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Strategic Change Management

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Change Management Challenges in the Danish Police Reform

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and Management Studies

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The Doctoral School of Organisation and Management Studies (OMS) is an interdisciplinary research environment at Copenhagen Business School for PhD students working on theoretical and empirical themes related to the organisation and management of private, public and voluntary organisations

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ABSTRACT

Since its commencement in January 2007, the Danish police reform has been a hot topic in the media, at universities, dinner parties, and in waiting rooms. The general perception of the police reform is that it is a failure. During 2008, the reform has been subject to much public debate, which has linked many unfortunate cases of police neglect with the police reform. Furthermore, the public debate has created a picture of a police not in control and with the reform to blame.

Given this troublesome context of the police reform, the question which everyone is asking is: why did it go wrong? Along with the question of: whose fault was it? The current thesis does not provide one single answer to the chaotic situation surrounding the police reform. Neither does it place the responsibility of the unforeseen consequences of the police reform. Rather, this thesis focuses on unforeseen consequences of the reform in regards to change management and organizational implications.

This thesis is submitted as a doctoral thesis at Copenhagen Business School in completion of a three-year Ph.D. study. The thesis is the result of a longitudinal research study on change management challenges in the Danish police reform. The study rests on a multi-sited methodology comprising an array of research methods such as interviews, field studies, presentations, meetings, written document studies, etc. over the course of the three years' duration of the study. The study draws from different strands of literature, primarily change management literature and institutional literature, including resource dependency theory.

The research question, which guides the thesis, is as follows:

What are the change management challenges and the organizational implications of introducing a reform, which has a functional-rational logic of modernization and efficiency to the Danish police, which is a strongly institutionalized organization?

The research question has been answered through the analysis, which is divided into three sections:

- Change management in the reform,
- Content of the police reform, and
- The external control of the police.

Conclusions

The findings from the thesis will be summarized in the following. First, the general findings will be presented, and following these, the contributions to theory, methodology, and practice will be presented in brief summary.

The change management efforts in the police reform have been thoroughly planned and coordinated with much focus and dedication. In conclusion, the study points to lack of organizational ability rather than lack of willingness or commitment as the main factors in why the Danish police reform cannot be described as a success. The findings in the current study point to lack of organizational abilities in regards to change management and strategic change leadership.

Findings in the analysis

The findings in the study highlight the fact that the planning of the implementation of the police reform has drawn upon change management technologies which have been developed based on premises other than those of the police organization. This has been the case in the communication strategy which has partly resulted in an unsuccessful communication in the implementation of the reform. Furthermore, the police have looked to experts and advisors from the outside for assistance in implementing the reform rather than looking inwards to draw on the organizational resources with the result that the informal relations in the police which is an essential organizational resource in the police has been neglected. In looking outward to implement the reform, the focus has been on how to implement the new initiatives in the reform. Therefore the positive aspects of the current and previous organization have been neglected in the pursuit of reforming the future police by implementing the reform initiatives. In the reform, the management initiatives targeted individuals in the organization rather than the collective. This was new to the organization and therefore created confusion at a time when it was necessary to stand together. Furthermore, the reform initiative of filling new positions created competition and rivalry in the organization which was unforeseen and unfortunate in that it served as a threat to the trust in the organization. Trust is particularly relevant in the police due to their function of sustaining democratic awareness in society.

The content of the reform has been based on a functional-rational logic which has disregarded symbolic action as being irrelevant which has served as confusion in regards to prioritization of police activities when confronted with feeling of safety versus real security. Much of the content of the

police reform relies on technologies. Some are IT technologies, including phone systems. Others are management technologies. Both have been subject to skills gap – or skills backlog – in that the technologies have been implemented before the necessary skills to handle the technologies have been developed. On the side of IT and phone systems, this has partly resulted in a chaotic situation regarding reaching the police. On the management side, it has resulted in an introduction of management technologies in the organization which has become much more complex without developing the necessary management skills to handle the new reformed police. The police appear to have been too impatient due to external pressures and demands to implement the police reform as politically decided.

The external control of the police has played a special role in the implementation of the police reform. The police apparently have not been able to assess the importance of the external environment and its influence on the discretion of the organization and the managerial space. It has not taken on the discretionary role to changing the environment and so gives discretionary space for managerial action. This neglect of the external level in the police reform has resulted in loss of discretion on the organization and unfortunate consequences for both the managerial level and operational level.

Contributions to theory, methodology, and practice

In the current study, there are clear connections between theory, methodology and practice. The three are intertwined and supplement each other in the study. Therefore, the broader perspective in which the combination of theory, methodology and practical implications is seen as a whole must accompany the analytical knack of dividing the contributions into these three parts. However, in the following, the structure into these three parts will be followed to give specific attention to the contributions of each part while at the same time realizing that this is an analytical knack.

This study makes its theoretical contribution to several strands of literature and primarily to the literature on change management and to the scarce theoretical strands of police management.

