

# Organisational Change under Environmental Pressure: Policing Change in Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>

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## **Introduction**

Organisational change is a widely studied and complex phenomenon. When the change process in question is forced to interact in 'real time' with a fast moving external environment, the nature of the case makes for a useful case study of change in conditions of environmental turbulence. It also has the potential to contain lessons for other organisations facing elements of these challenges. This paper sets out to analyze the radical organizational change process that occurred within policing in Northern Ireland in the aftermath of the Belfast Agreement, in conditions of political, social and organisational unrest. It sets the change process within its wider context, looks at the interaction between the organization and the environment, and the process by which it reinvented itself to fit a new political dispensation.

## **Environmental Conditions**

As Pettigrew asserts often in his work on organisational change and strategy, it is not possible to understand the *process* of change without a thorough understanding of the *context* in which change occurs.<sup>2</sup>

The challenges posed to the RUC at the beginning of this process of change were deeply rooted in the history, culture, politics and identity of the RUC as an organisation. This in turn was just as deeply embedded in the history, politics, violence and conflicting identities that made up Northern Ireland's divided society. As with other divided societies, policing and the operation of the justice process is a key issue of contention.<sup>3</sup> The partition of Ireland in May 1921 had seen not only the division of the island's territory into North and South but also the division of its existing police force. The

unsettled nature of the Northern Ireland state, the civil rights movement of the 1960's and the emergence of a new generation of nationalist leaders led to increasing unrest. Ongoing political disagreement and distrust meant that the complex and difficult relationship between the RUC and the Catholic population was made more difficult still by the political pattern of 'dominant – subordinate' political relationships which developed in Northern Ireland itself.<sup>4</sup>

The onset of the 'Troubles' in 1969 saw the suspension of the Stormont Government and the imposition of direct rule from Westminster in 1972. Policing during this time was characterised by a high measure of secrecy, security and a military approach.<sup>5</sup> Members of the RUC had to take extreme personal security measures simply to go about their daily lives and each one was subject to constant threat. For those from a Catholic background, membership of the RUC was extremely low, with only 7.7% of members Catholic in 1992.<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt that the threat of republican violence deterred Catholics from joining the police force, but also significantly, the history of animosity for the police within the Catholic community meant that participating in 'policing' within such an organisation was simply not on the agenda for the vast majority of Catholics.

Among the dominant Protestant community, the RUC were obviously perceived very differently. By 1983 Interpol figures showed that NI was the most dangerous place in the world to be a policeman: the risk twice as high as that in El Salvador.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, the murder of a member of the RUC was often not as a consequence of a crime, but was the very purpose of the crime itself. The size of the police force (13,500 at its height) and the relatively small population of Northern Ireland meant there were few Protestant families without some link to the organisation and therefore some personal experience of threat faced in policing the 'Troubles'.

The Belfast or 'Good Friday' Agreement signed by the British and Irish Governments on the 10th of April 1998 heralded a new beginning for politics and also for policing in Northern Ireland. As a major breakthrough for the Northern Ireland peace process it set in train a series of events which led to the devolution of power to a Northern Ireland power sharing Assembly. Policing, was deemed too sensitive an area to be included directly in this negotiation process. Instead, shortly after the Agreement, the British Government appointed Chris Patten, the former Governor of Hong Kong and Cabinet Minister, to head up an Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland. The Commission reported in September 1999 and recommended a wholesale change in the way in which policing was conducted.

## **Early Organisational Movement**

The republican and loyalist ceasefires in 1994 impacted on all sections of Northern Ireland society, none more so than the police. For communities that had been through over twenty years of political violence, polarisation and alienation from the state and each other, it was the beginning of a long and painful journey. While the initial ceasefires themselves proved to be a false start<sup>8</sup>, the unusual stability and sense of relief that characterised NI that first 'ceasefire summer' made the idea of a return to violence deeply unpopular. The RUC recognised at this time that things were changing and in 1996 instigated its own 'Fundamental Review'. The main rationale of the Review was to design a policing approach appropriate to a new and peaceful political environment, particularly in relation to policing with the community. This was not the first attempt at community engagement strategies and paralleled sustained and forceful pressure from the nationalist body politic for change. Externally, the international policing community were also embracing community policing methodologies, in a way that had a distinct impact on how policing began to be delivered in other societies.<sup>9</sup> While the Review made 189 recommendations for change, it stayed firmly distanced from the symbolic issues of name, badge and flag, and even more so the concrete issues of recruitment and reform of the 'Special Branch'.<sup>10</sup> The appointment of Ronnie Flanagan as Chief Constable in 1996 was a significant change. Flanagan was a local man, someone who had risen through the ranks of the organisation, was well respected within the security establishment (regarded with much less respect by the Republican movement) and a formidable media performer.

