom and Whetten, 2007). Such identity claims are enduring and tend to change only rarely and never easily.

The social constructivist perspective does not deny the relative endurance of formal claims, yet stresses that the interpretations of organizational identities are malleable (Gioia *et al.*, 2000). The shared understanding of the organization's identity is periodically renegotiated among organizational members. Scholars in this tradition (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Corley and Gioia, 2004; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006) highlight the dynamism that characterizes organizational identities and argue that substantial change leads organizational members to develop new interpretations of the answer to the basic question 'Who are we as an organization?' and how strategic issues and problems, including the definition of firm capabilities and resources, are defined and resolved (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Glynn, 2000). They argue that the durability of identity is actually contained in the stability of the labels used by organization members to express their organizational identify, but that the meaning given to these labels is prone to change (Gioia *et al.*, 2000).

In this paper, we aim to add to the discussion on threats to organizational identity and argue in favor of a stronger focus on identity threats that stem from changes to managerial practices and how these are perceived by internal audiences. While we do not deny that identity is socially constructed, we argue that caution is necessary in assuming *ex ante* the degree of flexibility and freedom organizations possess in changing their identities in the eyes of their internal audiences (Hannan *et al.*, 2007; Reger *et al.*, 1994). To make this point, we describe organizational identity as a set of restrictions for acceptable features and properties of the organization (Hannan *et al.*, 2003a,b), such as formal managerial practices and organizational culture.

In the following, we will first describe the role that organizational identity plays in setting boundaries on the extent to which organizational culture can change. We then argue that new management practices introduced to change organizational culture will, as a result of the necessarily limited foresight of top managers, lead to more severe misalignments and disruptions than ever intended. We describe the search-and-adjustment processes that organizational members initiate in reaction to such misalignments in order to restore organizational identity. Having described our theoretical arguments, we provide case-based evidence for our assumptions from our study on change processes within the German police force.

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Formal managerial practices and organizational culture have important effects on organizational identity (Reger *et al.*, 1994). Attempts to change either can affect how internal and external audiences perceive the organization and in extreme cases, changes can threaten the organization's identity. Formal managerial practices include human resource (HR) practices in areas like recruitment, selection and performance appraisal, as well as practices that specify the units in an organization and define which organizational units have authority over other units. Managerial practices are often explicit and formal, often codified in rules and governed by regulations, and can therefore be directly enforced (Pólos *et al.*, 2002).

Organizational culture, by contrast, tends to be implicit, informal and is enforced indirectly rather than directly. It governs and facilitates cooperation, coordination and decision making in an often unpredictable and complex environment (Hatch and Schultz, 2002; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). While a formal practice of providing job descriptions for each position may be in place in an organization, job descriptions themselves are typically underspecified, and instructions are open to interpretation. Issues such as the expectations regarding job per-

formance, and how one should deal with emerging uncertainties, are regulated by cultural norms and expectations. These norms are implicit, and even the people relying on them are often unable to explain what they do. A typical response to the request to justify an action is: 'this is how we solve these problems around here'.

Organizational identity and organizational culture are interrelated. Organizational culture can be considered as a context for sense-making efforts. It 'supplies members with cues for making sense of what their organization is about' (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006: 437).

We assume that organizational identities define range restrictions of cultural norms that members of the organization take for granted. Taken-for-granted norms are always perceived as legitimate, thus those organizational activities based on norms that are not perceived as taken for granted also lose their legitimacy in the eyes of members of the organization. But organizational identity does not define with absolute clarity what kind of behavior is considered acceptable or unacceptable; rather it establishes a range within which norms are expected to remain. For example, cultural norms do not define precisely who can become a professor at a university. Even though it is in most cases considered a requirement for a professor to hold a PhD degree, it might under certain circumstances be considered acceptable to deviate from this requirement. But being guilty of plagiarism would clearly be outside the range of what is considered acceptable and therefore lead to the exclusion of a candidate who violated this rule.

As long as a change process does not induce unacceptable norms, behaviors and practices, organizational identity is likely to remain intact. When behaviors and practices, however, are out of the acceptable range, the change process threatens organizational identity, possibly with grave consequences for organizational legitimacy (Hannan *et al.*,

2003a). Unexpected organizational practices make members of the organization wonder: 'what sort of organization is this really?' At that point, even formerly well-established organizational norms are questioned.

