**Practitioner Fellowships**

**Variations of culture in police organisations and their potential impact on amalgamation of police forces. A case study of the Scottish Police Service**

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**Introduction/Background:**

As part of the Scottish Police Reform Programme, Chief Constable Justine Curran has undertaken to lead on the "development of the culture and values which underpin the operation of the new service and to support the wider benefits of reform." (OGC R5)

The importance of understanding those "aspects of current organizational culture within the existing 8 forces, SCDEA and SPSA which might enable or inhibit the successful transformation" from the existing forces and agencies into the new Police Service of Scotland, has been recognised by those leading the Reform Programme (OGC R5(2)).

The importance of culture in the performance of organisations has been recognised in previous research (Deal and Kennedy 1999). In particular the management of cultural differences has been seen as important in the success of amalgamations in the public and private sectors (Fulop et al 2002, Johnson and Scholes 2008, Miller 2000).

For example, a Harvard Business School study cited by Miller (2000) stated "*without understanding the often hidden and implied values that drive decision making at every level, the chances are great that a merger or acquisition will quickly be awash in misunderstanding, confusion and conflict*". Additionally the 2005 amalgamation of the Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise into HMRC recognised that the difference of culture was seen as a serious constraint in the complete merging of the two organisations.

Given the widely held perception within the Scottish Police Service that there are differences in organisational culture between and within the existing Scottish police forces and agencies, and the apparent scarcity of research in Scotland in relation to police organisational culture, this research is an essential element in the development of the new Police Service of Scotland.

The study will not only identify those aspects of current organisational culture which might enable or hinder amalgamation, but also recommend appropriate actions. In order to be most effective, the work will focus on the cultural issues relating to the changes relevant to Day 1 of the new Service. Schein (2010 p.316) states "*not all parts of a culture are relevant to any given issue the organisation may be facing; hence, attempting to study an entire culture in all of its facets is not only impractical but also usually inappropriate*."

**Aim:**

To improve the understanding of key aspects (namely those integral to Day 1 of the new Police Service of Scotland) of the current organisational and occupational cultures within Scottish policing organisations with a view to facilitating the Police Reform Day 1 change programme.

**Research Objectives:**

* To identify any similarities and differences between cultures which exist within some areas of business which are currently distributed between the existing police forces and agencies comprising the Scottish Police Service and which will be merged with others to form new units or teams on day 1 of new Police Service of Scotland.
* To highlight those significant cultural factors which might enable or hinder the successful development of those elements on Day 1 of the new Police Service of Scotland.
* To consider whether the identified cultural differences and similarities require action to reinforce the planned change, and to consider whether action is required to change the basic paradigm (thereby requiring the development of a longer term major cultural change strategy)
* To examine areas of good practice in Northern European Countries in respect of how organisations, and police organisations in particular, managed the merger of previously separate organisations in a new whole in respect of organisational and occupational cultures. This will focus particularly on the recent merger of 26 police forces into one national Dutch Police Force.

**Research Strategy:**

From a research design perspective the strategy and methodology must be of sufficient rigor to withstand scrutiny, particularly from the Police Reform Strategy Group (which comprises existing Chief Constables) and the Vision and Values Steering Group. To that end the strategic approach will balance 'social science' and 'business school' approaches, highlighting the implications for managers responsible for implementing the Reform Programme and the impact of culture on organisational performance.

The research will take the form of a case study (Yin 2003) of aspects of Scottish policing organisations gaining insight from a broad range of knowledge sources in order to gain more understanding of the complexity involved in the organisational cultures identified.

There are three broad types of knowledge we will be utilising in order to achieve the purpose of this research, namely;

1. Existing knowledge which is already publicly available i.e. reviewing relevant academic, business and policy literature including experience of other organisations managing the cultural issues of amalgamations.
2. New knowledge acquired through field research involving small focus groups and a large survey of a range of staff from all eight Scottish Police Forces, the SCDEA, and SPSA who will be merging together into new teams and business areas prior to, or on, Day 1 of the new Service.
3. Existing knowledge from a 'Collaborative Group' of police and research practitioners comprising this Practitioner Fellowship Group, the Vision & Values Steering Group and others from police organisations within the United Kingdom and abroad (focusing on PSNI, the Netherlands and Scandinavia).

