

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The police fulfil an important task in Dutch society. Furthermore, the police organisation is the largest employer in the Netherlands. Like most employers, the police organisation is confronted with various developments in society demanding changes in employment conditions, labour relations and human resources management. For the police the most important developments are:

- a) Changes in the nature of criminality like web crime requiring new competencies of police officers;
- b) Cuts in the welfare and care system implying that the police have to deal with people that used to be taken care of by care institutions;
- c) Growing requirements arising in society concerning the deployment of the police, especially during weekends, and reduced predictability of the deployment;
- d) Changing and more individualised aspirations and expectations of employees concerning job content and job conditions;
- e) Demographic changes (ageing and dereliction).

The main research question of the study was:

How can the police modernise job conditions and labour relations to better match the requirements set by society and the wishes put forward by police employees?

Starting from this main research question the study has dealt with the following items:

- (i) Job conditions and labour relations;
- (ii) The degree to which police employees are satisfied with their job, the internal organisation, job conditions, labour relations and personnel policies;
- (iii) The deployment of police employment seen from the employer's angle (representing societal needs);
- (iv) The employability of police employees, also in relation to their health and resilience;
- (v) The internal and external mobility of police employees;
- (vi) The wishes of the police employer and employees for changing job conditions and labour relations, and making the latter more flexible;
- (vii) Experiences with modernising job conditions and labour relations in other sectors.

The study has focused equal attention to the employer's perspective and that of employees.

This summary is structured as follows. In section two we deal with the design of the study and we give account of the approach followed. Section three contains the main conclusions. The final section, section four, provides a synthesis of the study.

II RESEARCH DESIGN

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The study consisted of the following research activities:

- Review of the existing literature;
- Eleven in-depth interviews with HRM experts, involving both experts from the police as well as experts from other sectors;

- Two group discussions, one with 16 shop-floor employees and the other with 13 employees in managerial functions. For both sessions an e-boardroom was used;
- Analyses based on data taken from the yearly survey among public sector workers ('POMO');
- Analyses based on data from an one-off survey among about 1000 police employees which take part in a panel of public sector workers ('Flitspanel');
- Analyses based on data from a web-based survey among 570 persons potentially interested in a police job;
- A workshop with representatives from the Ministry of the Interior (DG Police), HRM experts from the National Police organisation and police employees from various regions in the Netherlands (some of whom took part in one of the e-boardroom sessions). The number of participants was 18.

The three surveys provided most of the information. The in-depth interviews and the group discussions served mainly to obtain a complete picture of the aspects which had to be deepened in the surveys. Information about contextual developments and HRM policies in other sectors were obtained from existing studies and some of the in-depth interviews. The literature review also included earlier employment studies about the Dutch police.

The workshop at the end of the study must be seen as a first step in a dialogue between police management and police employees about the modernisation of job conditions on the basis of the outcomes of the study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods

The in-depth interviews were held on the basis of questionnaires, which have been sent to the interviewees on beforehand. For each interview a detailed summary was made. Each interviewee was given the opportunity to react on the summary of the interview held with the interviewee concerned.

Budgetary restrictions made it impossible to interview large numbers of police employees face-to-face on an individual basis. Individual interviews also have a disadvantage in lacking interaction between interviewees. Such interaction is an important element of E-boardroom sessions, but at the same time these sessions make it possible to record opinions of all the participants. The latter implies that the results are not dominated by some participants, as is often the case with round-table discussions.

Quantitative methods

The three surveys mainly consist of closed questions. POMO is a yearly held survey and a data file from this survey already existed. This file also includes the coded answers to the open questions. As the other two surveys were held through the internet, most of the information was inputted in a data file automatically. Hence, there are no data entry errors. Consistency checks Only answers to the 'other' categories and answers to the few open questions had to be coded and inputted manually.

For each of the surveys the response was sufficient for valid inferences. POMO and the Flitspanel survey had a response of several thousand and one thousand respectively. In both cases we reweighted the data to reflect the population according to age and gender. The survey among the potentially interested had a response of 570, which is also sufficient for reliable inferences. The response gave an adequate reflection of the total group according to age, gender and education.

In analysing the data we used both descriptive and econometric methods. Descriptive methods are cross tables and graphs. They can be easily understood by readers. However, a variable like job satisfaction will be affected by many factors (characteristics of police employees, characteristics of their jobs and HRM measures) simultaneously. We wanted to find out which of these potentially relevant factors are significant and how big their influence is. To that end multivariate methods have been used. This was done for job satisfaction but also for other variables like the satisfaction with the way the work is organised, the satisfaction with specific job conditions and perceived job performance.

