

# Police leadership in times of transition.

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## ***Introduction***

*The policing environment is affected by complex dynamics, which can raise significant challenges for police leadership. Several countries in Northern and Western Europe have sought to adapt their police model and police organisation to a globalising society by moving towards a greater centralisation of their police forces (e.g. Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland). Underpinned by the principles of New Public Management discourse, which include a focus on results, commercialisation, performance measurement and reward (Pollitt & Boeckaert, 2011), centralisation is generally assumed to simplify and standardise practises and processes, leading to higher effectiveness and efficiency. In order to understand and analyse the role of senior police leadership during centralisation processes, empirical research was conducted in Scotland and the Netherlands, both of which experienced radical structural police reforms during a similar timeframe between 2010 and 2013. While Scotland merged its eight regional forces into one single police force, the Netherlands centralised its 26 regional police forces into one national police force with one national unit and ten regional units. Although a centralisation agenda in both Scotland and the Netherlands was present prior to 2010, windows of opportunity ultimately facilitated acceleration of the respective transition processes (Terpstra & Fyfe, 2015). In the Netherlands, several actors, including senior police officers, expressed resistance against the reform agenda, particularly in the initial phase. In Scotland, interviews among chief police officers revealed a **divided opinion** about the desirability of a single police force. A public consultation carried out by the Scottish Government in 2011 revealed that less than 10 per cent of respondents were in favour of a national force with a majority preference for a regional structure because of anxieties that a national force would mean an end to local responsiveness and that resources would gravitate to the big cities (Scottish Government, 2011; Fyfe, 2014).*

*The role, position, and involvement of strategic police leaders in contemporary police reform may be regarded as essential, particularly in view of the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of the process*

*and its outcomes. In view of this critical importance, research was conducted to reconstruct and analyse if, and to what extent, under comparable governance conditions in Scotland and the Netherlands, similarities could be identified concerning the role and influence of strategically positioned police leaders during transition processes in the two respective jurisdictions<sup>1</sup>. This research highlights the importance of strategic police leaders rather than the governmental actors in shaping the trajectory of the reform process. Prior to the identification and analysis of the role of police leaders in times of transition, we discuss the drivers of police reform.*

### ***Drivers of Police Reform***

*Police reform can adopt a variety of different shapes and dimensions. At one level, it refers to what Manning (2010, p. 155) calls ‘tactical modifications in resource deployment’. This type of incremental reform occurs without fundamental police re-organisation and typically does not include any change to governance or legislation. Other types of police reform involve fundamental changes to the structure and governance of police organisations, often requiring new legislation. These macro-level reforms are the focus of this article. It is suggested that reforms are interrelated with changes ranging from specific tactics, to policing strategies or ‘mind-sets’ and ‘policing paradigms’.*

*According to Savage (2007) the main sources that can be distinguished as drivers for police reform include system failure, corruption and miscarriages of justice, international influences, economic pressures, internal forces for change and political contexts for reform. Terpstra & Fyfe (2013, p. 7) developed and elaborated this analysis, highlighting how police reform must be understood against the background of general social, political, cultural and economic changes. Processes of individualisation, globalisation, a pluralist culture, the demise of traditional positions of authority,*

*new relationships between the state and society, innovations in communication and information technology, and, more recently, the economic crisis, present new tasks and challenges for the police, demanding changes in professional and organisational structures. In addition, Terpstra and Fyfe distinguished shifting power relations, changed views pertaining to the management and organisation of the police (comparable to the aforementioned 'economic pressures'), a loss of legitimacy (trust perceived by citizens and politicians), as well as other potential influences on police reform. While these general factors influenced the debate about the restructuring of the police organisations in the Netherlands in Scotland, it was largely the need for enhanced effectiveness that emerged as a dominant argument in the Netherlands while the search for greater efficiency against a background of public spending cuts was the key driver in Scotland.*