Through the auspices of the Vision & Values Steering Group we will utilise the professional knowledge and experience Chief Officers, Staff Associations and key partners/stakeholders important to the success of the Day 1 Implementation Plan.

A number of underpinning assumptions have been made when designing the research strategy and associated methodology namely:

* That organisational culture is created, maintained and preserved by managerial, organisational and environmental factors. It can therefore be assessed by studying aspects of the organisation, including:
  + the views of individuals and groups through interview processes. Schein (2010) proposes that group interviews are a better method for rapidly assessing culture in terms of both validity and efficiency;
  + the communications, systems and structures of the organisation;
  + the context within which the organisation operates.
* A cultural assessment is of little value unless it is tied to some organisational issue such as a new purpose, strategy, outcomes, performance or change agenda. In these circumstances, determining how the culture impacts the issues is not only useful but in most cases essential. Through this, the assessment of culture should be related to the organisation's effectiveness, efficiency and performance and how these might be improved.
* The assessment process should first identify cultural assumptions and then assess them in terms of whether they are a strength or a constraint on what the organisation is trying to do.

**Literature Review Strategy:**

The project will build on the definition of organisational culture of Schein (2010) broadly recognising that culture can be summed up as "the way we do things round here". It will use the work of Chao et al. (1994) arguing that culture is created and affected by organisational and managerial factors, and examine the importance of culture in creating social order and co-coordinating behaviour identified in previous research (Deal and Kennedy, 1999; Mackintosh and Doherty 2007).

It will consider differences identified between more general organisational culture and the more specific and distinctive police 'occupational culture' (Reiner 1992, Chan 1996) and draw on the work of Loftus (2009) examining the seminal publications she identified (Banton (1964), Skolnick (1966), Westley (1970), Cain (1973), Rubinstein (1973), Reiner (1978), Punch (2007), Ericson (1982), Holdaway (1983), Smith & Grey (1985), Young (1991), Paoline (2003))

However, three factors may question the application of these studies to the Scottish Police Service:

* Loftus (2009) and others challenge the current relevance of the findings on police culture on the basis of their age and the recent changes in the service and society.
* Parker (2000), Martin (2002) and others also point to multiple cultures in organisations. Therefore basing the study on the culture of individual forces may be flawed.
* Bush and Glover (2003) identify that variations in styles of policing from one society to another are perfectly explicable in terms of the structures and traditions of those societies. As there are no known studies of police culture in Scotland, it is unknown to what extent national and other more local environmental factors may influence the culture in forces.

Therefore a more inductive approach is necessary to the research using ideas of organisational culture to understand the particular factors at work in Scottish policing organisations.

The study will also draw on the work of policing and similar organisations that have recently considered the influence of their culture or have experience of amalgamations. This will include:

* Review of the cultural audit approach used by PSNI since 2005 with focus on how it has enabled or inhibited change from RUC to PSNI and whether there is any direct correlation between any resultant changes to practices, policies or procedures which have directly resulted in improvements to performance.
* Review of examples of change programmes within the private sector which have used organisational culture as an enabling factor.
* Examination of the recent amalgamation of Scottish Army Regiments.

**Field Research Strategy/Methodology:**

The knowledge we are looking for is around police occupational/organisational culture and therefore "relativist" i.e. how do staff within those business areas of the existing eight police forces and two policing agencies which will need to change by Day 1 of the Police Service of Scotland interpret the culture which exists within their current teams? To deal with the complexity we need to look at things in more than one way to 'triangulate' the findings. So we will consider:

* **Archival data**  
  What is known about the force - size, structure, age, profile of staff, tenure of chief officers, performance, strategy, resources, and history - including stories and events and views of the community.  
  Textual analysis of published documents (Corporate reports, especially customer surveys, lay group reports, force website, force newspaper etc). What sort of language is used? What sort of images? What messages?
* **Perception data**  
  Use of focus groups and interviews which will be considered more below, and an on-line survey using the Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (Quinn and Cameron 1999). This is shown at Appendix A.
* **Observation data**  
  Visits to public aspects of the organisations, seeing inside work areas (how they are laid out, pictures/posters etc on the walls etc), how staff behave towards each other re authority figures, interaction with customers, visitors etc.

