

**Best Practises - Case Study:**  
**Project “ZENTRAB (Zentrale Anzeigenbearbeitung)”**

**Central Criminal Case Processing**  
**A Pilot Project for Land Brandenburg**

(Germany)

**COMPOSITE WORK PACKAGE 2**

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## Background

ZENTRAB stands for “Zentrale Anzeigenbearbeitung” which means central complain processing. It can be seen as an effort related to differentiation in offence management. All offences with little investigative effort get outsourced in this centralised complain processing unit (ZENTRAB). Before ZENTRAB every criminal investigation department had to process all kinds of cases in their field of competence regardless of investigative effort. This less organised and structured approach led to high individual workload and caused a reduction of time for field work. A new and better organisation was indispensable. As a consequence, the ZENTRAB department was developed. It was established in November 2009 in the Barnim district as pilot project for the criminal police of the Land Brandenburg. The successfully installed ZENTRAB department of the Cologne police district served as a model for the Barnim police district, but it was slightly altered. To take on the model best way the district leader of Barnim, staff council and project management went to Cologne to look at the ZENTRAB department in the field. Phone talks have been carried out as well.

The model was very well adopted in Barnim including the involvement of different kinds of offences and a new software system. The special stacking system appeared particularly useful and therefore was applied in Barnim as well. There is a shelf for every day of the month in order to make things simpler and clearer even with other colleagues being sick or on vacation.

*“We transferred the filing system from Cologne. There is a box for each day with case files. At the end of the month the first box will be emptied and the case files will be sent to the public prosecutor. In this way ZENTRAB can meet the deadlines.”<sup>1</sup>*

The resources needed for the implementation of the project included the installation of as well as the move into a multi-person office and the costs of headsets. Thus the resource costs were minor.

Basically ZENTRAB is characterised by:

- multi-person office,

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<sup>1</sup> Interview conducted on December 19, 2011 with the ZENTRAB project manager Criminal Police Superintendent Dingelstadt. All following quotes without footnotes come from the same interview.

- no customer contact / no “real” investigative work,
- stringent implementation of a simplified procedure,
- daily completed processing based on precast standards,
- ascription of non individual-related processing.<sup>2</sup>

Different positive effects became apparent in the Cologne model. The concentration of responsibilities that improved actuality and substance of data as well as the definition of standards increased the quality in its entirety. Performance of employees was improved by the increase in motivation. Without person contact and field work, offering office duty saved resources. A gain of efficiency could be reached by the use of synergy effects in the workforce and by simplifying controlling processes.

*“The more certain offences get prioritized the stronger the positive effects.”*

While ZENTRAB has been proved to work in an urban area like Cologne, the pilot project in Barnim put an emphasis on analysing the implementation in more rural areas, which are typical for the Land Brandenburg. As an adaption more different kinds of offences got included. The project group was formed for an initial one year run. The aim was to verify the transfer ability into the rural area and to assess the effects. Furthermore, the investigative effort should be better adapted to the investigation closing practice of the public prosecutor. Due to ZENTRAB the investigative departments will be able to spend more resources in offence processing with higher investigative effort.

*“Police must set priorities. They do not need to investigate everything.”*

The ZENTRAB staff was chosen by certain criteria. First of all, participation was voluntarily. Second, employees who wanted to work for ZENTRAB had to be willing and able to work in a multi-person office. Furthermore, they had to have experiences with all kinds of different offence types reaching from burglary to assault and they had to be able to cope with processing of many cases. Executives should likewise have experiences in operating with mass proceedings and most of all sensitivity towards their staff. The computer based work

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the standardised procedure and the widespread investigative experience each employee can manage all kinds of criminal cases within ZENTRAB. Thus the management of the criminal cases is not bound to individual case managers.

within ZENTRAB is ideal for employees who cannot do field work due to physical restrictions such as back complaints or physical disabilities. Hence up to 50 per cent of the ZENTRAB employees should be capable of limited service. Diverse kinds of restrictions were taken into account by the setting up of the workplaces.