*Police reform is considered to be rarely straightforward and is susceptible to failure (Skogan, 2008). On each horizontal or vertical level of the police organisation, from rank-and-file-officers to front-line supervisors to mid-level and top managers, and from special units to police unions, competing interests, demands and expectations may hinder the reform process. Factors that influence the progress of reform include political and community support and the extent to which reform is perceived as 'the entire department's project' (Skogan, 2008, pp. 32-33). Transparency, acceptance, and internal as well as external support are deemed crucial conditions for success. In order to successfully reform a frontline organisation like the police, a solid basis should be provided, management should offer credible support, and the overarching picture must be clear (Tops & Spelier, 2013). To understand the role of police leadership during police reform processes, the following section deals with academic findings on police leadership.*

## ***Strategic Police Leadership in Times of Police Reform***

*A substantial part of research on (strategic, top echelon) police leadership is based on generic concepts of 'leadership', which are derived from the commercial management literature to comprehensive academic studies (Bisschop, De Kimpe, & Ponsaers, 2010). Police leadership is regarded as more specific and circumstantial in comparison with 'regular leadership' ('t Hart & Ten Hooven, 2004), because of the continuous interaction with internal and external factors. Police leadership is commonly defined as 'the process of influencing others to work together in order to achieve objectives' (Robbins, 2003, p. 314; Northouse, 2004). Bisschop, De Kimpe, & Ponsaers (2011, p. 36) add to that 'the potential or capacity to influence others'. The 'police leader' embodies a normative connotation as it relates to a person who is associated with certain skills and qualities. As police leaders are very visible public leaders, their position is subject to public exposure, certainly in combination with the responsibility they carry and the complexity of their task (Kotter, 1990; Yukl, 1989). Police leaders are generally responsible for providing visionary guidance (Boin, Van Der Torre, & 't Hart, 2003) as well as for justifying the (internal) changes to their subordinates. It is a challenge to every police leader to secure the acceptance from the 'frontline' which facilitates the transposition of legal and policy changes onto the work floor. (Police) leadership involves the capacity to develop, propagate and implement a vision (Bisschop, De Kimpe, & Ponsaers, 2010, p. 12).*

*The style of leadership appears to be key during transformations, especially when implementing new policy. Within the context of police reform processes, the concepts of transformational leadership and transactional leadership are potentially relevant concepts. These leadership styles differ quite significantly (Bass & Avolio, 1990), as transformational (police) leadership relates to a shared vision, and values of participation and to a lesser extent to hierarchy (Bass, 1990), while transactional (police) leadership concentrates on motivation by reward and tasking and is control-based. According to Cockcroft (2014, p. 12), we should avoid oversimplification of these concepts. Cockcroft also states*

*that transformational approaches 'are based upon values of participation, consultation and inclusion, and seek to erode the cultural barriers that may exist within an organisation's hierarchy. The objective is to transform the orientation of the worker to the desired behaviour from one in which they conform due to the expectation of reward or punishment to one in which they conform because they share, and buy into, the organisation's 'vision'' (2014, p. 6). Consequently, transformational leadership is not merely a leadership style in times of reform, but a broad style of leadership focused on cultural change in the (police) organisation (Scottish Institute for Policing Research et al., 2016).*

*In times of police reform, transformational leadership may be a precondition for a successful outcome. The combination of practical-operational experience and academic-level knowledge is also regarded as quintessential (Reiner, 1991). Writing in the context of Scotland's chief police officers, Scott (2010, p. 325) emphasises an urgency for the 'right' leadership at the highest levels of the police organisation: 'in organisations that remain fundamentally hierarchical and operate on the basis of a command structure, leadership at the top is expected to be both visible and effective'. More recently, the review of police leadership undertaken by the College of Policing for England and Wales (2015) identified a combination of desirable traits in an ideal police leader that will equip them with the skills and knowledge to be successful. These include someone who 'seeks out challenge and is quick to adapt', who 'empowers, trusts and supports', 'copes with the challenges of emerging crime and safety issues', and 'who values difference and diversity' and 'accepts personal accountability while retaining the trust of communities' (p. 6).*

*The execution of a large-scale police reform in a multilateral dynamic environment is complex, leaving the strategic police leader with the challenging task to steer the organisation. To what extent were police leaders in Scotland and the Netherlands capable of exercising their leadership in times of reform? In order to improve our understanding of these respective transition processes, empirical*

*research was conducted among two cohorts of (now previous) strategic police leaders in the Netherlands and Scotland.*

