

A CASE STUDY OF AN ORGANIZATION'S STRATEGIC HR APPROACH TO INTEGRATION INTO THE EU: THE ROMANIAN BORDER POLICE

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Abstract

This year ten European countries will gain accession into the European Union, thus not only changing the size but its very nature. Europe has become a much more diverse place, with huge variations in the wealth of its member states. Romania, one of least developed countries of Europe, is working towards accession for the next phase in 2007. The paper presents a snapshot of an organisation preparing for the EU in 2007, the Romanian Border Police, and attempts to present a realistic picture of incidents encountered over a short period (ten months), as the organisation begins to develop and implement its HR strategy. The focus of this research is a group of Human Resource Development senior managers, and the impact they have had on the development and implementation of the strategic plan. In order to facilitate the modernisation project the main HRD specialists (regionally based) were given an opportunity of studying a postgraduate certificate in Human Resource Development at the University of Wolverhampton Business School. The research attempts to reveal whether the managers now have the necessary knowledge to facilitate the changes, and how this knowledge has been transferred into the workplace.

Key words: HR strategy, accession into the European Union, Romanian Border Police

Introduction and historical context

This case study has three main strands or themes, which are iteratively woven throughout. The first theme goes in search of the RPB culture, by applying accepted, tried and tested models to analyse organisational culture. Hofstede's (1991) five dimensional model is arguably the most influential and widely used. However, the works of Jackson

(2002) will also be used and will provide a theoretical framework to help capture the links between culture and HR practice.

The paper will then attempt to present the existing strategic HR position of the RBP, and examine the steps of transition intended to bring the organisation inline with its European counterparts, by the year 2007. The steps of transition have emerged as a result of conducting a strategic gap analysis. The RBP have called this 'the implementation of an advanced system for HRM', with the HR strategy being largely based on the training of managers. The global and specific objectives have clearly been articulated and the research hopes to reveal how far the RBP have come in starting to achieve its objectives.

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The third theme therefore is concerned with those involved in the process of change, to achieve the strategic HR objectives, i.e. the transition agents: those senior managers who attended the programme of study, in order to gain knowledge of the tools and techniques needed to facilitate change. The underlying questions running in this theme will be: to what extent has their pedagogy impacted upon the organisation? Their work-based projects should demonstrate the transfer of this knowledge into the workplace, and will be used as a valuable source of secondary data. However, due to time factors (the programme of study was completed 6 months ago), it is envisaged that little evidence of this may exist, not all fourteen managers may have had the opportunity to begin addressing the strategic objectives. This strand is therefore emergent.

The paper presents a case study analysis of the RBP, adopting the methodology as developed by Yin (1994). Information is drawn from interviews (unstructured and semi structured), participant and non-participant observation, and extensive documentary analysis from various sources, such as the current RBP strategic plan, and the assessed work based projects. I have adopted a qualitative and interpretive approach, which is one that recognises that relationships and practices are 'organised through the ideas, values and interests of individuals and groups producing action and interaction' (Seale, 1998:27). This approach will allow me to focus on people's subjective experiences, and help me better understand how sharing meanings construct understandings of professional practice.

Ultimately the case study will help understand how language and practices are embedded in the patterns of organisational behaviour thus informing the culture, a culture that needs to change rapidly in order for the RBP to function effectively within a Western European capitalist economy, rather than the former command economies of Eastern Europe

A summary of the political and economic situation of Romania is presented. This provides necessary contextualisation in helping to understand the very difficult conditions and constraints in which the Romanian Border Police operate. Romania is one of the less economically developed countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CRANET Survey 2001). The Ceausescuian communist legacy left Romania with an

unproductive economy dominated by inefficient (obsolete) state owned enterprises and collective farms (UK Foreign Office Country Profiles 2003). Progress since 1989 has been slow. Romanian governments have taken a gradualist approach to structural reforms, with disappointing results. The country experienced high levels of inflation, a slight increase in the GDP per capita, and a constant devaluation of the national currency (lei). However, by the year 2000, the GDP growth rate had increased after a three-year period of decline between 1996 and 1999. At the same time the strong currency reserves of the National Bank grew by \$950 million, and those of other commercial banks by \$290 million, thus demonstrating a more optimistic climate (Guraău, 2002 p. 289) much needed for the pending entry into the EU in 2007. However progress on structural reforms and privatisation has been slow. Parliament has now adopted legislation to accelerate the privatisation process. In the last 2-3 years there has been a massive increase in the volume of training undertaken by Romania, particularly the public sector. In Romania's National Development Plan (2000-2004), human resource development is one of the three areas of national importance, alongside environmental and sexual equality (Romanian National Observatory, 2000 p. 33).