## **Political Agreement and the Patten Commission**

The IRA and loyalist ceasefires also kicked off a period of intense political negotiation that culminated in the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement of 10th April 1998. Policing itself was regarded as too divisive an issue to be explicitly included in the 'Talks' process. Instead, the Agreement provided for the establishment of an independent commission to look specifically at police reform. The Commission was chaired by the Right Honourable Chris Patten, CH, the last British Governor of Hong Kong and a former UK Cabinet Minister. The Commission reported in September 1999 and made 175 recommendations. In general, the recommendations were very similar and informed by those of the RUC's own fundamental review. Where they differed substantially was in the proposal for a change of name, badge and uniform. The British Government's general acceptance of Patten's Report against the

opposition of Northern Ireland's unionists, lit the torch paper on the pace of change. In response, the RUC leadership accepted the Report's recommendations and in September 1999 appointed a Change Manager and a change team. The organisational response began in earnest.

## **Theoretical background**

The large and varied nature of the literature on organisational change leaves a wide body of work to draw on, but a difficult landscape to navigate. Existing work relevant to this study includes that which looks particularly at change in large complex public sector organisations and especially police organisations.<sup>11</sup> The RUC experience as explored here is an examination of 'radical' organisational change - a transformatory shift from one organisational form to another.<sup>12</sup> The political and environmental circumstances of the change process meant that the research relied heavily on a processual approach which seeks to convey the 'embeddedness' of the organisation in its political, social and historical context.<sup>13</sup> Such concerns tie in with Greening and Gray's comment<sup>14</sup> that the polarisation of perspectives on organisational change have recently given way to the interaction of choice and context when looking at organisational change processes. One of the most significant points in adopting such an analytical approach is the realisation and acceptance that 'real life' policy formulation and implementation are interactive and muddled, and researchers should resist the temptation to seek to resolve such tensions.<sup>15</sup> Dawson too, shares this concern for an accurate reflection of organisational change processes.<sup>16</sup> Most importantly however, is the centrality of 'time' as a measure of analysis within the work of Pettigrew and other processualists. From another perspective, Pollit has also recently reflected on the neglected nature of the passage of time as a vital, pervasive and neglected dimension within the wider public policy arena.<sup>17</sup> Pettigrew's identification of three inter-related lenses or perspectives (that of the historian, the social anthropologist and the political analyst) representing the simultaneous analysis of context, process and content go further in unravelling this complexity.<sup>18</sup> In attempting to 'catch reality in flight' Pettigrew adopts a stance which is consistent with his earlier work and that reinforces the temporal inter-connectness of the strategic change process. He recognises that strategy formulation and implementation are fundamentally connected processes and the importance of leaders as gatekeepers and enablers/thwarters of change. By arguing for longitudinal, processual methods he highlights the importance of comparison, contrast, continuity as well as an awareness of change over time. In a discussion of 'process' itself he uses a definition, which

resonates with the methodological framework he outlines: *'process is a sequence of individual and collective events, actions and activities unfolding over time in context'*.<sup>19</sup> Crucially for the RUC / PSNI case his approach to analysis includes a concern for power and an understanding that little can be done without consideration of it within the change process: *'One can only fight power with power, hence politics and political behaviour and its outcomes become a key factor in the change process'*.<sup>20</sup>