### **Methodology**

*This article draws upon empirical research which was conducted on the basis of grounded theory, which 'seeks to generate a theory which relates to the particular situation forming the focus of the study' (Robson, 2011, p. 146): the recent police reforms in Scotland and in the Netherlands. By analysing the interview and documentary data within a grounded theory approach, insights which are generated include findings that are 'inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 23). Exclusive empirical material was collected by means of semi-structured interviews with former and current strategic police leaders. More specifically, these cohorts included the Chief Constables (11 in Scotland and 21 in the Netherlands), who were in charge of the regional police forces prior to the completion of the reform processes. The interviews with the strategic police leaders were held in the context of extensive field visits in both jurisdictions. Additionally, interviews were conducted with experts in both jurisdictions. Evaluation with the respondents, self-reflection and development of new sensitising concepts which emerged from the data analysis helped to formulate improved and specific questions for following interviews. The empirical research was complemented by generating qualitative data from the analysis of policy papers, legislative proposals and internal reports. The collection of documentary information was interspersed with data analysis (transcription and three-step coding). This iterative process, or, 'constant comparative' method' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), was repeated until data saturation was achieved.*

### ***Findings Concerning Police Leadership in The Netherlands***

*The police reform process in the Netherlands went through quite a few motions. In the end, the final step towards the new legislation and its implementation could be described as a ‘pressure cooker process’, in which little or no time was left for closer consultation and a patient process to prepare the transition from a regional to a national police force. Towards the end of this process, nearly all former strategic police leaders in the Netherlands endorsed the decision to merge 26 forces to one national force. However, a majority of them were critical of the reform process itself. Some key players within the RKC (Raad van Korpschefs (The Board of Chief Constables)) expressed their views in letters addressed to the Minister of Security and Justice before and during the reform. The RKC used to be a joint platform with the objective to discuss interregional and national policing affairs and to serve as an advisory body to the government with regard to policing matters. The main recommendation was to firstly construct the administrative (support and staff) part of the organisation.*

*The main findings on police leadership during the transition process concerned the political predisposition, the lack of transparency as well as concerns about the formal appointment procedures. The majority of the relevant respondents mentioned this lack of transparency in the reform process. The former regional Chief Constables were not individually informed about the move to a national police force, however indirectly involved as member of the RKC. A political situation emerged in which the newly elected government decided to (finally) merge the regional forces, which took place without further professional or public consultation.*

*The shortage of a formal selection procedure for the leadership positions in the new national police organisation was reported as one of the most significant shortcomings in the transition process. The*



*future Commissioner was directly appointed by the Minister. Other senior appointees had private meetings with the Minister. Several respondents thus claimed that it was 'a very opaque process'. The first subsequent selection round covered the appointment of the 11 'Quartermasters' (future Chief Constables of the regional/central unit). The Dutch governmental bureau 'General Administrative Department'<sup>ii</sup> ran the procedure. It started with an initial e-mail asking the CC's their preference. This was in early 2011. Each could argue their interest applying for a role of future CC (including location) with the requirement to live in the same region (inherently the question if one was willing to move). Additionally, one could submit a recommendation or preference on co-workers (DCC and ACC's) within a Unit's Management. Some respondents reported they were requested to attach a recent portfolio, containing assessments which were not supposed to be outdated. Only one or two took new tests<sup>iii</sup>.*

*From May 2011, the future Commissioner held 30-minute meetings with each of the then 26 Chief Constables. Most respondents thought this meeting was to get acquainted, although afterwards some were under the impression it could have been an unofficial selection interview because there was no follow-up. The next phase was characterised by nearly all respondents as 'radio silence' and 'a backroom process'. 'It was a game behind the scenes', one respondent explained. While preferences were already expressed early in 2011, the selection process was delayed until the Summer for the first 11 to be appointed. A very small number of the appointees received the news of selection with the location directly from the Commissioner first. One respondent mentioned she had to read the news regarding her position in the newspaper.*