What sort of behavioral consequences do violations of cultural norms produce, and how can we detect such violations empirically? Violation of the range restrictions established by organizational identity can be observed when changes are initiated that bring about sanctions like recruitment problems, increased requests for early retirement, more time spent on sick leave, counterproductive work behavior or deterioration in the work climate and strong emotional resistance to the changes introduced. 'It is getting cold in our force' is a sentence often heard among German police officers as a comment on change processes that produce such violations of acceptable norms. On the contrary, the behavioral consequences of organizational compliance with the range restrictions of managerial practices and cultural norms include better work climate, less counterproductive work behavior and better oiled practices. When the 'taken-for-grantedness' of norms and values is threatened due to change processes, organizational members have a tendency to 'work-to-the-rule' and seek more explicit direction from superiors. Work processes slow down and the loss of 'taken-for-grantedness' leads to a higher degree of ambiguity regarding what rules to follow.

LIMITED FORESIGHT, NORM VIOLATIONS AND SEARCH-AND-ADJUSTMENT PROCESSES

In the following, we describe the reactions of organizational members to change processes that are perceived to threaten organizational identity. Typically, a change initiative starts with changes to specific managerial practices including, for example, changes to working methods and organizational structures. Organizational members react to

the disturbance of routines with intensified communication, reflections and observations, and try to make sense of the new situation. In the context of this enhanced focus on information about the organization, misalignments of new managerial practices and existing cultural norms start to be obvious. In addition, misalignments between old practices and existing norms might also be noticed for the first time.

Three aspects of norm-based behavior become problematic: it is not clear what the applicable norms are (especially local cultural norms), to whom (which units, individual members of the organizations, etc) these norms apply and whether or not compliance with these norms can be taken for granted. When the new managerial practices appear to be well aligned with existing cultural norms, the change process has a good chance of gaining acceptance. When misalignments between the new managerial practices and the existing cultural norms are, however, observed, search-and-adjustment processes will start in order to prevent threats to organizational identity. This process is in itself neither predictable nor manageable and can lead to unintended outcomes that undermine rather than strengthen organizational change processes.

Limited Foresight
During change processes disruptions are to be expected, are often intended, and also at times the primary goals of specific change initiatives. Their consequences, however, cannot be easily overseen. Although senior management may provide 'master change plans', the way the blueprint actually operates is determined by highly complex social processes of interaction (Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Jacobs *et al.*, 2006; Edelman, 1992). In the disastrous change efforts at Xerox Corporation in 1999 that resulted in substantial financial losses, Hannan *et al.* (2003b) observed that decisions that were initially viewed in terms of dispassionate

cost–benefit calculations, such as the decision to consolidate 36 administrative centers into three, soon turned into normative matters. As change processes proceed and organizational members begin to reflect on unfolding events, new management practices and structural changes that were once considered unproblematic can become infused with moral values.

The structural limits on foresight of those initiating the changes affect the outcomes of changes to management practices (Hannan *et al.*, 2007). Limited foresight can partly be explained by the general notion of bounded rationality (March and Simon, 1958), but a more precise explanation focuses on the fact that in many cases an organization's structure imposes limits on what can be known by change initiators. Information about some parts of an organization is often unavailable in other parts. Sometimes the hindrance to information flow arises from differences in the languages used in different parts of the organization, which make it difficult for those outside the unit to interpret fully what is going on. Illustrations of this include Glynn's (2000) symphony orchestra, where the ideology embedded in identity claims filtered musician's and manager's perceptions of firm resources and seriously hampered communication. Other times, lack of transparency arises due to strategic withholding of information (Hannan *et al.*, 2003b, 2007). Limited foresight leads change initiators to underestimate the length of reorganizations and the associated costs of change.

Norm Violations
Change processes challenge taken-for-granted ways of operating. In an ongoing change process, organizational members perceive the intended misalignments of the new management practices with the existing cultural norms. In doing so, they release organizational members from the constraints of taken-for-granted norms, and enable greater freedom to try out new and innovative

work forms. Loss of 'taken-for-grantedness', however, also generates uncertainty and ambiguity. Work processes slow down when members react by more cautiously interpreting rules and seeking more supervisory guidance. In these processes, organizational identity plays a crucial role. If the change in managerial practices is in line with the existing organizational culture, organizational identity can provide a safe platform to give sense to new forms of operating. The uncertainty posed by changed routines can be interpreted positively and the enhanced freedom offered by new management practices can be used in a positive sense. For example, new career options might be explored or new modes of operating might be embraced by organizational members.

If the change in managerial practices severely violates central norms of an organization, organizational identity is called into question or surrounded by ambiguity. This rising uncertainty about what is central to the organization requires organizational leaders to fill a 'void of meaning' and help members rebuild their sense of who they are as an organization (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). This in turn will generate additional costs.