One intended incentive for employees to switch to ZENTRAB was the more flexible working time. This should not only attract staff but also reduce work related stress for staff.

### **Project goals**

An evaluation of the criminal investigation departments revealed a reduction in case officer positions in the departments. Especially with the Reunification case, officer positions dropped or got miscast. Re-staffing of case officer was very often not performance related. The reduction in case officer positions as well as the mismatches involved a high workload in the departments. ZENTRAB was expected to relocate personnel resources to a better use of knowledge and performance of employees. The competencies and skills of officers should be primarily taken into account when positioning in ZENTRAB. This together with the centralised responsibility for minor crime as well as such with no investigative approach should lead to better employee satisfaction, efficiency and effectiveness. Unloading workload in the criminal investigation department by transferring minor crime and crime with no investigative approach to ZENTRAB was one of the main goals.

#### *Effectiveness*

The centralised responsibility for minor crime as well as such with no investigative approach was supposed to relive processing in the individual departments and increase effectiveness of processing of major and mid crime likewise.

#### *Efficiency/Profitability*

The focused and extensive use of the standardised questionnaire and procedure together with the precise instructions should increase efficiency.

The staff relocation within the criminal investigation department should also contribute to more efficiency and better outcomes.

### *Employee Satisfaction*

Relocating the basic crimes to ZENTRAB, it was expected to have different positive effects on staff. This should lead to a decline in administration work as well as data collection in the investigation area and thus, give the case officers time to do their actual work as criminal investigators. Additionally, this should bring about a decrease in workload and raise satisfaction in the criminal investigation department.

The placement of staff in ZENTRAB according to skills, competencies and merits that before have often been left unexploited was on the other hand supposed to lead to a gain in motivation and decline of absenteeism in the ZENTRAB team. A reduction of workload and therefore a reduction of sick days were expected.

Cases were evenly distributed between all ZENTRAB team members. The higher transparency of individual performances in the ZENTRAB team -partly due to the multi-person office - should add to better motivation.

*“Very often in the civil service performance ratings are not really motivating for officers. There is no transparency. You don’t know where you stand and how your performance is compared to others”*