The main focus of this research is to gain an understanding of people's perceptions of the culture within their workplace. In particular it considers how that might help or hinder the amalgamation with teams from other force/agency areas of Scotland. We need to find of what's inside their heads - what they have experienced and how they have understood and interpreted their experiences (Roshomon Effect).

Therefore, a social science approach is required - a more subjective, relativist approach through which a greater understanding can be reached as the basis on which to recommend actions by those making the structural changes for Day 1.

We also need to accept that we are dealing with the perceptions of people. However perception is what drives behaviour and therefore is the important factor in considering the influence of culture.

The complexity of this leads us to a more inductive approach, and a case study using both quantitative and qualitative data gathering allows an understanding of the complexity. The inductive approach develops theory and draws conclusions "from the bottom up" through the collection of data obtained largely through verbal reports on participants observations and experience and then reflecting on subjective engagement, abstracting meanings and organising them into different categories in a cyclical way as information is gained from each participant. It is assumed that providing the understanding is grounded, it will resonate with anyone sharing the culture of those under study. It will triangulate this understanding with a more statistically significant sample of staff through the use of a focused, objective, quantitative on-line questionnaire.

Finally, we will triangulate our results with those obtained from DCC Allen's Engagement Groups which will have been held across the Scottish Police Service during the summer of 2012.

**Focus Groups, One-to-One Interviews and Survey Instrument:**

The study will use small focus groups (with 6 - 8 junior staff), one to one interviews (with more senior officers/police staff) and an on-line Survey Instrument focusing on some of those business areas which will be subject to change programmes ahead of Day 1 of the new Service. These are:

* The SCDEA which, it is understood, will form the bulk of the Specialist Crime Directorate
* Those existing Roads Policing Units which will be amalgamated to form the East Region within the new National Roads Policing structure

This will focus limited resources on these individual sub-cultures within existing forces and agencies which will be amongst the first to be amalgamated on or before Day 1. It will not provide a 'cultural map' for the Service (OGC R5(1)), which would take significantly more resources and time to complete than available time and resources allow. However, it will assess current perceptions of culture and views about important cultural factors in key areas of the new PSOS and will hopefully 'prove' not only the validity of the research strategy and methodology, but also the usefulness of the findings and recommendations in supporting key aspects of the National Police Reform Programme which might form the basis for a wider, longer term programme of study towards the development of a more comprehensive 'cultural map' as recommended by OGC Review Recommendation 5(1).

The process for the focus groups, interviews and the survey instrument will be pre-tested and piloted with officers at Tulliallan (or those who have recently attended courses there) to test for shared understanding and ease of use.

Once the questions for the focus groups, interviews and survey instrument have been adequately tested and any necessary changes made, an interview schedule and topic guide for use by focus group facilitators and/or interviewers will be developed. The facilitators and interviewers will be people who are suitably trained and experienced in these roles and from outwith the force or agency concerned.

The study will recognise the risks associated with focus groups and interviews such as hiding data if feeling defensive or exaggerating to impress or get cathartic relief recognised in other research (Frost, 2003; Goldman, 2008 cited in Schein (2010)). Steps to reduce this are considered in the description of the focus group process in Appendix B.

**Ethical Issues**

Participation will be voluntary. All participants will sign consent forms which clearly set out purpose and ethical considerations of the research such as anonymity and the storage and use of the data.

**Collaborative Group:**

As this study progresses it will be crucial that it is constantly fine tuned so that not only the needs of key stakeholders are met but also that their professional judgment and experience are utilised to both assist with interpretation of the emerging findings and also to advise and guide any changes to the approach and methodology which will be required so as increase the chances of not only achieving the desired outcomes but also that these outcomes are utilised as part of the National Police Reform Programme as required by OGC Recommendation 5(2).