The perceived severity of norm violations is likely to vary along a number of dimensions including the plausibility of alternative explanations, the proximity of social relationships and the centrality of the norm to organizational identity. For example, when alternative explanations are possible, like the assumption of a misunderstanding or the perception that things might be more complex than reported, norm violations might be perceived as less severe. When the employee herself or a valued colleague was the victim of a norm violation, for example in the form of a broken promise for promotion in the context of a period of change, this experience will have a stronger impact on the perception of the trustworthiness of the organization. In addition, the severity of the violation and how central or peripheral

the violated cultural norm is in the total map of organizational norms, both play a role (van Rekom and Whetten, 2007). The frequency and duration of perceived norm violations also have an impact on the reactions. As long as these changes do not touch upon central norms, organizational members try to adapt. But recurring violations of central norms can lead to a feeling that 'nothing is sacred anymore', which in turn can lead to feelings ranging from irritation to a profound sense of alienation.

Search-and-Adjustment Processes
Organizational members react to violations of organizational culture with search-and-adjustment processes and adaptive steps, often with the goal of maintaining valued working methods and routines (Hannan *et al.*, 2007). Structural changes that are not in line with the existing organizational culture, for example the introduction of new performance indicators, will first be assimilated within the sense-making mechanisms of the old system. Even simple changes in the managerial practices that seem at first sight to be innocent might result in further violations of expectations of organizational members. For example, changing work hours might lead to personnel turnover, and an unforeseeable side effect could be that the only person who knew how to accommodate all the relevant personal preferences into a shift schedule leaves the organizational unit. Such a loss might make several people unhappy, providing management with a serious and escalating problem.

Organizational changes often generate cascades of related changes in the sense that a single initial change often begets a series of subsequent changes (Hannan *et al.*, 2003a). The direction of search-and-adjustment processes is extremely hard to control, and outcomes can be the opposite of what was intended. Once second-order changes have occurred, it is practically impossible to re-establish the status quo or to 'put the

genie back into the bottle'. For example, once a managerial decision takes away half of the responsibilities of an employee, she typically interprets this as severe implied criticism and a challenge to her competence. As a consequence of this interpretation, she might reduce or withdraw her loyalty to the organization. Even if the management instantly realizes that the initial decision was a mistake, the damage has already been done. To persuade her to take back her original responsibilities might turn out to be harder than expected, but to give back her self-confidence and regain her loyalty would be even harder. Rewinding adaptation processes does not guarantee that they take the same route back, and schemas once changed cannot be restored to their original state.

CHANGES IN THE GERMAN POLICE

In this section, we provide illustrations taken from a two-step case study that we have been carrying out in the German police since 2002. In the first step, we conducted extended semi-structured interviews with 98 students from the German Police University (Deutsche Hochschule der Polizei, DHPol, former: Police Leadership Academy) in Münster. The DHPol is the only institution in Germany where experienced police officers can obtain the official qualification to belong to the most senior level ('höherer Dienst') in the German police. Students at the DHPol represent all 18 police forces in Germany (two federal and 16 state police forces) roughly according to their size. Recruiting a representative sample of DHPol students means that the regional structure of police forces in Germany is quite accurately mirrored. Because of the recruitment mechanisms in place for senior police officers in Germany, officers aged between 30 and 40, male officers and criminal investigators are somewhat over-represented in relation to the rest of the police. Our sample, however, comprised the cohorts that are most likely to become involved with change projects and

therefore have had more exposure to change processes than the rest of the police. The interviews focused on the experiences students had with projects within their police forces in the last two years before they were sent to the DHPol (Jacobs *et al.*, 2006, 2007a,b).

The second stage of our research consisted of an analysis of the reform processes that five police forces in the state of North-rhine-Westfalia had gone through over a period of ten years. During this part of our research, we conducted 50 qualitative interviews with police officers at all levels of the police hierarchy. Constant validation and refinement of our observations were greatly facilitated by the possibility for discussions one of the authors had as a trainer in management and leadership courses at the German Police University.

In order to give an impression of some of the changes that the police force in Germany has gone through since the beginning of the 1990s, the organization of the German police is described in a condensed form and some of the major change processes are presented.

The entire police force of Germany numbers roughly 270,000 sworn officers. Each of the 16 German (federal) states has its own police force that includes uniformed police (Schutzpolizei) as well as investigative police (Kriminalpolizei). There is no municipal or local police in Germany. Of all police officers in Germany, more than 80 percent serve in the state police forces. In addition to the state police forces, there are two federal police organizations in Germany: the uniformed Federal Police (Bundespolizei) and the investigative Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt).