## **Research Design and Method**

The aim of the research was to explore and explain the process of organisational change that saw the Royal Ulster Constabulary become the Police Service of Northern Ireland, with all of the organisational, symbolic and cultural connotations that such a change involved. Two research questions predominated. The first centred around the 'how' aspect of the process itself: *how did the police in NI go about conducting a process of change*. The second addressed the suitability of the process embarked on: *was the change strategy adopted appropriate?* The research approach adopted for the study was process based, longitudinal and multi-method, utilizing a single explanatory case study method. In its focus it followed the 'processual' approach outlined by Pettigrew<sup>21</sup> in that it was primarily selected as a route to capturing the complexity of organizational change in a situation, which has changed over time, and on many levels. Data collection was largely limited to access to the top-team, a criticism which is made of some processual research<sup>22</sup> but which was unavoidable in this case, and not unusual in terms of processual research generally.<sup>23</sup> However, attempts were made to 'cross check' data with research contacts at a number of levels within the organisation and outside it. Originally, the research had set out to explore the success or otherwise of the change process. After negotiation with the organisation the focus of the research questions changed slightly and a focus on 'strategic appropriateness' was settled upon.

## **Findings**

While the basic narrative or 'chronology'<sup>24</sup> of change can be outlined through a series of dates and times, the real story emerged as a series of interlocking and interconnected 'change motifs', appearing throughout the four main identified 'phases' of change. The term 'motif' is used here to describe salient repeating themes within the change story. From these motifs

emerged the key overarching themes of leadership, resourcing, the roles of external agents and the pacing / sequencing of change. The four 'phases' of change identified are equal neither in length, importance or impact but reflect the chronological process and the flow of one series of events into another. From the phases we can understand how and why things happened as they did: from the motifs, the significance of particular themes such as leadership, pacing, resourcing and environmental turbulence.

### **Phases identified**

The first phase identified is the 'Pre-Story' – the preparation period when change was looming but not quite there, and there was a sense in the organisation and outside it that movement was afoot. This period is characterised by external pressure and internal manoeuvring, resulting in among other things, the RUC's internal 'Fundamental Review'. The second phase is the period in which change begins to be defined. This is the time at which change became inevitable, where the political environment 'tips' and the organisation is plunged into a process they can no longer control. This period is characterised by the Patten Report, the creation of a 'structure' for change within the organisation, and widespread political and organisational discontent and resistance. The third substantive phase is the 'Implementation Period' – the time when the change process began to 'bite' and real upheaval, rather than its anticipation, became the issue. The stage is underpinned by structural modifications at an organisational level, widespread voluntary redundancies, recruitment and symbolic signalling. The fourth phase is the 'Settling Down' period. This is when some elements of change became 'normal' practice, when leadership altered at all levels and the organisation transition was solidly entrenched. This stage is not the end in a process, simply a point at which we can say that the 'change process' ceased to be a key factor within the operational reality of policing in Northern Ireland. The dominant concerns of this period were the appointment of a new Change Manager and a new Chief Constable and the consolidation of the process.

## EMERGENT THEMES: LEADERSHIP, RESOURCING, EXTERNAL AGENTS, PACE & SEQUENCING

### **Leadership**

Leadership was a clear theme that arose throughout the data analysis. The theme was seen as significant at different levels within the organisation and at particular junctures in the development of the change process. As Dawson suggests, when focusing on leadership, there is an enormous temptation to look for unblemished hero figures: the charismatic leader driving through change.<sup>25</sup> While one figure necessarily dominates discussion (the Chief Constable Sir Ronnie Flanagan), leadership can be clearly seen at other levels within the organisation. If we consider leadership roles more generally, we can determine a number of layers that are significant. The first and most obvious is that at the very top, occupied within the research timeframe by Sir Hugh Annesley, Flanagan himself, Colin Cramphorn and Sir Hugh Orde. The layer below consisted of what was generally described as the Top Team, comprising the Chief Constable's Policy Committee and an appointed 'operational inspectorate'. This Team contained the key individuals within the change process, including the Assistant Chief Constables, the Change Manager, the Programme Manager for the Change Team as well as individuals Flanagan had singled out for the 'operational inspectorate' and as such may be regarded as the 'de facto' second leadership tier within the organisation. Below that were the more dispersed District Commanders who were regarded as vital to the implantation of the change process on the ground.