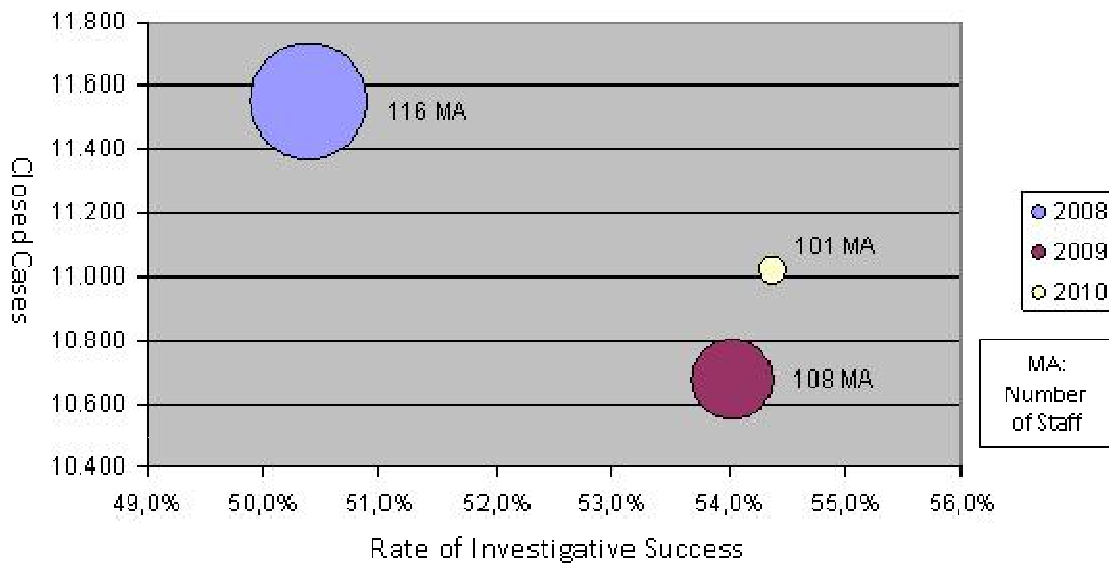
### **Achievements of Project ZENTRAB**

ZENTRAB has accomplished a high acceptance among the employees. It almost fulfilled its expectations. Most of the goals could be accomplished. Limiting factors and barriers are mentioned further below. The standardised questionnaire procedure is extensively used.

### *Effectiveness*

ZENTRAB could reach a gain in performance even with a reduction of manpower (see Figure 1). Although this increase was below expectations it can still be seen as success. At this point, ZENTRAB relieves the former KK I-III (investigative departments I-III; formerly responsible for minor, petty offences, cases without investigative approach) by about 50 per cent. Thus, officer in the KK I-III have more time to deal with other cases as well as taking care of ad-hoc situations.

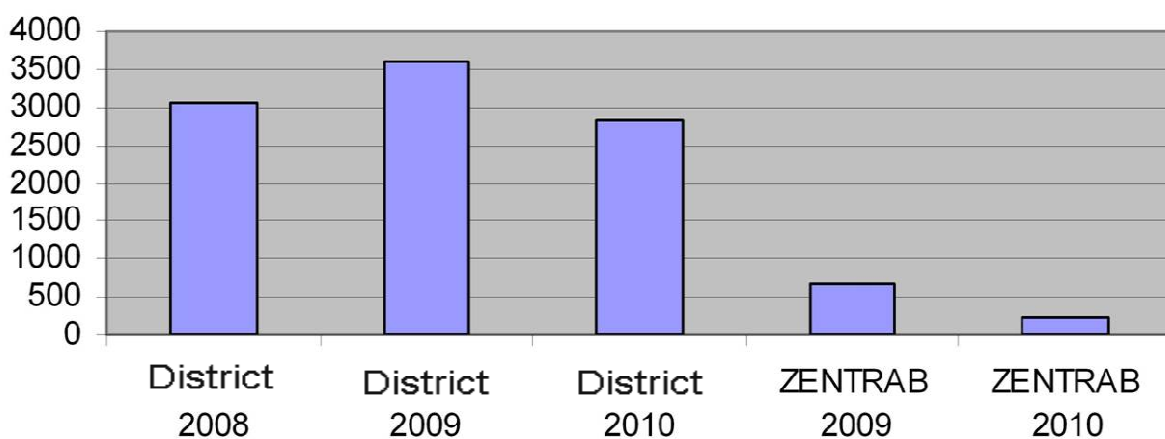
**Figure 1: Performance Outcome, Relation Staff-Number to Investigative Success<sup>3</sup>**



*Employee Satisfaction*

The new multi-person office in ZENTRAB promotes teambuilding and commitment. There is mutual motivation and controlling. The performance of ZENTRAB is perceived as a team performance by all colleagues. Returns are perceived as team failure. A high motivation of employees and significant reduction of sick days was noticeable as can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Sick Days of Staff of Barnim District/ZENTRAB 2008 - 2010<sup>4</sup>**



<sup>3</sup> This figure is taken from the final project report of the Criminal Police of the Barnim Police District. It has been translated into English.