Although the criticism against the civil service in Germany began as early as the 1980s, the need for a paradigm change in the German police was not part of the political agenda until the mid-1990s. The ideas associated with New Public

Management (NPM) (Aucoin, 1990; Barzelay, 2001; Ferlie *et al.*, 1996) had first been developed and tested on the municipal level before they reached the police and the state administrations. The reform agenda of the 'Neue Steuerungsmodell' (NSM), the German version of NPM, was fairly ambitious and included instruments such as budgeting, management by objectives, contract management, performance assessment, cost accounting, quality management and benchmarking (Jann, 1998).

This modernization of the German police was accompanied by a host of changes in other areas. In many states, uniformed police and investigative police were merged, forces were restructured and a new shift system was introduced. Appraisal systems were changed in most forces and competencies reformulated virtually at all levels. The retirement age was raised by several years, so that the average police officer might end up having spent more than 40 years in the service by the time he or she retired. Weekly work hours rose to 42, and financial benefits (Christmas bonus, vacation bonus) were cut. Even the color of uniforms and patrol cars are currently being changed from green to blue. Changes were not identical in all the states, but every police force in Germany has faced considerable changes in one way or another during the past ten years.

The reactions to NPM among members of the organization have been mixed: many welcomed the modernization efforts as a long overdue overhaul of outdated procedures and behavioral patterns, whereas others greeted those new methods with a considerable amount of skepticism (Wehe, 2006). In particular, management philosophies and instruments directly derived from the private sector were met with a great deal of resistance. Many of the 'cops on the beat' considered the new methods as either fads introduced by management ideologues who wanted to turn the public sector into some kind of business enterprise or as just

another way of trying to save money and increase the workload by introducing better mechanisms to supervise and control the officers in their daily activities (Christe-Zeyse, 2006a,b, 2007). The debate about the future course of the police became a hotly contested issue (Wehe, 2006; Christe-Zeyse, 2006a, 2007). Many officers felt that the concepts of NPM were not suitable for an organization such as the police, and they resented having to spend time learning the new procedures and applying them. A police lieutenant ('Oberkommissar') told us: 'They made us sit there talking about management concepts while all hell was breaking loose out there in the streets'. Another officer put it this way: 'I remember how we left the room after this information meeting. I said to my colleague: I can't believe this. I always thought we were police! We're not selling anything! We're not a business! I wish they'd stop this management bullsh…!'

The statement 'I always thought we were police!' strongly suggests a perceived threat to a central aspect of the organization's identity. Emotions became more intense the longer the debate went on and the clearer it became that the changes in managerial practices were not exceptions, but rather were seriously supported by the ministries and therefore impossible to interpret as idiosyncratic preferences of only a small group of managers within the police. Reform protagonists in Germany liked to explain the kind of resistance signaled by the comments above as attributable to the proverbial conservatism and inflexibility of the German civil servant. But this hypothesis turned out to be inadequate in explaining the exact nature of organizational resistance because, as we found out at a rather early stage of our research, the police had gone through many changes before without bitter arguments of this nature surfacing, and without the level of resistance that was obviously directed at changes initiated under the NPM umbrella. An

organization that is as closely observed by the media and therefore as highly politicized as the police has a long history as a target for political interventions. Therefore, police officers are fairly well trained in accepting decisions 'from above' and living with that. As one officer puts it: 'We're always at the end of things, you know? When everything else fails, we are called to fix it. And I think we're pretty good at it. They (the politicians and senior officers) say "do this, do that", and we do it. That's it. We're used to that. That's what we're here for'.

An explanation of resistance that is rooted in threats to organizational identity gains plausibility because the strong emotional reactions we witnessed cannot be explained by the objective impact of those changes upon the individual officers working lives. Talking to officers about reforms connected to NPM, one gets the impression that the amount of hostility toward rather minor changes, for example the use of certain words like 'customer' ('Kunde') or 'product' ('Produkt'), the participation in quality circles or the requirement to type some data into a management information system at the end of a shift, was disproportionate to the actual impact that these new managerial practices had on the average police officer's work life. Resistance was not obviously related to the actual amount of hardship imposed upon the individual officer, but seemed rather to depend upon a very personal and sometimes emotional perception of what was acceptable and what was not. One officer drew a lot of laughs in a group interview when he said: 'I can't stand the word "product" in a police context. It's just not what we do. We don't produce anything, and they should stop pretending we did. You know, it gets so bad I break out in a rash every time I go to a super market and see the sign "dairy products"'. To illustrate this very basic experience of alienation toward the new managerial practices, we quote the introduction of a speech that was warmly received by police

officers, a speech made by union representative in early 2004: 'Today I wear black … black as a sign of mourning. I am in mourning, because you, dear gentlemen from the ministry of the interior, are about to carry the police to the grave. Many say this is not my police anymore. I completely subscribe to this point of view. We all joined the police force to become police officers. We always wanted and still want to serve the citizens. The citizens, mind you, not the customers! Our lives are now determined by elements of the free market economy. Do you really believe that these elements apply to a non-profit-organization like the police? Our everyday police life is now determined by input-output considerations, controlling, evaluations etc'. The speech was published on the trade union's website and triggered hundreds of police officers to send supportive mails.