The three tiers of the Chief Constable, the broadened 'Top Team' and the DCU Commanders represent the structure through which the organisation put in place the process of change and carried it through. The central focus of Flanagan and his transformational leadership role is reflected to a lesser degree by the role and behaviour of the other tiers. The Top Team acted as a facilitator of change and a constraining mechanism when the pace moved too fast. The DCU commanders managed the process on the ground and had a particularly important role in terms of the structural change and managing the uncertainty which characterised the early process.

In terms of how appropriate the organisational leadership was, it was clear that Flanagan's approach to leading the organisation through such a difficult and complex process was conscious and nuanced. In his unwavering defence of the organisation externally and his internal challenge to his members, he set the tone for how the organisation would move ahead. By reinforcing

continually the aims of the process alongside the length of time it would take, and negotiating successfully on severance, Flanagan presented the organisation with a path to follow, which, while difficult, was at least perceivable. For the Top Team, it was inevitable that their contribution would remain in the shadow of the Chief Constable's profile. However, the logistical challenges of managing the process, restructuring the organisation, dealing with the emotional issues of the change of name and badge and the long periods of uncertainty required a steady hand through choppy waters. The team was diverse (or as diverse as could be expected within a largely homogenous organisation) and represented both those who were publicly and privately arguing for change and those who were much more sceptical. By providing a foil for each other, the team was able to avoid any tendency towards 'group think' and push the organisation forward. There is no doubt that tensions existed, but in general the approach adopted appeared to work well. For the initial DCU commanders, the training and consultancy support received left them in a strong position to move into the new structures and their new responsibilities. However, relatively quick turnover (encouraged by voluntary severance) left newly appointed commanders in a more challenging situation. It is clear that the training strategy broke down, partly due to decisions taken by a new Chief Constable.

## **Resourcing**

When we think about change incentives, we tend to look at a range of financial and non-financial mechanisms that facilitate the 'unfreezing' of existing organisational processes.<sup>26</sup> One of the unusual aspects of the RUC change process was the reliance on a particular method of financial incentive in order to 'kick start' the change process - voluntary severance - and the absence of any additional performance incentive for changing for those who choose to stay. The reasons for this are clear: the RUC was a public sector organisation in the midst of a turbulent period of social and political change. While the British Government (the funding source) implicitly recognised that the peace process and policing change would incur a substantial financial outlay, it was also aware of the potentially huge savings it could make if security costs in Northern Ireland dropped, as they would in a relatively peaceful situation. So while the UK Treasury could be persuaded of the need to front-end a large financial commitment, the public service nature of the sector largely prevented any opportunity for financially incentivising change for those that stayed in the organisation, rather than just for those who choose to leave. One unusual aspect of the RUC change process is the very significant

financial resources available to those managing the process, and particularly the resources which were made available as part of the voluntary severance process. These costs are defined by the organisation as 'Patten non-severance' and 'Patten-severance' expenditure. Patten non-severance expenditure was used to '*take forward the implementation of ...Patten related business cases*'.<sup>27</sup> These business cases included: the provision of training; increased numbers of part-time reserve officers and civilian support staff; development of a new police training college; improvements in the appearance of police stations; staffing structures for the new District Command Units; and IT system upgrades. Patten severance included lump sum payments, commutation, pension and administration costs.

By dissipating the power of the 'securocrats' and the old guard, and in this instance power can be defined as the ability to influence effectively the behaviour of others<sup>28</sup>, severance fundamentally altered the power dynamics within the organisation and laid the foundations for the change process to progress. However, as other organisational members point out, there is a real issue about where the space for the next round of recruitment will come from. Indeed, it is most likely that the organisation faces a period of relatively little internal movement for quite a while as these young Superintendents, Chief Superintendents and Assistant Chief Constables stay in rank for years and the impasse reaches further down the chain of command. The process of change within the RUC was intrinsically linked to its environmental context. The future of policing was one of the key issues in terms of the peace process and an enormously important factor in stabilising the conflict and moving Northern Ireland onto a new phase. Its significance for the British Government was clear. Given the political risks that had been taken in the wider process and the difficulty getting political movement on many areas of concern around policing, it would have been surprising if the change process had been allowed to flounder through lack of resources. We have seen above the degree to which the organisation was financially resourced to facilitate the change. Existing internal resources (such as IT capability and even morale) were however, low. Financial resources went some way to fill those gaps. The appropriateness of this strategy on behalf of the Government is a contextual judgement, but given the enormous political resources and time that had been spent trying to get policing right, resourcing it appropriately seems like a relatively straightforward calculation to make.