The Romanian Border Police

The Romanian Border Police were established in 1999 as a result of the start of a comprehensive reform and modernisation programme. Part of this process was to merge the National Border Guard and the Border Police Directorate to form the RBP. To address the pending inclusion into the EU (2007) the RBP developed a strategy for the period 2003-2007. The main focus of the RBP's strategic document is that of border security, understandably as Romania is land locked by Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Moldavia. However, it also strongly identifies a drive in the training of staff in legislation, organisational development, human resource management, human resource development, and logistics (at this juncture it is necessary to point out that some of the words used in the RPB strategy are different from those used in this paper. This illustrates in the first instance the cultural language differences, which we need an awareness of when conducting research (Gilbert 2001). For example those we refer to as HRD specialists are called

'professors' in Romania, and the concept of HRD is generally referred to as 'training' by the Romanians). Hence in order to improve the RBP's training systems and function new headquarters were established, with the remit of coordinating the training function across all regions of the country. To facilitate the modernisation project the main HRD specialists (regionally based) were then given an opportunity of studying a postgraduate certificate in Human Resource Development at the University of Wolverhampton Business School. The preferred mode of attendance was the block or fast track programme. That meant that fourteen RBP senior managers would be in residence for five weeks including weekends. The period of five weeks is split into three parts, thus requiring the students to return to England on three separate occasions over a five-month period. The RBP managers were carefully selected by an independent organisation to attend the programme of study, which began in March 2003 and ended in August of the same year. The content of the programme consists of four main modules and is CIPD endorsed. The modules are: Managing Change through HRD, Managing the Learning Process, Managing the Training Function, and Employee Development. A work based project and a professional development journal is also required to complete the programme of study. The work-based projects will feature later, and will be used as a rich source of research material.

In search of Romanian culture

The first strand of this case study attempts to put some meaning to Romanian culture. During their programme of study the RBP managers were required to undertake a module entitled 'International Perspectives'. The assessment of this is based on their ability to conduct a comparative analysis of their organisations HR strategy against a host organisation in a different country. The data from their findings has been used to examine the RBP culture. However, first it can be useful to contextualise an organisational culture by first examining the national culture, and to consider, and understand some of the major aspects impacting and influencing organisational culture. The RBP managers used Hofstede (1991) to make broad cultural comparisons. This may be viewed as unhelpful in as much that Hofstede's (1991) western

theory might not fit into the Romanian context. However, in Hofstede's work entitled 'Cultural consequences' (2001) he writes at length about being first Dutch and secondly European. Hofstede (1991) claimed that in his studies his dimensions accounted for just half the differences. However, Hofstede's more recent work (2001) has ranked each of the main cultural factors of: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity against the country analysed to produce indices of countries. Romania was not included in the indices. Hence the building up of this cultural profile was original work done by the group, and stimulated much debate. The findings in Table 1 are based on a synthesis of the data collected from the group, and may help to rank Romania on Hofstede's indices.

The findings presented in Table 1 require further analysis, but given the constraints of the word count a summary can only be presented. The findings are not a total surprise considering the organisation in question is military, hierarchical, and ex communist. One would expect to find such an organisation as having high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance and a high degree of collectivism, but somewhat surprising that the organisation is moving towards masculinity. Several of the items listed relate to recent changes in peoples behaviour, (such as being more competitive, and the acquisition of material wealth). Thus it invites the invocation of cultural scholars such as Schein and his work on corporate culture (1969), and Hofstede himself, who suggest that it takes a lot longer for an underlying culture to change than for a people's behaviour. According to Searle (1998) changes in behaviour might easily be misinterpreted as signs of culture change. A further examination of this will be incorporated into a follow up paper.

Having looked at the Romanian culture the group were then asked to look at their organisation culture. When the RBP managers were asked to conduct a cultural analysis of their own organisation they argued that in order to compare their organisational culture against a national culture the same model should be used to give consistency. It is widely known that Hofstede's (1991) model is used for a societal analysis, but given the managers' request and their justification for this request they conducted an organisational analysis using the same model.

Table 1. Sociocultural analysis of Romania (as analysed by the RBP managers)

Cultural dimensions	Observations and experience
Power distance	Hierarchical organisations High degree of autocratic leadership (legacy of Communist regime) Style of dress important i.e. uniforms displaying rank (status important) Personal style is warm, friendly and emotionally open Wide wealth differentials Lecturers, teachers, parents treated with respect <u>High power distance</u>
Uncertainty avoidance	Risk traditionally avoided but becoming more accepted Organisations tend to be strong bureaucracies Strict rules and policies Career stability important High emphasis now being placed on security (due to rise in corruption and gang warfare) Due to historical event Romanians want stability not uncertainty or ambiguity High levels of stress, alcoholism, low standards of public health Integration into the EU seen as bringing stability Organisations now keen to work in partnership outside Romania <u>High uncertainty avoidance</u>
Individualism/collectivism	Importance placed on group loyalty Harmonious relationships within groups important Strong emphasis on cohesiveness of family Group achievement more important than personal achievement <u>High degree of collectivism</u>
Masculinity/femininity	National culture moving towards masculine traits Being more competitive (in the business world) Achievement oriented Acquisition of money and wealth becoming more important More emphasis on buying houses, and owning home Quality of life and caring for others becoming increasingly more difficult to reconcile with the long working hours to achieve Improved life style and obtain luxury goods (cars, own home etc.) Growing importance placed on being 'successful' <u>Moving toward masculinity</u>

