



Striving for the improbable through transformative means:

Morphing the Malta Police Force

Saviour Formosa, Angelo Gafà

Terms as transformation, reform and change posit very difficult paths towards structural renewal.

Such is highly evident in traversing the narrow, gravelly paths taken in the process to transform the Malta Police Force (MPF) into a dynamic, modern, proactive and community-centric exercise. Guided by an enterprise to push the improbable into a realistic doable endeavour has only been made possible through a focus towards a long-term structural change process, one that is cognizant of a past anchored in deeply entrenched practices. The latter pertain to an ingrained police culture characterised by bureaucratic traditional practices a top-heavy structure, failure to implement past reform attempts, routine crisis management and reactivity that was steadily approaching a gridlocked functionality. Old entities are reluctant to change and MPF is not an exception. However, change overcomes those that lag. Two separate reviews of the operations of the MPF carried out in 1996 (MSU Ltd., 1997) and 2015 (Formosa, 2015) respectively highlighted a conservative mentality, encumbered by an internal fear of change as opposed to a proactive approach.



Articles by Academics

Note is made that law enforcement in Malta is mainly the responsibility of the Malta Police Force (MPF) which is one of the oldest police organisations in Europe, dating back to 1814 (Malta Police Force, 2021). Thus, the situation can only be understood through awareness that this is a relatively old entity with established deep roots.

The paper outlines the process employed by the authors to reach a pivotal point that pushed the entity towards change, both coming from diametrically opposite but intertwining life experiences. Hailing from academia and operations but driven by a strive to tackle crime through the taking of an operation form and morphing it into a functional operand: that of an effective and efficient police service to the community. The paths converged through a common drive to focus on research, past strategies, success and pain points and the vision to reach commonality in transforming the MPF into a flexible, efficient, data-driven, community-centric, outcome-focused organisation. This entailed internal reviews, employee input, political will, legislative change, EU funding and the engagement of external partners

tasked with drafting a five-year strategy eventually launched in September 2020.

One year post launch, the rumblings of change are snowballing into an effective set of gears targeting the future of the entity disbursed of the police culture that restricted change in such organisations (Holdaway, 2013). This is a move away from the dominant cultural effect on police culture (Azzopardi Cauchi, 2004; Demirkol & Nalla, 2019) towards one that “emphasizes the underlying values, beliefs, and attitudes of organizational members” (Fyfe et al., 1997, p. 160).

Criminological schools speak of deterrence, sanctioning and enforcement with the Urban Ecological approach integrating the spatial aspect of crime into the understanding of the offence and offender dynamic, themes so crucial to the effective implementation of police intervention. The father of modern policing, Sir Robert Peel’s nine policing principles (Law Enforcement Action Partnership, 2021) and his insistence that a policing establishment can only work within a social contract theoretical approach is very valid in current society. This is due to

his argumentation that the police can only effect change through the trust and respect gained from the citizenry. The MPF cannot exist without its presence in the community, both as a security provider and as a safety guarantee as highlighted by Gafà (2008). The societal pillars that serve as social cohesion form the playground for effective policing in a desirable social capital scenario, where communities interact within political, religious, economic, family and educational circle. Compounded by the new technological worlds, policing has become ever more complex such that it requires constant interaction and input with the community building trust factors. This was also evidenced in a 2020 survey that registered a low 49% trust factor in the police (Martin, 2020).

The transformation goes beyond the internal structures but expands itself towards a holistic approach in the transformation of the social, natural and physical environments. The Police Force exists in the society it operates in thus its transformation directly affects and is affected by societal change (Hufnagel, 2015).



Championing for Change

The current transformation strategy can only be read through an understanding of what led to its creation, a past steeped in a lack of change ownership and implementation bottlenecks, towards one that has a concrete vision, effective champions, targeted deadlines and a consistent effort to ensure that the effort is brought to conclusion. This was enhanced by a Vision stating that “Our vision is for the community to trust us in ensuring a safe and secure society for everyone.” This latter Vision established the baseline, away from the processes required to reach the aim, leaving such to the transformation’s 3 outcomes, 11 strategic objectives, 49 strategic initiatives as established in the 2020 Strategy (Malta Police Force, 2020).

The rationale to change emanated from diverse studies that identified that in a scenario where the Police Force is facing a rapidly evolving society, new modes of criminality, a real-world/virtual world dynamic and

multi-dimensional requirements to tackle crime, the need to embark on a strategic approach to policing was deemed ever more urgent. Various reviews and studies were commissioned, most notably the 1997 organisational and management review task (MSU Ltd., 1997).