## **External Change Agents**

Ford and Ford comment that intentional change occurs when “*a change agent deliberately and consciously sets out to establish conditions and circumstances that are different from what they are now and then accomplishes that through some set or series of actions and interventions either singularly or in collaboration with other people*”.<sup>28</sup> Change agents are usually defined within the literature as either a subset of internal leaders<sup>29</sup>, or external agents who are often consultants brought in to facilitate the process<sup>30</sup>. These agents are regarded as having significant legitimate power which they can use to motivate the change process.<sup>31</sup> The change agents themselves are defined as those who ‘*facilitate change in the particular area in which it is needed*’.<sup>32</sup> The political role and political activity of the change agent is of particular relevance within the process.<sup>33</sup>

The RUC had an unusually closed organisational culture.<sup>34</sup> But the intensely political nature of the process, the involvement of external agents for change – particularly those with a community relations focus - and also the degree of international exchange which was involved, meant that others from outside the organisation played a role in the ‘thought leadership’ within it. Five different types of external influencers can be categorised. The first group can be identified as ‘academic’. It contains two distinct types of engagement processes. The first were academics who were sought out and engaged by the RUC themselves, in a consultancy and advisory role. The second is that of academics who actively sought out the RUC to engage with them. This includes individuals who were interested in issues of conflict, community division and good relations, but also a number of anthropologists who had specific interests around parading and crowd control. The second category can be identified as ‘community relations and mediation focused’. While there is some cross over between the two categories, the latter is mostly populated by those who have a practitioner interest in the development of better relations and the organisational consequences of the Northern Ireland conflict on service delivery and the implementation of public policy. These community relations and mediation practitioners largely engaged with the active aim of fostering change and developing relationships both within the organisation and with the organisation and the wider community. The third category is that of commercial consultants engaged by the RUC for their specific skills. A number of consultant types can be identified. For example, the police made use of a great deal of outsourced public relations support to enable them to deliver key messages to a wider audience, but also to overhaul their internal communications systems which was regarded as sub optimal. External consultants were also used to manage the new 50 / 50 recruitment system,

among other functions. The last identifiable category is that of external political agents who engaged with the police to further their own political objectives. This included representatives from the political parties, and especially the nationalist parties.

### **Pace and Sequencing**

Commentators on the sequencing of change processes are generally consistent in stressing the importance of establishing a sense of urgency in terms of change itself, forming guiding coalitions and developing and communicating a vision.<sup>36</sup> While the RUC case is generally consistent in its sequencing in relation to these models, in two areas the RUC case diverges sharply. The fact that much of the 'pace' of the process was determined by outside forces meant that when severance became a facilitative mechanism for employee turnover, these external forces (generally lack of political support in nationalist communities) also significantly stalled the recruitment of new officers and put considerable pressure on the process in its early stages. While a guiding coalition internally may have been established early, the lack of a coalition externally created real operational problems. Given the intensity of the organisation's relationship to its context, this was a major omission, but to some extent outside the organisation's control.

More interestingly, Kotter's (1996) well known advice to create a sense of urgency to spark initial momentum was not followed. Indeed, looking at what the RUC leadership was communicating internally at the early stages of the process, Flanagan, was doing the opposite: consistently talking down the change and reassuring officers of the security of their own prospects and the importance of the organisation to the future of NI. It is important to remember Pettigrew's (2003) assertions on the significance of political skills and the overwhelming importance of context. In an already feverish political atmosphere, where rumours were rife and voices of injured and widowed were being heard loudly within the organisation, the last thing that was required was any more urgency. Rather reassurance, emotional empathy and a holding period allowed the organisation and its members to become accustomed to the idea of change, without needing to do much about it. Some of those interviewed were critical about the slowness of this initial period and what they regarded as the stifling role played by the Top Team at this time. However, when change did happen, it was rapid. This is particularly evident around the issues of name and symbols. For example, the year April 2001 to April 2002 saw the instigation of the new District Command Units with new Commanders and an exhortation from Catholic community leaders (including

political and within the Church) for Catholics to join the new police service. The change in title and agreement on new symbols and uniforms also took place, the first batch of PSNI trainees were recruited, a 'new recruit' training programme with a focus on community policing and human rights was developed and implemented. The severance scheme was also moving swiftly forward, the clean walls policy<sup>37</sup> was implemented and reviewed, and the period saw the retirement of the first Change Manager and most significantly Sir Ronnie Flanagan himself. It ended with the graduation of the first batch of new PSNI recruits.