*Similar observations were made on the selection of chief officers for the unit's management team. Almost half of the former Chief Constables described (and some actually witnessed) a method by which notecards with pictures were hanging on a wall and were reviewed in five or six meetings by members of the Force Command, in conjunction with the General Administrative Department. The Chief Constables made mutual jokes and ridiculed the use of notecards. Conditions for selection*

*included an adequate mix, consisting of men and woman differentiating in years of experience, although these criteria were not explicitly defined or communicated prior to the recruitment process. There were no additional conversations or interviews.*

*Various respondents reported that they saw the 'writing on the wall' and they subsequently took the easiest and safest exit route by submitting their resignation. In the Fall of 2012 the 'Top 61' were identified, as a respondent concluded: 'Picked by the boss', referring to a process of selection not accompanied by an open or transparent selection procedure. Different respondents described the process as 'questionable', 'non-transparent', 'unclear', 'unintelligible', and - according to some – 'unprofessional', in which powers were used to form an, and to quote a respondent: 'Old-boys network' through 'co-optation'.*

*Teams were assembled which started working on the new structures. This process continued from the late Summer of 2011. A number of respondents explained they already positioned employees from their own force in vacant positions (including promotions in a number of occasions), to ensure they would obtain senior positions within the future organisation. A large majority of former Chief Constables left without a Quartermaster position and those who did not opt for a future position often stayed loyal to the police by delivering the best colleagues they could. 'Loyal but not docile', as it was characterised by two respondents. Most respondents explicated they wanted to help and put their best effort in the process of assisting the Quartermaster to move forward. This changed their role as strategic police leader inherently, providing space for manoeuvre and gradually switching to a position as an advisor.*

*For every future Unit, teams (comprising co-workers from different forces) were led by the corresponding Quartermaster discussing how they preferred the organisation to be structured. Not all efforts seemed to be appreciated however. The research from the interviews demonstrates that previously constructed blueprints did not leave much space to display initiative and exercise influence: according to some respondents 'It was a mass-marked route'. Or: 'It was like flogging a dead horse' and 'Strengths were not used'. A small minority of respondents remained optimistic and generally emphasised the difficulty of the process, trying to respect everyone's ideas and opinion. Eventually, the future Commissioner concluded the debate and made a decision, together with the Force Command<sup>iv</sup>. Hence, while the designated route was quite open and transparent by itself, the possibility for police leaders to influence the process from within remained extremely limited.*

*A gap emerged between the incumbent Chief Constables and the exclusive group made responsible for designing the structure and organisation of the Dutch National Police. The Quartermasters originated from the RKC, which meant that still a considerable part of the 'old club' worked through the transition.*

### ***Findings Concerning Police Leadership in Scotland***

*The findings for the Scottish police reform process resemble those of the Netherlands, in that the political character of the process, its top-down character, and the lack of transparency of the selection process were raised by the respondents. It was also a major break with the past. Prior to the 2013 reform the Chief Constables of the 8 regional forces were required to operate an 'efficient and effective force' and were held to account both by a local police board composed of elected councillors*

*from the local areas of their region and at a national level by Scottish ministers in the government. Each Chief Constable was given the mandate to exercise daily leadership of the entire police operation, and at the same time to determine the vision and strategic direction of the organisation. Furthermore, every Chief Constable was a member of ACPOS (the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland) which met at regular intervals to discuss joint strategic issues from across Scotland. ACPOS tended to work by building a consensus on key police issues across the eight forces but in relation to police reform ACPOS was marked by a disunited voice, which was a situation the Scottish Government benefited from in its efforts to effect radical change within the police organisational structure. As respondents explained, the majority within ACPOS accepted the need for reform but believed that this could involve a limited programme of mergers to create three or four forces with enhanced levels of collaboration; only a minority felt that a national force should be the preferred outcome. Indeed, according to a majority of the respondents, as a result of the split voice, ACPOS was eventually marginalised in the reform. The transition to a single force involved a reduction in the number of chief officers from over 40 to just 11 and the abolition of ACPOS per April 1, 2013.*

*The majority of the Scottish respondents argued that the creation of a single force was an entirely political decision. There was a strong perception that the government treated the police as a game of 'political football'. The focus was to bring about a rapid reduction in the police budget while also addressing issues like police governance and increasing equity of access to specialist police resources across the country. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice had been explicit about its preference to proceed expeditiously: 'You can take a long time and stage it over two or three years, or you can go the other way: change it and fix all the concerns'.*