Irrespective of the purpose of these initiatives, implementation was lacking and recommendations were not taken up, whilst monitoring updates were not launched, which could in turn review why the processes were stalled or shelved.

The need to change the status quo was driven by a strive to modernise the Police Force that goes beyond structural/physical changes but also focuses on new forms of criminal activities, a rapid-return crime dynamic, new sentencing practices, technological impacts and the internationalization of criminality.



Articles by Academics

This was by an imperative to inject changes where the force has an ethic and a drive to mitigate a process that ensures the stepping up of the fight against crime through proactive measures as against the inherent reactive processing.

Thus, it was imperative that two decades following the 1997 report, a focused strategy was set out and implemented across the entire force and its dependent functions, inclusive of education, community realities and a disciplined-civilian capacity balance.

Formosa's 2015 situational analysis report (Formosa, 2015), the 2015 Scoping document (Abela et al., 2015), the 2017 legislative changes, the Gafà Strategy presented during the Commissioner selection process (Gafà, 2020) and the 2020 Transformation Strategy (Malta Police Force, 2020) pushed the new effort to fruition, with the resultant changes being implemented as per the 2020-2025 set of outcomes, strategic objectives and related initiatives.

The process sought a strategy that was based on a bottom-up approach (Formosa, 2015; 2016), reversing a situation where the MPF was reviewed as suffering from a low level of public esteem, low morale and motivation, low retention rates, lack of resources, lack of intense recognised training and non-existent continuous professional development. The Gafà Strategy (2020) enhanced the tenets of the Transformation Strategy with major change pointers for change including a focused approach on the GRECO report (Council of Europe, 2019) that aimed at strengthening training programmes, measures towards

integrity and professional ethics, transparency, internal transfers, parallel activities, communication, anti-fraud and corruption policy and standards of conduct. Thus the need to take an 'outside of the box' approach where the entire concept of recruitment, training, capacity, skills, retention, structure, operations, management and other processes were revisited stressing on communication, community-centric approaches and motivation.

These were achieved through a three-pronged triangulated approach:

• Review of past efforts

Three strategic documents were completed in decades past (MSU 1997; Malta Police Force, 1999; 2004). All failed due to lack of implementation of recommendations and no monitoring effected to review why initiatives were stalled or shelved. To kickstart the process, a series of internal and international surveys and missions were held in conjunction with the University of Malta and the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security (MHAS) (Formosa, 2015; 2016).

Task results: Drafting of Strategy Scoping document as presented to the MHAS and Parliament. The result of the scoping exercise led to an aim to gain cognizance of the Malta Police Force and bring in change through transformation through an understanding of the strategic requirements for the Malta Police Force. This would then charge the process to move from a scoping document to an operational transformation.

• Legislative Changes

The effort was focused on changes to Chapter 164 (Police Act, 2017), the setting up of a Board of Governance, revisiting the roles of Policing and Corporate Functions as well as initiating the Strategic Change process.

Task results: Amendment in legislation, setting up a Board of Governance and the engagement of a CEO. The latter was tasked with remits in HR development, skills and needs auditing, finance and funding, acquisitions, public relations, industrial relations, Information technologies and other foresight actions. The Board of Governors was tasked with the development of the long-term vision, purpose and direction of the Force, the development of a long-term strategic document, advisership on any recommendation brought before it and the approval of key organisational policies.

• Seeking of EU backing for the transformation

Aware that the previous exercises led to a gradual or instant non-action, a decision was taken to engage international consultants through EU funding. Following an application submitted in October 2018, in early 2019 the MPF was successful in its submission for EU funding for a Police Transformation Strategy within the framework of the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP).

Task results: The consultant PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) brought in international experts and local

strategists to draft the strategy in conjunction with the CEO and the Board of governors through an exercise where officers were engaged to initiate the ownership process. Strategy was drafted and launched on the 25th September 2021 (Malta Police Force, 2020).

The Strategic imperative

Following the procurement process conducted by the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) of the EU Commission (European Commission, 2021), whose mission is to 'provide support for the preparation and implementation of growth-enhancing administrative and structural reforms by mobilising EU funds and technical expertise', PwC was entrusted to carry out this project on behalf of the Commission, initiated in October 2019 and concluded in the third quarter 2020. The general objective of this project was to contribute to the modernisation of the MPF. The results targeted an increased strategic orientation of the MPF, better management of external dynamics and stakeholders, increased operational efficiency and effectiveness as well as the optimisation of internal structure and human resources management, including selection, career development and retention.