<sup>4</sup> See 3

### Achievements résumé:

- One of the main made achievements is the saving of time for both ZENTRAB and the criminal investigation department. The colleagues belonging to ZENTRAB do not have to do hearings any longer. Due to the fact that usually not all invited persons appeared at the police station, officers often have had unused time slots and wasted preparation time.
- The use of a standardised data management form to communicate with citizens via phone has accomplished a saving of time as well.
- The management of the investigative cases could be equally distributed in the ZENTRAB team. It is a transparent work process: Everybody knows about the work load of his/her colleagues. They have lunch and smoking breaks collectively.
- The sickness absence rate could be reduced significantly.
- The case managers being a part of ZENTRAB can work more flexible and the work process is very manageably structured.
- The efficiency of the investigative police departments can be better controlled. It is not possible to count dropped cases as an investigative success any longer.
- Before ZENTRAB had been installed, the work load of the departments corresponded to the number of criminal cases per department and per case manager. Now the departments have more time for other investigative tasks.
- One investigator finishes 1300 case files a year.

### ***Key Success Factors and Enablers, External Stakeholders***

Key success factors and enablers identified that contributed to the success of the project are the following:

- Support by the staff council

*“The support by the staff council was essential to start and to realise the project.”*

- Project management was led by senior criminal superintendent with police external juridical education

*“I do not come from the police. That was an advantage. I considered the work flow from another perspective. I let the departments give 10 case files to me and checked them.”*

- Good preparation

*“We visited the colleagues in Cologne who successfully introduced ZENTRAB. The number of criminal cases in Cologne corresponds to the number of crime cases in Brandenburg.”*

- Support by public prosecution

*“Sometimes the case files were sent back from the prosecutor and we could not assess why. I spoke with the chief prosecutor and we agreed that all case files have to be checked by him before they go back to ZENTRAB. Now there is a control point avoiding that the ZENTRAB colleagues have to spend more resources for managing the case files than necessary.”*

### **Limiting Factors and Barriers**

There are different possible explanations why ZENTRAB has not entirely reached its goals. The standardised questionnaire for example has its benefits but also its limitations. Problems can occur if the questionnaire is not fully or wrongly filled out, if a citizen prefers a face-to-face questioning or if the offense does not completely fit the questionnaire.

Other barriers or limiting factors can be:

- The minor criminal cases do not reach the investigators in the departments any longer. These are managed by ZENTRAB now. Thus, departments only get the more severe cases. Some colleagues cannot cope with this situation. One way to deal with this new situation could be that the police officers would get special trainings.
- Some colleagues refuse ZENTRAB due to a special culture of investigators. Especially older colleagues want to hold the investigation of criminal cases in their own hands. They want to retain the ability to influence the crime clearance rate by their investigative work.



- ZENTRAB leads to a reduction of the crime clearance rate of the individual criminal investigation agencies. That is why these agencies want to keep little crime cases with known offenders in their responsibility.
- Not all investigation agencies are well-staffed. ZENTRAB only works if there is enough staff in the agencies. If there is a lack of staff in one ZENTRAB unit, staff of other units will help managing their case files.
- There is a lack of statistical knowledge among employees to understand the rationale of the change fully. Thus the implication of ZENTRAB has not been accepted by all officers in the departments to all extents.

## Further Developments

### **ZENTRAB II**

The findings of ZENTRAB led to the implementation of ZENTRAB II in September 2010 as an addition to ZENTRAB. While ZENTRAB took responsibility for minor crime and such with no investigative approach that could be handled via the established questionnaire procedure only, ZENTRAB II was supposed to take in all minor crime offences whatsoever. This includes returns as well as requests. ZENTRAB and ZENTRAB II can therefore be regarded as a closed system which is complementary. An alteration made with the introduction of ZENTRAB II was the addition of offense customised questionnaires. If such questionnaires are not sufficient enough, tightened questionings can be carried out by ZENTRAB II now. Therefore ZENTRAB II has got 4 interrogators who do questionings only. Due to the reorganisation of the workflow and the competences investigative police officers could get specialised on hearings of witnesses and do hearings the whole day. The hearings can also be done via phone, if the invited person does not appear at the police station. In this way, ZENTRAB II is closing the gap in case personal hearings are needed.