The research team and the Collaborative Group play complimentary roles. In a systems approach to action research, tentative explanations are being formed as the story unfolds. These insights are tentative frames to articulate the elements of the system in order that the research approach may be understood and to consider interventions to change it as and when required. This is also relevant in respect of any changes to the external environment (political, financial etc) which might help or hinder this work as it progresses.

This 'virtual' Collaborative Group will comprise:

* the Police Reform Programme lead, Chief Constable Kevin Smith;
* the National Police Reform Strategy Group (which comprises Chief Officers and senior police staff from the existing forces and agencies which make up the Scottish Police Service);
* the Sponsor of this work (Chief Constable Justine Curran) in her capacity as Chair of the Vision & Values Steering Group;
* members of the Vision & Values Steering Group, which includes Chief Constable Derek Penman, DDC Steve Allen, ACC Johnny Gwynne and representatives from Unison, ASPS, Scottish Police Federation, and the Senior Careers Development Service;
* Chief Inspectors Suzie Merties and Richie Adams who are leading on the other sub-strands, which, along with this SIPR Practioner Fellowship, form Strand 1 of the Values and Vision workstream within the National Police Reform Programme.

**Timescales:**

**By 13 July 2012** - design of this Research Proposal for submission to Vision & Values Steering Group

**15 July to mid August 2012** - Finalise Field Research design and logistical arrangements i.e. dates, places, composition etc of focus groups, 1:1 interviews and complete literature review with focus on comparison with Netherlands and Scandinavian Police Forces experiences in respect of culture on their reform programmes.

**Mid August to mid September 2012** - undertake field research

**Mid September to early November 2012** - Analysis of data from Field Research and Literature Review - formulate emerging findings and recommendations for action and sense check with Collaborative Group (principally Visions & Values Steering Group).

**Mid November to early December 2012** - produce and submit final paper with recommendations to Vision & Values Steering Group.

**April 2013 to 2016** - completion of 'cultural map' of the Police Service of Scotland (OGC R5(1)) with focus on how it is enabling or inhibiting progress to desired 'end/future state' and recommendations for action in respect of the on-going change programme (SIPR led PhD student?)

**Outputs and benefits for the Service:**

The outputs of the study are three-fold:

* An analysis of key 'Day 1' elements of current organizational cultures within the forces and agencies which currently comprise the Scottish Police Service.
* Identification of similarities on which to build identity and values for those functions which will be in place for 'Day 1' the new Police Service of Scotland.
* Identification of elements which might enable or inhibit successful transformation from those functions within the existing forces and agencies which comprise the Scottish Police Service which will be merged in to the new 'Day 1' functions of the Police Service of Scotland.

These findings will have the following implications and benefits for the Scottish Police Service:

* It will provide insights into some differences of culture between the forces which need to be taken into account in the management of the change, particularly in relation to leadership, communication and engagement.
* It will recommend improvements in practices that can be implemented prior to and following the implementation of the newly formed Police Service of Scotland.
* It will allow understanding of the factors associated with the different cultures focusing management activity on building on areas of similarity and addressing only those areas of difference which are likely to significantly hinder the Reform process.
* It will give guidance about HR and training needs in the new PSOS.
* It will give a basis to examine changes in culture over time in the PSOS.
* The results will give a basis to longer term study to develop fully the cultural map of the Police Service of Scotland.

**References**

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**Appendices**

[**Appendix A: Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (Quinn and Cameron 1999)**](https://web.archive.org/web/20171119030336/http:/www.sipr.ac.uk/downloads/Tatnell_Appendix_A.doc)  
  
[**Appendix B: Focus Group Process (From Schein (2000) Chapter 18 - Culture assessment as part of a managed organisational change)**](https://web.archive.org/web/20171119030336/http:/www.sipr.ac.uk/downloads/Tatnell_Appendix_B.doc)