*Moreover, most former police leaders characterised the process as a top-down movement. The new strategic police leader of Police Scotland, the Chief Constable, was made responsible for an organisation consisting of more than 23.000 employees. He was appointed six months before the new*

*national force became operational, which drew critical perspectives from the Scottish respondents. Reference was frequently made to the inability to make decisions in the preparatory phase of reform (between the legislation being passed in June 2012 and the appointment of the new Chief Constable in October that year) due to a lack of mandate. ACPOS had established a National Police Reform Team after the legislation was passed and this team developed several options for command structures, territorial areas and support functions. However, this work had relatively little impact because the appointment of the new Chief Constable had to be formalised first (Beech, Gullidge, & Stewart, 2015) which, in turn, depended on the appointment of a chair for the new Scottish Police Authority (the SPA). The SPA was established by the police reform legislation as a 'buffer' between government ministers and the Chief Constable to rule out direct political influence of the police. It carries a range of responsibilities including the appointment of the Chief Constable, providing the budget for Police Scotland, and calling the Chief Constable to account. Only after the Chair of the SPA had been selected could the process of appointing the Chief Constable happen (in September 2012), and only after that could the process of appointing the executive team of the national police take place.*

*Several respondents perceived a preponderance of newly appointed Chief Officers originating from the Metropolitan Police Service and Strathclyde Police in which the appointed Chief Constable had worked. Of the four deputy Chief Constables, for example, one had previously been the deputy in Strathclyde (although the earlier part of his career had been employed by Lothian and Borders Police), one originated straight from the Metropolitan Police Service and yet another had previously worked in the Metropolitan Police Service before moving to Scotland. Many characterised this as the 'Strathclydifcation' and the 'Metrofication' of Scottish policing, as a result of what was perceived as the imposition of policies and practices from these two forces (Fyfe, 2015). Indeed, rather than a merger of the eight regional police forces, the establishment of a national police service was framed as a 'take-over' by Strathclyde Police (the largest of the regional forces) resulting in an organisation*

*which one respondent concluded 'is now highly centralised, tightly controlled, transactional and about hierarchy'.*

### ***Police Leadership During Transition from a Comparative Perspective***

*The political narratives about the need for reform were strikingly similar in the two jurisdictions. A dominant argument related to the need for enhanced effectiveness in the cooperation between the regional forces and its effect on tackling national and global crime, and austerity measures were introduced in both jurisdictions (Terpstra & Fyfe, 2013a; 2015). The two governments also sought to expand their control over policing by reducing the forces' autonomous positions and by changing their modes of governance as well as structure of command.*

*The majority of respondents observed that the police reform processes were heavily subject to political decision-making, which effectively led to the marginalisation of the former police leaders. The government agenda prioritised centralisation of policing, leading to political-executive pressure, short deadlines and rapid informal selection procedures for senior positions, which some respondents saw as being weighted towards particular interests. A remarkable difference between Scotland and the Netherlands is the way in which the selection process from former strategic police leaders to the current highest ranking police officers was conducted. At first sight, Scotland seemed to lay down a more open, transparent, and fair style of selection. Requirements were communicated by means of job advertisements followed by interviews. This stands in stark contrast to the relatively opaque top-down appointments in the Netherlands, performed in the course of a process which had not been formalised or codified beforehand. Regarding the outcome however, the re-appointment of members*

*of the old-boys network was subject to criticism in both jurisdictions. Put more mildly, the new generation of police leaders reflects an absence of diverse opinion.*

*Within a complex process full of divergent interests, and partly dependant on and dominated by a centrally determined policy, the extent to which strategic police leaders themselves were able to influence the process can be regarded as limited. According to several respondents, particular difficulties emerged when decisions were required on the basis of collective views within a time-frame which was too short to build consensus. Deadlines were considered as crucial, leading to a lack of serious consideration of alternatives. Hence, the establishment of a national and centralised police organisation became the preferred option early on in the process of reform and culminated in a 'tunnel vision' in which alternative routes were choked off. Many respondents viewed this as a missed opportunity because a debate about alternative options could have had a positive effect on the quality of policing.*