To establish ZENTRAB II at its best, data has been collected and analyzed for more than a year. A computer programme has been developed to help generate a prognosis of how many summoned persons will actually appear. This has brought out a more effective

process. Out of 5 to 6 invitations, three persons will actually appear on average. As a result, it has become a general proceeding to send out more invitations per day. Since every questioning need preparation time this proceeding will get further advanced in the future. Therefore the computer system will get more enhanced. A statistic system is meant to be established that will estimate the probability not only of how many persons but also which persons are likely to appear. To be able to do so, different data of invited persons will be collected and then analysed in regard of coherences. In the future, only in case of a high chance of appearance preparation of questioning will be carried out. This will lead to a saving of resources.

To offer an incentive, interrogators are now allowed to use 20 per cent of their weekly working time as telework for the preparation of cases.

## Reflections

ZENTRAB can be seen as best practise for different reasons. It could be implemented the way it was intended. It has accomplished most of its goals and expectations. Employee's motivation, commitment and satisfaction along with performance improved. Moreover, more cases can be closed with ZENTRAB and ZENTRAB II. To further meet expectations and gain performances, ZENTRAB will continue its intense trainings.

Based on the success of the pilot project in the Barnim district, the implementation of ZENTRAB will be expanded all over Brandenburg. The commission which is in charge of the structural reform of the police of Brandenburg called "Brandenburg 2020" considers ZENTRAB as a valuable instrument increasing the efficiency and quality of case management in the field of crimes with little investigative effort.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that ZENTRAB has been successfully established in the police forces of other German *Länder* indicates that it can be considered as a best practice case in the police. For the cities Bremen, Cologne, Aachen, Dortmund, Essen, Mönchengladbach, Recklinghausen and others ZENTRAB became an essential and necessary instrument of the criminal police

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<sup>5</sup> Commission "Police of Brandenburg 2020" (2010). **Report**. Document for internal use only.

departments. In May 2005 the former Senator of the Interior of the Land Bremen visited the ZENTRAB department of the Bremen police force and resumed:

*“The central criminal case processing... slims down and accelerates procedures and leads to an increasing quality of case management which is profitable for the public prosecutor, for the police and for the citizens. The criminal police departments get relieved ... and are enabled to manage severe crimes prompt and more concentrated.”<sup>6</sup>*

Beyond the positive effects of ZENTRAB one critical aspect regarding the culture of criminal police officers shall be mentioned. Criminal police officers regard themselves as investigators which is contrastive to a pure administrative job. Against this background, the federation of German criminal police officers (BDK)<sup>7</sup> and the GdP<sup>8</sup>, which is the biggest German police union, warn that the quality and the investigative requirements of crime case processing must not get lost due to a standardised and form based procedure. Both federations appreciate ZENTRAB on condition that it keeps the balance between investigation and administration.

Apart from that, to address for future developments there is still a need for better statistical knowledge on the behalf of police officers which has to be aimed-at. More data is needed and more mathematical probabilities have to be taken into account.

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<sup>6</sup> See the press statement of the Senator of the Interior of the Land Bremen for more details. Available at <http://www.senatspressestelle.bremen.de/detail.php?id=14267>.

<sup>7</sup> See the press statement of the BDK for more details. Available at: <http://www.bdk.de/lv/brandenburg/aktuelles/zu-besuch-in-der-zentrab>

<sup>8</sup> See the positions of the GdP for more details. Available at: [http://www.gdp.de/gdp/gdpbra.nsf/id/pos\\_fa\\_k\\_polizeireform?Open&setprintmode=1](http://www.gdp.de/gdp/gdpbra.nsf/id/pos_fa_k_polizeireform?Open&setprintmode=1)

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## **Appendix**

### **Partners Involved in Project ZENTRAB**

District Attorney's Office Frankfurt / Oder

Police Force Cologne

Former Police District Barnim

Main Staff Council

Local Staff Council of former Police District Barnim

Ministry of the Interior of the Land Brandenburg