We interpret these intense, emotional reactions as rooted in perceived threats to organizational identity. They are reminiscent of the threats to organizational identity, Whetten (1998) described with the intensive debates following the 2 percent budget cut at the University in Illinois in 1979. While the business school professors could calmly analyze the dramatic financial crises of 'Chrysler Corporation' in the class room, they perceived the 2 percent cut at their own university as a pending financial disaster and framed this legislative mandate as a profound threat to the organization and their membership in it: 'The need to reduce the organization's commitment to something introduced the possibility that the organization might be willing to give up everything' (Whetten, 1998).

In the following section, we describe in more detail the organizational identity of the police force. By doing so, we substantiate our interpretation that responses to managerial practices we have described so far can best be read as rooted in threats to organizational identity. These threats emerged as a result of

violations of central aspects of the organizational identity of the police force that accompanied the introduction of new and clearly discordant managerial practices.

POLICE ORGANIZATION AS A HYBRID IDENTITY

Hybrid identity organizations are defined by multiple identities that cannot be changed (inviolate), that cannot be divested (indispensable) and that fundamentally conflict with one another (incompatible). Contradictory identity elements can co-exist either 'ideographically' or 'holographically' (Albert and Whetten, 1985). Ideographic identities can be held by different segments of the organization, while holographic identities are diffused throughout the organization and might co-exist within the same roles (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997). An example of an ideographic identity is Glynn's (2000) description of the conflicts between the musicians and the management of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (ASO). While the musicians enact a normative identity ('idealistic, music driven'), the administrators enact a utilitarian identity ('The product is music, … fiscal stability is crucial; the issue is always money'), which leads to conflicts expressed in statements from musicians such as '(ASO management is) looking at the orchestra like it was a potato chip factory'. Similar conflicts can be found in hospitals where doctors and managers clash over issues such as the relevance of cost-effectiveness or budgets when lives are at risk (Golden *et al.*, 2000; Llewellyn, 2001; Pollitt *et al.*, 1988).

Within the police two holographic identities co-exist that act as a source of tension and conflict. This hybrid identity follows directly from the special functions that the police force needs to perform in a society and from the demands that external and internal audiences articulate; on the one hand, a police force is the armed section of the executive branch and gives its members

the right to infringe upon citizens' rights in a sometimes rather drastic manner. But in order to preserve the rights of the citizens and control the police, the police force on the other hand needs to be organized as a bureaucracy. Bureaucratic procedures serve to limit the powers of the police, make its members accountable and secure political control over it (Behr, 2000; Reiner, 1991, 2000).

Therefore, the German police force is shaped by two predominant identities: a bureaucratic identity and what we call a 'crime fighter identity' (Behr, 2000; Christe-Zeyse, 2007). The bureaucratic identity shows itself in the numerous rules and regulations that a police officer has to follow, the hierarchical nature of a police organization, and sometimes rather tedious routines that need to be observed in order to get something done. But it also plays a role when police officers claim their right to enjoy protection from getting fired or retain other privileges of a German civil servant. In the crime fighter identity, the 'cop culture' rules (Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983; Behr, 2000, Christe-Zeyse, 2007). It is the world in which individual behavior is shaped by traditions, implicit pressures and the need to perform a very often difficult job to keep chaos at bay. The cop culture is full of unwritten codes, rituals and features that are taken for granted by every officer who has spent time on the force (Crank, 2004; Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983; Behr, 2000; Manning and Van Maanen, 1978; Manning, 1997). Those two identities have co-existed over the years, although some aspects might clash every once in a while and require management intervention. But every police officer knows the, explicit as well as the implicit, rules of the game and in which situation it is better to follow a bureaucratic rule and do what is required to clear a situation or get a colleague back in line.

What is decidedly *not* part of these two organizational identities is the managerial

way of thinking introduced by the implementation of NPM: aspects such as the strict focus on efficiency and the accountability for results directly undermine core features (Albert and Whetten, 1985) of the organizational identity of the German police.