The Resultant 5-year strategy

The Transformation Strategy was formally launched on the 25th September 2020 and outlined a new Vision, Mission and a set of 3 outcomes, 11 strategic objectives, 49 strategic initiatives to be implemented between





for the community to trust us in ensuring a safe and secure society for everyone.

...

2020 and 2025. The main tenets were aware that governance is paramount but only if paralleled by a successful operational approach that is flexible, efficient and data-intelligence driven. Such can be achieved if the entity is community-centric, outcome-focused and modern. This pushes against the culture-ingrained reality and thrusts towards a new structure and mentality shift that transforms the current practices into one that is client-centered, delivers a service, is society-centered as against a self-serving Force-centred structure. It also strives to deliver a functional entity that is prepared for the short- and medium-terms and strategic approaches to modality shifts of society and crime.

Cognizant of the shifting societal modality and perceptions on crime and the MPF, the strategy ensconced as its driver a Mission “To provide a professional and trusted policing service to ensure safety and security in partnership with the community”. This is based on a vision “for the community to trust us in ensuring a safe and secure society for everyone.”

The Transformation Strategy sets three desired outcomes:

- Increased trust, confidence, legitimacy, and responsiveness externally from the perspective of the community, and internally from that of Malta Police officers and staff.
- Transformation of the police organisation into a flexible, efficient, data-driven, community-centric, outcome-focused, and modern Police Force; and
- Innovation and sustainment of positive changes resulting from reform through leadership and management practices that are both effective and efficient.

Implementation Process: A year later

With such ambitious targets, a change management process was initiated to aid the implementation of the diverse objectives and initiatives, split over thirteen projects tasked with operation strategy, digital policing, responsibility, offices, quality, internal audit, communication, IT, training, workforce strategy, recruitment and career, integrity and wellbeing. Such is managed by a dedicated transformation team, guided by the Commissioner of Police, the Director General and Deputy Commissioners, the Board of Governors, PwC guidance and encompasses a number of project leaders and change agents. Public attitude and employee engagement surveys were conducted to ensure an on-the-ground anchorage of change processing.

The Implementation within the first year tells its own story that when academia, research, a strategic mentality and a solid operational drive come together, the results show direction and a process to achieve. The results include adherence to the tenets of social contract theory, an urban ecology

approach to crime mitigation and a managerial scope aimed at a leaner top management structure, a performance-based approach to deliverables, an intelligence-based drive and an ownership process. The Vision to push for trust through the launching and expansion of the National Crime Prevention Strategy (Formosa Pace, 2017) and its outcome community policing project rendered positive results, even in a COVID-19 driven year that stretched and stressed resources. These initiatives have already flicked the Eurobarometer survey trust rating from 49% in 2020 to 60% trust factor in 2021 (European Union, 2021). The MPF efforts to communicate clearly and consistently, strengthen accountability and ensure anti-corruption measures. These were shored by an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy (comprising an Integrity Officer, Break the Silence, Gifts, Gratuities & Hospitality Register), the setting up of a robust Internal Audit Department, a new Code of Ethics reflective of today's context, screening processes, introduction of body-worn cameras, changes in the law to enable drug testing within the Force, community policing and the introduction of

KPIs that ensure that departmental heads are performance-oriented. The latter places emphasis on the distinction between leadership and management and is governed by leadership development programmes, identification of change agents, a Professional Standards Office and a horizontal movement policy, which elements are also guided through engagement with the Board of Governors.

Such is not achievable without a restructuring of the mechanisms that oil the process, those back-end services and drivers that push the change. The MPF set out the elements for a top-management restricting based on an effective operational plan, streamlining of the core police duties, engagement of civilians, an inclusive agenda, training courses, in-service training, recruit uptake and family-friendly measures that found mental health and wellbeing. This is backed by the outsourcing of non-essential activities, future-proof integrated records management system, a human resources management system, systems interoperability and the need to engage in increasingly digital and virtual environments.





Conclusion

Reforming or better Transforming an entity cannot be carried out through kneejerk, management by crisis hiccups, but through a long-term generational change management process that allows for low-hanging fruit harvesting that encourages drive and motivation, whilst reaping on the ground benefits in interim periods through structured deliverables and trust measurements.