The study contributes to change management theory in two main ways. The first is for contemporary change management theory to increase emphasis on the external environment, particularly for institutionalized organizations. In the current study, an analytical framework has

highlighted how the external level must be acknowledged in change management regards as it influences the managerial level and the operational level immensely, particularly in highly institutionalized organizations such as the police. This framework divides the efforts into the following three levels: The external level, the managerial level, and the operational level. Thereby the current study challenges the predominantly internal perspective of contemporary change management theory to direct more attention towards the external perspective. The other main contribution to change management theory regards a call for a strengthened focus on utilizing existing organizational resources in vast organizational change. Current change management theory has an intense focus on what should be changed with specific attention to how the new organization should be structured, organized, and how it should perform. The current study points to a need for supplementing change management theory by including focus on the organizational characteristics, which have enabled the organization to perform prior to the change. A central aspect is that of culture which is often considered a liability rather than an asset. The findings in the study direct a need for further attention to existing organizational resources in change management literature with the aim of improving both the implementation process and the future performance of the organization. The study further indicates how change management theory can gain from including concerns of organizational character at a strategic change management perspective and thereby include regards to the constitutive effects of change management initiatives. The theoretical contributions also regard the scarce and emerging field of police management. The weighing majority of police studies are concerned with criminology. In recent years, the field of police management is emerging with the waves of New Public Management and public reforms and a tendency to increased transparency of police at operational and organizational level. This study highlights how the organizational character of the police requires that the emerging field of police management bridges the specificity of the organizational character of the police to the established bodies of management theory and organizational theory.

The methodological contributions from the study relate to two main concerns. The first regards how to gain access to an organization such as the police which is closed to the outside given the nature of its operations and its historical heritage. The methodology has applied a specific coupling between theory and practice throughout the course of the study to gain further access to the organization and to engage practitioners in research perspectives. Furthermore, acquiring knowledge of the organization through field studies and action research has been essential in

gaining access to the organization. In the process of gaining deeper access to the organization, using tales from the field has been highly relevant and has proven as an essential methodological approach in gaining access to organizations which are operationally closed to the outside. The other methodological contribution relates to the questions of how to acquire knowledge of vast change initiatives such as public reforms, which are influenced by both external factors and internal factors at various levels. The study has shown how multi-sited methodology (Marcus, 1995) can serve as a methodological approach to capture the different levels when combined with analytical triangulation across the sites. In the study, the richness of the ethnographically rooted field studies supplements the strategic traditional organizational analysis, action oriented activities, and document studies necessary to capture external aspects. By combining multi-sited methodology with analytical triangulation, the methodology serves as a way to capture decoupling between external, managerial, and operational level. Thus, the methodology applied has shown to be able to shed light on crucial change management aspects by illuminating decoupling between different perspectives and levels, which would otherwise not be revealed.

The contributions to practice of the current study is structured into two parts. The first part focuses on the implications of the findings for the Danish police. The second part focuses on the main contribution to change management practice in other organizations.

The most crucial finding in the study with direct implications for the Danish police is the importance of having a clearly defined strategy to lean upon in turbulent times. The study clearly shows that in times of vast change, it is essential to complete a strategy for how to manage and lead the organization through transformation which acknowledges the specific organizational character of the police, and thereby activating and utilizing the unique resources of the police comprising the social capital which is an essential resource in the police. Furthermore, the reform process has shown the importance of having a clearly defined strategy on how to engage in the public debate and how to handle the external control of the organization. Thus, the study shows a need for the police to work with strategically anchored approaches to the operational level, the managerial level, and the external level. When developing these strategies, the police must necessarily acknowledge the difference between what is described as symbolic and real police work at a higher level – that of efficiency vs. effectiveness, the latter being an externally determined measure of success. In relation to specific change management aspects, the study indicates that the police can make better use of

the unique resources of the police organization at the heart of which are the mutual trust and the informal relations between those in the police force. The organizational character and culture of the police should be utilized in a constructive manner and used as an essential driver in reaching the organizational targets. These aspects call for a dramatic shift in the police in regards to some of the main aspects which have been brought forth in the current analysis such as a strategic mindset, an increased focus on culture, added attention to management development, and a much stronger relation with external stakeholders to ensure discretion for the police to set strategy and direction which can in turn improve the police services to 'maintain safety, security, peace and order in society' as stated in the first paragraph of the Police Act.

The contributions from the current study to change management practice of a more generic character relate to some of the themes which have been described above. A couple of these points should be mentioned with specific attention to the general contribution to change management practice. Even though the topic is mentioned across management and organization studies, the lessons from the current thesis highlight the importance of not applying generic solutions to local challenges but rather to customize management technologies which have been imported from other organizational contexts. Another general contribution from the study is the importance of treating change management as more than a planning exercise and a series of organization development activities. Vast organizational change must be accompanied by change management strategy. Such a strategy should encompass the external level, the managerial level, and the operational level. Developing such a strategy is resource demanding; yet the risks of not having a specific change management strategy outweigh this aspect when facing vast organizational transformation. Content wise, the study points to the fact that such a change management strategy should identify the organizational resources and culture and use these as an asset rather than a liability which is valuable in both the implementation phase as well as in the new organizational setting. Furthermore, the study shows that the more institutionalized the organization, the more the external perspective is of importance. Therefore, it is essential to include both efficiency and the externally determined effectiveness measures and to monitor and influence the perception of these in the public debate to ensure managerial space which is essential, particularly in times of vast organizational change. With specific regard to change which is politically decided, the current study points to the role of management which must step up to the plate and assess and challenge how the reform can be implemented in the reform. It is the responsibility of the management to assess and analyze the

expected resources required to implement the reform regarding time, finances, and qualifications. These three aspects must be central elements of implementation concerns and to be included in a change management strategy. Making it happen is a management responsibility.