Just as much as most artists are led by an intrinsic desire to create or perform and therefore resent being managed like a 'potato chip factory', most police officers we talked to are guided by an intrinsic desire to police: to catch criminals, provide security and keep order. Their organizational identity clearly marks the difference between serving society and working in the business sector. It does not matter in that respect whether police officers' perceptions of a private company or the business sector are 'true' or not. Those distinctions are meant to draw the line between 'us' and 'them' (Table 1).

Our interviews show that for most police officers the (ideal type) police organization is characterized by a strong emphasis on team spirit, solidarity and reciprocity. The leader of a shift (Dienstgruppenleiter) said: 'When I was a rookie, our shift was like family. We helped each other out whenever we could. Working those odd hours, policemen are about the only friends you can spend your time with'. Most police officers tend to see private enterprise as an entirely different world ruled by competition, efficiency and the need to make a profit. A senior police officer told us: 'When I joined the police force 30 years ago, my friends felt sorry for me because of the pitiful salary I got. My best friend went to an international company and pretty soon made five times of what I got. Well, the company is gone now; my school buddy tried to run a consulting firm himself and went broke. That's what free enterprise is like. Police will always be around. We watch out for each other'. Although police officers in our study tend to see management techniques as modern and efficient, they also tend to see working for business as somewhat morally inferior to working for 'the greater good'. Management terms such as 'controlling', 'performance', 'quality management' and 'mission statements' (terms that are frequently not even translated into German) belong to a world that is seen as very distinct from the world of police work. Attempts to introduce management concepts into the police are seen as a threat to the specific identity that defines what police ought to be all about (Christe-Zeyse, 2007).

NORM VIOLATIONS AND SEARCH-AND-ADJUSTMENT PROCESSES: TWO EXAMPLES

Any kind of change that violates one or more of the basic features of the police force's organizational identity is likely to trigger a cascade of sense-making processes. In the following, we provide two examples that illustrate the limited foresight of change managers concerning the search-and-adjustment processes catalyzed by the introduction of new managerial practices. We describe how an initial change in managerial practices was reinterpreted by the members of the organization and in the process modified and partly circumvented in order to protect what they thought was an essential element of their organizational identity.

Example No. 1: The Introduction of Performance Indicators

Part of the NPM paradigm has always been its focus on output and performance. While the old bureaucratic form of management favored rule compliance and relied largely on input management and controls, NPM puts a lot of emphasis on contract management and the measurement of performance. It goes without saying that a system of targets and performance indicators can only work if somebody is accountable for the results (Christe-Zeyse, 2004: 29–32). Traditionally, in the German police the middle managers have never been accountable for the results of police work in their districts. The fact that

Table 1: The Hybrid Identity of the German Police Force

Identities	Claims regarding accountability	Claims regarding the use of resources	Claims regarding employee's satisfaction
Crime-fighter	Police work is performed according to established standards that are learned in trainings. As long as police officers follow these standards, they are on the safe side.	Primary goal of police work is to do whatever is necessary – regardless of the costs. When there is an emergency, all available resources need to be mobilized.	Police officers pledge to risk their health or lives in the line of duty. Therefore, they can expect a special kind of care, fairness, trust, and sympathy from their superiors.
Bureaucratic	What a police officer must and must not do is codified. As long as officers follow the rules, they are on the safe side.	Civil servants have to observe the rules of thrift and parsimony in their daily work.	Civil servants are entitled to certain benefits and services. There are legal provisions that regulate what civil servants can expect from their employer.
Managerial	Officers are expected to think like entrepreneurs and pursue effective solutions efficiently and prudently.	Good management is finding the right balance between yield and costs. That also applies to the police. Everything else would mean squandering scarce public resources.	Officers are the primary and most valuable resource to pursue organizational goals. It is good management to see that officers are satisfied and motivated. Motivated officers perform better.

individual officers as well as the lower and middle management could not be held accountable for the security in a town or region was one of the fundamental taken-for-granted assumptions of a bureaucratic organization. It was simply assumed that every police officer did his or her best, and when crime rates or the number of traffic accidents went up, it was considered a reason to ask for more input: staff, money and infrastructure, but also tougher laws, more controls, etc (Christe-Zeyse, 2004: 24–28). Nobody bothered to take a closer look at the strategies or processes of an organizational unit, because the rules and standards were formulated at the top of the organizational pyramid, and there was no need to question the wisdom of how a unit organized their operations. This distribution of accountability made a certain amount of sense, because the number of crimes or

traffic accidents depends on a wide variety of variables of which police work is but one.