The long gestation of the process was followed by a rapid and radical programme of change, under the firm control of the leadership at the three levels outlined above. While in hindsight, the internal 'pacing' of the early part of the process appears careful, risk averse and considered, the later part is rapid and fast moving. This internal pacing was defined both in action and tone by the leadership, and in particular by the Chief Constable. Given the challenges that faced the organisation at that time and the intense external pressure under which it was operating (as well as operational pressure from ongoing community disorder), the gentle initial pacing seems to have been a leadership response to unsettling external events which may have resulted in organisational instability. The need for the leadership (and in particular from the Chief Constable) to simultaneously act as a defender of tradition and an innovator for change is also apparent. This was evident through the layers of leadership. In this the sequencing and pacing adopted appears to be as appropriate as it could have been at the time.

## **Implications**

The findings of this research encourage a greater consideration of both the process of change within organisations generally, and the management of change within organisations facing hazardous external turbulence. As we have seen, the themes of 'leadership', 'resources', and 'pace and sequencing' were crucially important to an explanation of the RUC change process. These themes also appear regularly within the wider literature on strategy and strategising, and the findings underline much of the work of other processualists in pinpointing the significance of context to a coherent understanding of change within organisations.<sup>38</sup> However, the important role of external agents is less well covered in the literature, especially the context-laden interventions of the community relations and mediation professionals in the RUC case. Within this case, interview respondents again and again emphasised the significance of this involvement and the role of some of these

agents as 'touchstones' for the process. In this respect, the research adds a new dimension to our understanding of how complex and difficult change processes can be affected by the intervention of other agents acting independently but with a progressive agenda to advance the process. The experience of the external agents in the RUC case was at times difficult and challenging for all involved. At one point one set of external agents withdrew entirely because of concerns that they would be regarded as partisan and conflicted through one of the worst periods of civil disturbance in the peace process (the Drumcree Dispute). In general though, the intervention provided a useful and additional set of 'scaffolding' to hold the change process in place, while a new organisational reality was constructed.

The research also contributes to knowledge of the strategy process under environmental pressure, and the interactions of organisational strategies and their environment. It underlines the significance of top-team leadership as a bridge between strategy and delivery and the significance of resources as a change lever. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel comment that '*power relations surround organisations; they also infuse them*'.<sup>39</sup> The RUC case can be read as a distinct illustration of the use of power both within an organisation to drive through a change process but also between an organisation and its political environment to create the conditions in which change becomes the only option. This duality between these internal and external processes is rarely focused on in strategy research, although obviously the dimension of power is a common concern. This research adds to our knowledge of the complex interactions between strategy internally, and the pressures that extreme external contexts represent.

The research also adds to our understanding of the interaction between political processes and public sector organisations. Change under political pressure is not an uncommon phenomenon, but is rarely explored. In terms of policing change, the RUC case is unusual, but not entirely alone. Recent research on change within policing contexts has centred on the implementation of 'policing with the community' strategies<sup>40</sup>, evolving to a new language of 'community safety'<sup>41</sup>. While community policing methodologies represented the core delivery aspect of the RUC's change agenda, the process went much further than that, encompassing a transformational change process from one organisational state to another. This is an unusually comprehensive change process for a policing organisation within stable democratic states, but one which is not without precedent. South Africa, Iraq, Palestine, Bosnia and Afghanistan all spring to mind as states within which policing organisations are at various points in transition processes. Indeed, if impartial policing is the lynchpin of democratic