Their findings are recorded in Table 2 and reveal that the national culture is influencing organisational culture. Moreover, it was difficult to avoid duplication i.e. some of the observations, and subsequent comments made of the national culture were being repeated for their organisational culture. Table 2 represents a synthesis of their findings.

This cultural analysis helped the RBP managers to make sense of the organisation in which they operate. They had never conducted such an activity prior to coming on the programme of study, and they felt the whole exercise gave meaning to some of the

practices adopted in the workplace. It is worth mentioning at this point that Hofstede's (1991) cultural factors may be interpreted differently from our British/Western perspective. As Russ-Eft and Hatcher (2003) point out, the notion of power distance may be construed as something quite different between cultures. For example, low power distance cultures hold that 'all should have equal rights' whereas high power distance cultures hold that 'power holders are entitled to privileges'. The ways in which two types of cultures interpret this may be quite different and may lead to the elimination of this particular principle because

of lack of agreement. This was something experienced in the classroom, and needs to be

considered when reading these cultural analyses.

Table 2. Organisational cultural analysis of RBP (as analysed by the RBP managers)

Cultural dimensions	Observations and experience
High power distance	RBP officers have a strict attitude to dress, official uniforms and noticeable rank Hierarchical organisation Select for specific job and level RBP - 9 ranks in the hierarchical structure, 5 are senior officer ranks Clear vision and strategy
High uncertainty avoidance	Leadership is task specific Specific rules and policies Limited use of performance related pay Started setting appraisal targets Need to clear vision and goals to aim for High degree of formality Emphasis on security
Collectivism	Group membership loyalty Group achievement more important than personal achievement Emphasis on teamwork and team competition Normative or moral employee relations Conscious 'we'
Masculinity/femininity	Work to live Relationships important Conciliation and compromise Acquisition of money and wealth becoming more important More emphasis on buying houses, and owning own home Increasingly becoming more competitive in the workplace <u>Both masculine and feminine characteristics evident</u>

The next stage was for the managers to examine their HR practices, being mindful of the cultures (national and organisational) influencing their practice. In order to capture the links between culture and HR practices Jackson's (2002) framework was used as a tool for analysis. The framework has developed two contrasting management perceptions of the value of people in organisations: instrumental and humanistic. These perceptions are evident in the way in which policy is formulated, and the subsequent HR practices coming from these policy orientations. The framework is called 'locus of human value'. Jackson claims that the two loci of human value lie at the heart of international HRM and each approach is a product of cultural factors. According to Jackson (2002), global cultural interaction can bring these two loci of human value into conflict. This is a

situation facing the RBP currently. They are under increasing pressure to adapt their culture in order to align themselves with their EU counterparts. Hungary has recently been accepted into the EU by developing their processes and procedures to make EU laws meaningful. This has been done by using the well-educated workforce, and training them into effective HR professions (CIA country profiles 2003). Jackson (2002 p.470) argues however, "managing globally goes further than simply adapting practices effectively from one culture to another".

The RBP managers collectively agreed that their perception of the value of people in their organisation was humanistic, based on Jackson's framework. The following framework was indicative of the RBP links between culture and HRM practices.

Table 3. RBP Locus of human value

Cultural factors	Humanistic	The organisation should serve the ends of its people	People development
Loyal commitment People orientation Relations orientation Collectivism	Seeing people as an end in themselves	Quality of work & life Democracy People development People welfare Moral commitment	Worker participation Developing the person Social welfare Job commitment

Given the socio-cultural, organisational and HRM/cultural analysis, what HR strategy did the RBP need to develop in order to meet EU legislative demands? The RBP strategy reflects some of HR practices, which need development, and indeed those HR practices that have yet to be implemented. The strategy has been formulated on two plains: at inception and the final vision. It is the final part of the strategy, which is of more interest, and thus demonstrates how the programme of study has aided the process of HR strategic planning.

The strategy taken by the Romanian Border Police towards integration into the EU

The strengthening of border management and controls, in particular on the Eastern and Northern borders, is a key element of Romania's Accession Partnership with the European Union. Romania, as many other states in Central and Eastern Europe, is faced with a growing threat from illegal cross-border activity, which includes illegal immigration, drug trafficking, weapons smuggling and many other forms of organised criminal activity. Many organised criminal groups view Romania as a natural transit route as they seek to penetrate the European Union itself.