The introduction of performance indicators and contracts into the German police would have meant a shift in the distribution of accountability within the forces from the political level further down the ranks – eventually even down to the individual officer. Under the new paradigm, police officers were thus confronted with the perceived unfairness that they had always associated with the private sector: to be held accountable for results they could not entirely control. Police officers felt they had no real influence upon the amount of drugs that were imported illegally, the number of car thefts or the level of violent crime committed in their region. In an interview, a union representative from the state of Northrhine-Westfalia puts it this way: 'Criminals don't care how we are managed. They commit

their crimes regardless of our concepts, and there's not a whole lot that we can do about it'. It was firmly believed that making the police accountable for crime rates, the number of traffic accidents or consumer satisfaction was potentially unfair to all the police officers who performed their duty consistently, loyally and professionally. The attempt to improve police work by introducing new managerial practices, such as target setting and performance management, led to a clash between the requirements of the new system and the taken-for-granted aspects of organizational culture in the force.

We came across numerous examples that show how officers tried to develop routines to avoid being held accountable for things they could not directly influence. Mensching (2006) also gives illustrative examples of 'creative book-keeping' by police officers who used newly implemented reporting requirements to give a favorable impression of their activities and thus avoid trouble without actually changing their way of policing. First of all, police officers focused on activities that were 'easily recordable' and reduced activities that could not be booked into the accounting software. They further focused on types of crime that have high detection rates, because it looked well in reports that were produced under the new system. Some types of crime have a notoriously low detection rate, for example larceny, whereas other forms of crime such as the use of drugs, shop lifting in department stores or fare dodging in subways have favorable detection rates, because they are usually brought to the attention of the police only when the suspect is known. So, if a police officer needs to improve his or her detection rate, they increase searches of drug users or talk to private detectives in department stores and then deliver cases that can be reported as 'solved'.

Many police officers also redefined their routine activities in order to make them more compatible with the official goals of their organization. They found ways of doing the things they had always done, such as going on patrol, but presented it as though they were making a conscious effort to pursue the newly agreed upon goals. They simply booked their activities as something pertaining to the official strategy, regardless of what they actually did.

Inevitably, some superiors realized that the data that were produced in this way were fairly useless. They either introduced even more sophisticated control mechanisms in order to detect incorrect input of data, or they simply learned to live with it and pretended not to notice the sloppy and incorrect data input. In the latter case, the senior officers mostly refrained from using the data at all, knowing very well that the data were unreliable and could not be used to make management decisions.

In both cases, the clash between these new management practices and the existing organizational culture produced violations of police organizational identity, and flowing from that, reactions that ranged from cynicism to apathy. The officers observed how their superiors were responding, noticing that controls were tighter or that data were simply ignored. In the first case, they felt confirmed in their initial suspicion that the 'real' goal of NPM was not so much increasing effectiveness and efficiency, but rather tighter control of the officers' activities in order to detect slack and intensify the workload. They felt that their commitment and professionalism were not valued and usually reacted very defensively. In the second case, the officers felt reassured in their initial belief that the introduction of NPM was no more than just a temporary thing, a fad that their superiors had subscribed to and that would go away as soon as everybody had realized that those methods were not suited for a special organization such as the police.

The effect of both reactions was fairly similar: the initial goal of the change in the

managerial practices (increased effectiveness and efficiency of police work) was not achieved, but trust between officers and their superiors was damaged and subsequent change efforts were made harder.

Example No. 2: The Introduction of New Appraisal Systems

At a time when the police in Germany operated like a typical bureaucratic organization, it was understood that an officer who simply did his or her job by following established procedures was 'on the safe side' and could expect decent appraisals and a promotion in due course. The assumption that even officers with average performance, average capabilities and average commitment deserved a promotion now and then, had acquired taken-for-granted status as part of the cultural code over the decades. Even though many police officers had questioned this type of promotion policy – especially when they saw somebody being promoted who was universally considered undeserving – it was, nevertheless, a very stable and predictable feature of a police officer's career, particularly as long as there were enough attractive positions and enough money to provide for the desired number of promotions.

Because most appraisal systems in the German police did not include fixed quotas for excellent, good and fair grades, there was a tendency to give more and more officers good or excellent appraisals in order not to damage their commitment and probably also to save their superiors the trouble of communicating bad appraisal ratings and risking having another trouble maker in the team. And giving only good and excellent grades looked like a rational strategy, as long as all the other leaders seemed to be doing it. By the end of the 20th century, there were several police forces with a grade average of 1.2–1.5 with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest grade. Because appraisals with this kind of grading tendencies were

unsuitable as a basis for making promotion decisions, other criteria became important: age, years in service, social factors, etc. Leaders were faced with the task of finding a pragmatic compromise between promoting good officers and at the same time making sure that the average officers still had a chance to eventually be promoted.