The Malta Police Force, as engaged in a new structural change process has taken the first steps to traverse the road less travelled in previous iterations. The pivotal coalescence between the operational drive, the academic imperative, a target to professionalise the MPF and crucially the engagement with the community serve as a constant reminder that there is no way back.



References

- Abela, C., Formosa S., Caruana, P., Vella Gregory A., Farrugia, E., Bonello, J., Cremona, A. and Pisani, J. 2015. *Police Force Policy Scoping Document: 2016 – 2019*. Valletta: Ministry of Home Affairs and National Security.
- Azzopardi Cauchi, J. 2004 *Police Culture in Malta*. PhD Thesis. University of Leicester. [Online]. [Accessed 14 December 2021]. Available from: <https://hdl.handle.net/2381/4434>.
- Demirkol, I.C. and Nalla, M.K. 2019. Police culture: An empirical appraisal of the phenomenon. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 20(3), pp. 319-338.
- Council of Europe. 2019. GRECO Fifth Evaluation Round: Preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive function) and law enforcement agencies: Evaluation report Malta. [Online]. [Accessed 8 December 2021]. Available from: <https://rm.coe.int/grecoeval5rep-2018-6-fifth-evaluation-round-preventing-corruption-and-/168093bda3>.
- European Commission. 2021. Structural Reform Support. [Online] [Accessed 8 December 2021]. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/structural-reform-support_en.
- European Union. 2021. Eurobarometer - Latest surveys. [Online] [Accessed 8 December 2021]. Available from: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/latest>.
- Formosa Pace, J. 2017. Crime Prevention Strategy for the Maltese Islands 2017-2021. [Online] Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security. [Accessed 8 December 2021]. Available from: <https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/media/Policies-Documents/Documents/Crime%20Prevention%20Strategy%20for%20the%20Maltese%20Islands%20-%202017-2021-%20Online.pdf>.
- Formosa, S. 2015. *The Malta Police Force: A Bottom-Up 10-Point Survey Situational Analysis on the State of Affairs as Perceived Through the Ranks*. Valletta: Ministry of Home Affairs and National Security.
- Formosa, S. 2016. *Police Force Strategy: A High-Level Document*. Valletta: Ministry of Home Affairs and National Security.
- Fyfe, J.J., Greene, J.R., Walsh, W.F., Wilson, O.W and McLaren, R.. 1997. *Police Administration* (5th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Gafà, A. 2008. *The rules and principles governing the use of force by the Malta Police*. Masters Dissertation. University of Malta.
- Gafà, A. 2020. *A strategy for the Malta Police Force presented in the Commissioner of Police interview process*'.
- Holdaway, S. 2013. Book review: Police culture in a changing world. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 13(1), pp. 119–120.
- Hufnagel, S. 2015. Book review: Centralizing forces: Comparative perspectives on contemporary reforms to policing in Northern and Western Europe. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 15(1), pp. 121–124.
- Law Enforcement Action Partnership (2021) Sir Robert Peel's policing principles. [Online] [Accessed 8 December 2021]. Available from: <https://lawenforcementactionpartnership.org/peel-policing-principles/>.
- Police Act 2017. (Chapter 164 of the Laws of Malta). [Online] [Accessed 8 December 2021]. Available from: <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/164/eng/pdf>.
- Malta Police Force. 1999. *L-Impenn Taghna 1999-2001*. Floriana: Malta Police Force.
- Malta Police Force. 2004. *L-Impenn Taghna 2004-2006*. Floriana: Malta Police Force.
- Malta Police Force. 2020. Malta Police Transformation Strategy 2020-2025. [Online] [Accessed 8 December 2021]. Available from: <https://pulizija.gov.mt/en/police-force/Pages/Transformation-Strategy.aspx>.
- Malta Police Force. 2021. History of the Malta Police. [Online] [Accessed 8 December 2021]. Available from: <https://pulizija.gov.mt/en/police-force/Pages/History-of-the-Malta-Police.aspx>.
- Martin, I. 2020. Survey reveals just 20% trust politicians and big business. [Online]. *Times of Malta* [Accessed on 8 December 2021]. Available from: <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/survey-reveals-just-20-trust-politicians-and-big-business.800337>.
- MSU Ltd. 1997. *Organisational and Management Review of the Malta Police Force*.