III CONCLUSIONS

SATISFACTION WITH JOB CONDITIONS

Most police employees are satisfied with their job: three-quarters of employees report that they are very satisfied or reasonably satisfied. They are less satisfied with the internal organisation of the police. These results do not differ much from military personnel and teachers, although the latter are somewhat more positive about the internal organisation.

Police employees are less satisfied with the following aspects:

- 1) Pay and other financial aspects of their job;
- 2) Certain aspects of the labour relations like management style;
- 3) The implementation of HRM measures.

With respect to pay it must be noted that wages of police employees are not unfavourable compared to other sectors, including the private sector. Neither do we have any indication that pay is a reason for not joining the police. For higher police employees pay is somewhat lower than in the private sector, but this is also true for other public sectors. However, particularly low paid police employees are dissatisfied with their wages, while their pay is relatively high compared to the private sector.

Police employees are more satisfied if they have regular job performance interviews with their superiors. Job satisfaction also depends on what is discussed in these interviews. And even more important is to what extent the conclusions are put to practice. Unfortunately, many police employees do not get a job performance interview. This amounts to not less than 30 per cent of the police work force. And the ones that do get an interview are critical about the way the interviews are held and also about the degree to which the outcomes are put into practice.

CURRENT JOB CONDITIONS

Many police employees believe that the results of the current collective agreements between the Ministry and the police unions do not sufficiently take account of their individual needs and wishes. Their criticism particularly concerns pay, pensions, training opportunities for personal development, career policies and measures aimed at strengthening resilience. According to the police employees the prevailing regulations concerning work time and leave of absence.

Not only are police employees discontent with the existing career measures, they also make relatively little use of these measures. The latter is also true for working at home and flexible working hours, although this is also due to the fact that these options are not possible for most executive police functions. Those making use of these options are in general satisfied with it.

Compared to other public sectors the collective agreements for the police offer little room for individual choice with respect to secondary job conditions (the opportunity to 'buy' more time for vacation or to obtain higher pay for less vacation time). The collective agreements show a lot of differentiation with respect to different groups of police employees. Allowances for irregular working hours and exemption from night work can be mentioned in this respect.

LABOUR RELATIONS

Police employees are more dissatisfied with the labour relations than with the job conditions. They are of the opinion that the human touch has been lost in the police organisation. Furthermore, they think that communication with their superiors is awkward and they are dissatisfied with their management style. There is also little trust, neither in management of the police organisation, nor in the policy makers in the Ministry. Partly this might have to do with the reorganisation process that is going on in relation to the introduction of a national police organisation. Particular many low-paid employees do not feel involved in the organisational changes. A concrete point of criticism is that there is not enough transparency with respect to promotions. Many police employees feel that people are chosen for

promotions not because of their quality, but because of personal relations with the people deciding about promotions.

Police employees are satisfied about most aspects of their job. Particularly job content, autonomy, the relationship with colleagues and working hours may be mentioned. And although many criticise the management style of their superiors, they feel that their relationship with the latter is good. Hence, there seems to be a basis for improving work processes. Police employees are less positive about the administrative burden in their job, the work pressure, the lack of recognition and the mental pressure. However, as was indicated earlier, overall police employees are quite positive about their work.

PREFERENCES FOR FUTURE JOB CONDITIONS

Above all police employees want improvement of the following job conditions: a) wages, allowances and pensions, b) career and employability measures and c) training opportunities. These are precisely the job conditions they are most dissatisfied with. The priority for financial aspects is also reflected in the fact that two third of the police employees can imagine leaving the police in case of wage cuts. Police employees give less priority to improving: (i) opportunities for longer working hours, (ii) exemption from night shifts, (iii) psychosocial guidance, and (iv) measures reinforcing mental and physical resilience. However, police officers having health problems and lacking enough resilience do give priority to the measures mentioned under (iii) and (iv). It might well be that police employees that currently do not have health problems underestimate the chance of being faced with these problems in the future.

Slightly more than two third of the police employees like the idea of being given the opportunity to determine their individual job conditions, assuming that for each individual worker total labour costs would remain the same. However, most of them are of the opinion that collective arrangements should be kept to provide a minimum for each aspect of the job conditions. The answers to these questions show a similar pattern among all types of police employees. The support for individual choice in job conditions is highest amongst employees in higher functions and amongst higher educated staff in general. There is not much difference between different age categories.