governance<sup>42</sup>, then the reform of policing within societies under transition is a core component of institutional change. This research is the first to provide a glimpse inside a policing organisation undergoing such change, and it underlines the importance of certain central themes. The first is unequivocal overarching political support. Research in Israel has shown how lack of political support (among other things) fatally undermined a policing change process.<sup>43</sup> In Northern Ireland the situation was the reverse, with the political infrastructure (in terms of the two governments) firmly behind the change process, and the wider political infrastructure designed to support it. The second important lesson is the significance of independent oversight both as a change lever and a quality / progress check. The Oversight Commission gave the internal change team a leverage point (and enabled the change team to say '*its not us, its them..*'). It also gave those outside a firm evaluative mechanism with which to measure change – crucial for political and social buy-in. The third lesson is the significance of appropriate multi-level transformational leadership, and particularly leadership at the top, to act on conflict 'hot spots' and to retain organisational cohesion when change dynamics are pulling the organisation in many directions. Such leadership needs to be politically skilled and in possession of enough power to push through difficult and challenging points in the change process. The last lesson is the need for significant resources both to facilitate staff turnover where necessary, and to support those remaining and those engaged in the change. Such resources may be largely financial but the significance of intellectual support and internal capacity building should not be underestimated. As the RUC case has shown, widening horizons to new possibilities of development can be a change motor in itself.

## **Conclusions**

The change process undergone by the RUC in its journey to become the PSNI was radical, transformatory, risky and ultimately regarded by some of its most significant critics as sufficiently successful to be commented upon.<sup>44</sup> The process required careful strategic positioning within the rapidly evolving political process and visioning which was as interactive externally as it was reinforcing internally. This research identified four phases within the process and four themes emerged from the analysis. The phases speak to the process narrative: the themes are analytical and focus on the key concerns, decisions and insights of the process. This experience of policing change in political turbulence is not unique in history. But the experience of the RUC in successfully facing up to such challenges holds valuable lessons for such processes of transition.

## Notes

- 1 This article is based on research conducted by the author as part of her doctoral thesis 'RUC to PSNI: a study in radical organisational change' (PhD awarded by Trinity College, Dublin, July 2009).
- 2 Pettigrew, 1990.
- 3 Brewer et al, 1996; Ellison, 2007; Guelke, 2004.
- 4 Brewer, 1996.
- 5 Mulcachy, 2000.
- 6 ICPNI, 1999.
- 7 Ryder, 2000.
- 8 The IRA ceasefire initially broke down and was reinstated some time later
- 9 Weisbund et al, 2001; Skogan, 1995.
- 10 RUC, 1996.
- 11 Pettigrew et al, 1990; Ferlie, Hartley et al, 2003.
- 12 McNulty and Ferlie, 2004.
- 13 Pettigrew et al, 1992.
- 14 Greening and Gray, 1994.
- 15 Pettigrew, 1990.
- 16 Dawson, 2003a.
- 17 Pollit, 2008.
- 18 Pettigrew in Cummings and Wilson, 2003.
- 19 Ibid. p.309.
- 20 Ibid. p.312.
- 21 Pettigrew, 1990, 1997.
- 22 Dawson, 2003b; Buchanan and Boddy, 1992.
- 23 Pettigrew, 1992.
- 24 Pettigrew, 1997.
- 25 Dawson, 2003b.
- 26 Lewin, 1951.
- 27 PSNI, 2002.
- 28 French and Raven, 1959.
- 29 Ford and Ford, 1995, p.543.
- 30 Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991; Stace and Dunphy, 2002.
- 31 Grey and Starke, 1984; Williams, Dobson and Walters, 1993.
- 32 Buchanan and Bradham, 1999; Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991.
- 33 McCalman and Paton, 1992, p.144.
- 34 Pettigrew, 2003.
- 35 Brewer, 1991.
- 36 Kotter, 1996; Pettigrew, 1992; Moss-Kanter, 1983.

- 37 Controversial because it led to the removal and archiving of organisational symbols, pictures and thus memories. It is important to note that 'passing out' photographs were exempted.
- 38 Pettigrew et al, 1990; Dawson, 2000a, 2000b.
- 39 Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, 1998, p.235.
- 40 Gee and Scott, 1998; Maguire and Shin, 2003.
- 41 Skogan, 1995.
- 42 Ellison, 2007.
- 43 Weisbund and Shalev, 2002.
- 44 Ellison, 2007.

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