In order to modernize this rather outdated system of Human Resource Management in their police forces, more and more Ministries of the Interior introduced new appraisal systems with fixed quotas for good and excellent grades in order to force leaders to restrict those grades only to those who really deserved them. But this new managerial practice collided with the existing organizational culture that valued solidarity, team spirit and a rather egalitarian notion of fairness more highly than competitiveness.

The way the organization reacted to the clash between managerial practices and organizational culture is instructive. In quite a number of cases, the new appraisal requirements were redefined or modified so that officers who were believed to 'deserve' a promotion still had a chance. Usually, that was done in the form of a 'package deal' with the staff representatives. A number of strong (and mostly younger) officers were promoted together with a number of weaker, but older officers in order to temper criticism. After the shortlist with the candidates for the next round of promotions was agreed upon, the appraisals were formulated so that they fit into the required quotas. This kind of pragmatism was clearly against the letter of the regulation, and in some cases it was just a matter of time until some officer sued and an administrative court stopped the whole process (given they could find enough evidence to have a case). But in most cases, this procedure has proven to be fairly stable, because it is in alignment with existing cultural codes, although the outcome was not what was intended. Clearly, the consequences of the new appraisal

systems and the reactions of the members of the organization were not anticipated by the initiators of the change, and the costs of the new system were a lot higher than originally expected.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, we argue that changes made to the managerial practices of the police organization can result in misalignments with the existing culture of the organization. Such misalignments might produce violations of basic organizational norms. If changes to managerial practices produce emerging organizational cultural norms that remain in the acceptable and expected range restrictions, this process is likely to proceed smoothly. When norm violations, however, go beyond the accepted ranges, leading to culturally unacceptable behavior and managerial practices, this can create a perceived threat to organizational identity and as a consequence lead to severe disturbances in the social system. Violations of organizational identity can evoke distrust among the members of the organization. These reactions produce secondary changes, the pathways of which cannot be predicted and the progress of which cannot be easily rewound.

The initiation of change projects generates uncertainty by making the currently expected future less likely. The more clearly goals are specified by those leading change projects, the easier it is for change recipients to imagine what the outcomes might be, and how these might effect them. Effective management of change projects is therefore essential, and this entails clear goal definition and an exerted effort to communicate persistent respect for the established organizational culture and organizational identity.

In the spirit of NPM, police forces are increasingly seen as public service organizations that deliver important goods. Questions concerning the user friendliness of the service, the efficiency (end efficacy) of the delivery and the costs of these services in general suddenly gain priority. Whether these new practices will be taken for granted in the eyes of the members of the organization depends on the ability of management to facilitate sense making within the current boundaries set by organizational identity.

The phenomenon of revisionist history, namely that change initiatives not only revise the current perception of the organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1996), but also revise the current perceptions of the past, might be of specific importance for the police. As Gioia *et al.* (2000: 71) note, 'revisionist history (…) assures some infidelity to previous conceptions of identity'. This infidelity might be something that an organization such as the police cannot afford, since it would touch too deeply on its crucial position in a democratic system. The perception that new management methods signal that 'up to now we did everything wrong' is especially painful in an organization that relies on the commitment and professional identification of its employees. Instead, embedding new claims and new managerial practices in the cultural heritage of the organization and emphasizing the connection with 'who we have been' rather than 'what we want to become' seems to provide more credible support to reframe collective understandings in the light of new environmental conditions (Gioia *et al.*, 2000; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006).

Police forces, along with several other public sector organizations, are hardly exposed to market competition, and political goodwill offers a certain degree of immunity, if not a feeling of immortality. This immunity might allow for a certain shortsightedness, and the feeling of immortality might lead to a kind of organizational blindness. In addition to that, the high level of intrinsic motivation and discipline of police agents can reinforce this institutional blindness in the sense that dissatisfaction is often voiced very late and the commitment of

most officers guarantees the functioning of the organization, although frustration and dissatisfaction among the officers might have reached a critical state. Because police organizations do not have indicators comparable to stock prices, profits, sales figures, credit ratings or turnover rates that can signal a critical state to the management, the organization and its members can be pushed to the point of exhaustion.

The importance of organizational identity to members of the police cannot be overestimated. Change processes that endanger this organizational identification due to serious threats to the organizational identity must be considered a severe risk and taken into account in any attempt to understand the long-term consequences of organizational change processes. Change projects that create the impression among organizational members that core aspects of organizational identity are challenged might not only distort the intended aim of the change initiatives to a critical degree, but also, more seriously, endanger the very continuity of organizational identity.

Acknowledgments

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