In one of the surveys police employers were confronted with a hypothetical situation in which they could improve one or two job conditions, but only at the expense of one or two other job conditions. The results show a similar picture as the opinions discussed earlier: most staff member want to improve the financial aspects of their job and many are prepared to save on measures aiming at more mental and physical resilience.

FLEXIBILITY IN WORKING HOURS

In recent years police deployment has shown more variation and less predictability than before. There are many examples of a sudden need for a huge police force to cope with a specific situation. Therefore, more labour flexibility is needed. Most organisations can achieve their need for flexibility at least partly by temporary work. However, this is impossible for the police in view of its monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force and the integrity of its personnel. Therefore, flexibility must be found in more flexible working hours.

Although police employees are generally satisfied with the prevailing regulations concerning working hours, many also feel that these regulations have become too strict. However, at the same time there is consensus that the existing regulations offer much more space for flexibility than is actually used. This conclusion could be drawn from the opinions given by police employees, but also by the fact that some regions succeed much better in realising flexibility in hours than other regions. Perhaps not so much the strictness of the regulations but their complexity is the main problem. Owing to this complexity both managers and personnel cannot see the wood for the trees. The rigidity in working hours may also have to do with a culture favouring fixed action patterns. There is also evidence of planning systems not being used in the best possible way. Suggestions given by employees for improving flexibility often refer to the way working hours are planned and scheduled. More self-regulation by teams is one of the suggestions given.

Given the fact that other sectors like health care and private security have been able to create more flexibility in working hours than the police, it is likely that the police can do more in this field than they currently do. One option applied in many sectors, which could also be feasible for the police, is the use of a working hours bank. Such a system implies that the number of working hours per worker is fixed for a longer period (say one year), but can vary during this period according to the needs of the employer and the worker. Another option, which is currently used in the private security sector, is to use better planning systems enabling planning further ahead (rolling forecast), which makes it better possible to take workers' preferences into account.

EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER POLICIES

Most employees judge their own job performance positively in terms of employability, professional knowledge and other aspects. Ten per cent of the police work force think that their performance level is not sufficient. Higher educated employees and employees in senior functions think more positively about their own performance than the average police employee. There is a strong relationship between performance based on self-evaluation and age. At young age performance increases strongly, but the increase is diminishing the older an employee becomes. There is a turning point at the age of 53: starting from that age performance is decreasing. But this decrease is relatively small, implying that, on average, older workers perform better than young workers. From this result we can conclude work experience plays an important role in police work. This causes problems for people who initially worked in other sectors and then join the police. Because they are older when they join the police, they gain less experience in police work. The experienced gained elsewhere does not provide full compensation, at least in their own view.

HRM measures, particularly training and performance interviews, improve performance. We noted earlier that almost one third of the employees do not get an performance interview. Furthermore, if such an interview takes place the commitments made are often not met by the employer. Hence, there is a potential for improving performance by reinforcing HRM policy.

Good health and resilience are key factors for employability. Police employees experience more problems in this field than workers in other sectors. This is not just a matter for older workers. Reactive measures dealing with physical and mental problems have been put to practice and are used on a large scale. However, so far less attention has been given to prevention.

DYNAMICS

The share of workers aged over 50 in the police work force is not higher than in other parts of the public sector. However, it is growing faster. In recent years police employment has hardly increased and it is likely to stay that way in the coming years. At the same time the police organisation has an extremely low outflow rate compared to other sectors. External mobility is very low among all age categories, with the youngest category (workers younger than 25 years of age) as the only exception. There is the danger that the number of workers aged over 50 will increase to such an extent that there is no opportunity at all for hiring new workers. This situation poses a threat to the police organisation. New workers who have just finished school embody the latest developments in professional knowledge. And new workers who had previous job experiences in other sectors bring specific experience and know-how from these other sectors to their jobs. However, we have also seen that on average older workers perform relatively well. Hence, the consequences of an ageing police workforce should not be dramatised. But then there is still the problem that there is hardly any room left for adjusting the police workforce. Police employees cannot be fired unless there are special grounds to do so. Hence, the police organisation is facing the problem that there are hardly any opportunities to change the structure of its workforce, which might be needed in view of the changing crime patterns.