*In both jurisdictions the strategic police leaders who were going to lose their leadership position remained loyal to their organisation, despite several disagreements and an uncertain professional future. A considerable number of respondents identified a change of emphasis and style towards operations and some viewed this as very beneficial to policing. In the Netherlands this was identified as a shift towards 'operational leadership' at all levels of the organisation (Kwartiermaker Nationale Politie, 2012a) while in Scotland the notion of 'operational leadership' became synonymous with an enforcement-led approach to policing driven by targets and Key Performance Indicators (Scottish Institute for Policing Research et al., 2016). Indeed, from the interviews, it emerged that a small number of current chiefs exerted a high degree of influence on the direction of their organisations. Moreover, the new dominant leadership style which was propagated focused on the demand for micro-level quantitative performance information to hold officers to account. Examples included*

*decisions to introduce a 'Compstat-style' performance management system based on accountability of local police commanders to Key Performance Indicators focused on enforcement targets and the requirement for increased levels of stop and search across the country as the preferred tactic in trying to tackle violence. Strong local resistance to these policies led the Scottish Police Authority to review the governance of policing and to suggest ways of giving local communities greater scope to challenge national policing decisions that have significant local impacts (Flanagan, 2016; Fyfe, 2015).*

### ***Discussion and Outlook***

*In both Scotland and the Netherlands, the recent police reform processes towards centralisation can be characterised as top-down, politically driven and accelerated. The comparative research reported in this paper highlights how strategic police leaders were often excluded from influencing the process towards a national police force. In the police reform processes in Scotland and the Netherlands major changes were rushed through, in the understanding that problems and concerns could be fixed later. The deadlines for the reform process were regarded as crucial, severely limiting the scope to engage with alternative pathways and counter-voices. Nevertheless, despite many disagreements and an indefinite future, in both jurisdictions remaining strategic police leaders stayed loyal to the organisation. This loyalty stands in stark contrast with the dominant (transactional) and short-term style of leadership adopted during the accelerated transitional phases, as well as with the substantial reconfigurations in the hierarchy of both organisations.*

*Several Scottish respondents also argued there should be a different spread and mixture in the Command Team. Hence, diversity in the leadership was seen as another condition for the success of a*



*police reform trajectory. On the other hand here was a shortage of available and actively applying candidates, to - for instance - secure a gender balance in the Command Team.*

*Now that in the Netherlands as well as in Scotland large parts of the police administration including all support and staff departments have been centralised, it may be more difficult to mobilise the required resources, both in terms of internal support as well as external partnership. This might impact upon the type of leadership that is required to effectively and dynamically drive through innovations against the backdrop of rapidly changing societies.*

*The empirical research which underlies this article has strengthened the claim that successful police reform processes depend on (co-)ownership of the reform process and inclusion of strategically positioned police leaders. Moreover, quality assurance, transparency and feasible deadlines can enhance professional support for a police reform process. However, this can be a challenging situation for police leaders who are simultaneously confronted with the demise of their autonomous leadership position and the demand to rally around a reform project. As one respondent observed, 'Turkeys don't vote for Christmas'.*

*Strategic police leadership in times of reform can be vulnerable, sensitive and subject to critical appraisal (Van Dijk, Hoogewoning, & Punch, 2015). For future research purposes, it is proposed that the views of former and current police leaders are analysed in conjunction with those of other actors, such as responsible civil servants and mayors. Moreover, it remains essential to refine academic knowledge to identify critical conditions of successful strategic police leadership during times of transition.*

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<sup>i</sup> This article draws upon a Master's thesis undertaken within the Dutch Police Academy to complete the Master of Science in Policing. The research project was supervised by Monica den Boer and co-directed by Nicholas Fyfe..

<sup>ii</sup> Algemene Bestuursdienst

<sup>iii</sup> Assessments were undertaken by a Dutch agency called 'Leeuwendaal'.

<sup>iv</sup> Korpsleiding. The strategic top echelon of the National Police of the Netherlands, comprising the Commissioner (First Chief Constable) and a three-membered Force Command.