The low external mobility of police officers is caused by a number of factors. Firstly, pay is quite good compared to other sectors. Secondly, police employees have additional pensions arrangements compared to other sectors. They are only entitled to it when they keep working for the police until their pension age, making it highly unattractive to leave the police force, particularly for older

workers. As a third factor we mention specific measures reducing mobility that have been taken within the framework of the current reorganisation. The fourth reason for the low external mobility is that police work requires specific competencies that largely gained through work experience. The specific nature of their competencies makes it difficult for police employees to find employment elsewhere. Finally, it must be noted that the police organisation does not have an active policy to guide its employees to jobs in other sectors.

The image of the police among young people and among people already having work experience in other sectors is quite good. Particularly job content is valued positively. Job conditions like pay form no obstacle for joining the police. What could become a problem is the fact that the police organisation hardly has any vacancies and that the situation will stay this way in the next years. The image of the police could be harmed by it. We may end up in a situation where working for the police is not even taken into consideration anymore by young people. The situation in the manufacturing industry may serve as an example. Diminishing employment opportunities lead to a declining interest in studies like engineering. But after some time the decline became so big that shortages emerged. It took more than ten years of special programs and measures to reverse the declining interest in technical studies.

So far, internal mobility has been similar to other sectors. However, if the workforce is not growing and there is hardly any external mobility, eventually internal mobility will also decrease, at least upward internal mobility. As a result the ambitions of young workers may be frustrated, which may have adverse effects on their job satisfaction and even on their performance. It may also further harm the image of the police among people potentially interested in working for the police.

IV SYNTHESIS

In many ways the police organisation is successful as an employer. Most police employees are satisfied, many very satisfied, with their job. Furthermore, compared to most other sectors the police organisation performs better on some important job conditions (pay!) workers are somewhat less satisfied with. However, on two points improvements are needed, namely career policy and training opportunities. A considerable part of the police workforce does not get a performance interview. And even if such an interview takes place and the manager involved commits himself to offering training or other measures to the worker, often nothing happens in practice, because, for instance, there is no budget. Furthermore, managers must improve the communication with their staff. Hence, it seems that improvements can be made with relatively simple means. The fact that the relationship between managers and staff is generally good provides a good basis for these improvements, which can be reached without changing any regulations.

HRM measures are crucial in improving employability. Many police employees have health problems and lack enough mental and physical resilience. The incidence of these problems is higher than in other sectors. Moreover, sickness leave and disability (which is related to sickness leave) are relatively high compared to other public sectors. Policy measures to deal with these problems have already been taken, but these measures are mainly reactive by nature. Prevention is still in its infancy.

Compared to employees in other sectors police employees are far less inclined to move to a job in a different sector. Combined with a stagnating staff size, this results in an ageing workforce and in few job opportunities for new workers. The ageing of the workforce does not seem to be the main problem, because older workers tend to perform relatively well. More important is the fact that if there no job opportunities for young people for many years, the image of the police organisation as an employer will be affected negatively. The example of the manufacturing industry shows how difficult it is to change educational choices again, once young people have come to believe that a specific sector or occupation offers no job opportunities for them. But an ageing workforce will eventually lead to a sudden increase in the number of police employees reaching retirement age. Then not enough young people may be available to replace them.

As many older workers perform adequately, it makes no sense to concentrate measures increasing external mobility to this category of workers. It is more logical to focus those measures on employees

who do not perform as they should and have not been able to improve their performance with the help of HRM measures. Improving average performance neither requires new regulations.

Society expects more flexibility from the police. Police deployment shows more peaks and has become less predictable. Much can be done within the prevailing regulations to increase flexibility. Even managers are often unaware of the possibilities. More flexibility does not necessarily go at the expense of police employees. Tools that are already used in other sectors like a working hours bank can also be applied in the police organisation. Such tools offer flexibility for the employer, but at the same time take workers' preferences into account. Again no changes in regulations are required in implementing such tools. In the past we have seen that implementing new rules is not a strength of the police organisation. The fact remains, however, that there are too many rules and regulations, which partly explains why managers and employees do not know all of them. Therefore, it makes sense to look for ways to simplifying the rules and regulations, as long as this is not seen as *the* solution.

More than two third of the police employees is in favour of more possibilities for individualised job conditions. However, most of them still want minimum standards in job conditions for every police worker. Individualised job conditions will only be possible under the condition that the labour costs per worker does not increase. However, confronting police employees with hypothetical choices shows that it is easier for them to say what must be improved than what could be sobered down. Higher pay is particularly popular. When it comes to sobering down many employees tend to opt for measures aimed at solving or preventing problems in the field of health or resilience. In view of long-term employability this may not be wise. Obviously, there is reason to limit the freedom of choice in individual job conditions.