The National Border Guard was a military organisation, in which conscripts made up the largest part of the personnel. The Border Police Directorate also had a military regime but without conscripts. After one year, the conscripts were ending their military probation and they had to be replaced with others, without any knowledge and skills regarding border management (surveillance of the borders). The training period over the first three months from their military probation had to be provided in order to equip them with the

necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes required to cope with growing threats of cross border crime. Moreover, due to the high potential of corruption within the conscripts, they were breaking the law by allowing some facilities to the offenders (smugglers, illegal migrants, traffickers of human beings, etc) in exchange with benefits.

During the initial period, after these two large organisations were merged, it became clear there were vast cultural differences between the two organisations, and that the merger had presented many problems. The main task was to replace old-fashioned methods to manage the borders with a modern approach, in line with EU standards and best practice. This required the undertaking of a gap analysis, which would form the basis for a new strategy, as recommended by Beardwell (1995). The new management team therefore initiated a gap analysis, in order to establish the priorities as well as an Action Plan (Journey of transition). The gap analysis also accounted for the new work methods, methodologies and the strategic approach in the field of Human Resources, logistics, and European legislation. Thus, the scale of the task facing the RBP as it seeks to develop itself from a partly military, conscript organisation to a fully professional law enforcement agency is considerable, and addressing it places a severe strain on the country's scarce resources. Consequently, external assistance through the European Funding Programme was required.

HR strategic gap analysis

It was only possible for the senior RBP managers to conduct a gap analysis since attending the University of Wolverhampton. Prior to that period the gap approach was unheard of. The Gap Approach was used as

described by Walton (1999), and has been established on two levels.

Inception level

The strategic position of the RBP at the time of the exercise:

- military structure and regime
- ineffective structure, hierarchical with too many tiers, and no formal regional structures
- lack of communication both horizontally and vertically, therefore the necessity to establish a Communication Plan for the RBP
- no Human Resources Directorate in which the HRM and HRD areas are clearly defined
- no strategies and policies, especially in the HRD area
- lack of a training policy and function, high number of training centres, a legacy of the former regime when RBP had conscripts, the professors were 'trainers' for the conscripts rather than real professors for the officers and sub officers
- the RBP Schools (Oradea and Orsova) have a lack of specialised personnel for delivering required training
- training delivered in a long established way: no interactive training, playing role, study cases etc
- lack of training for managers, as well as for the reserve of the personnel. Almost all managers had a military schooling and they had a military management
- lack of personnel trained in the HR area, especially in the field of employee development, managing change through HRD, organisational development, etc
- ineffective selection and recruitment system for the professional sergeants (hired based on personal contract, etc) who are replacing the conscripts within the professionalisation process
- out-of-date legal basis (not in accordance with EU requirements) as well as secondary border legislation
- lack of high level equipment for border surveillance and control and equipment out-of-date
- old fashioned methods and methodologies in operational areas (border surveillance at

the green (land) and blue (sea) border, control of the documents).

Final level

The Romanian Border Police strategic vision for 1st January 2007 (the proposed date for joining the EU) is:

- professional management structure: qualified professionals at all levels and in all functions (operational, logistics, HRM/HRD, juridical, international co-operation, financial)
- adequate equipment for border surveillance and control at the green and blue borders, as well as within Cross Border Points, in line with those within EU
- adequate training system and function, in line with the EU training function within similarly institutions; modern training centres and schools with required experts for training and developing the personnel
- adequate legal basis, in line with EU requirements, including the secondary border legislation
- methods, methodologies and work patterns according with those in use within the EU similarly institutions
- adequate selection and recruitment system for the personnel.

The re-organisation process is ongoing, but the strategy proves that the Romanian Border Police are taking into account all the changes needed, and how the organisations personnel will be effected by the speed of change (i.e. how quickly change is implemented). Taking into account the tensions change can cause as observed by Jaffe (2003).

The Postgraduate Course in HRD at Wolverhampton Business School made possible this new approach to organisational change and helped the Romanian Border Police on the path of EU integration, by assisting them to solve their own problems through the teaching of process consultancy (Schein 1969).

Knowledge transfer

The third theme of this case study is concerned with those involved in the process of change, to achieve the strategic HR objectives, i.e. the transition agents: those senior managers who attended the programme

of study, in order to gain knowledge of the tools and techniques needed to facilitate change. Given the RBP strategic HR objectives do the managers now have the necessary knowledge to facilitate the changes? The underlying question will be: to what extent has their pedagogy impacted upon the organisation? The fact that a coherent strategy has been formulated is in itself a measure of success, but one of the key measures would be how the managers have

demonstrated the transfer of skills and knowledge into the workplace. Their work-based projects should demonstrate the transfer of this knowledge into the workplace, and has been used as a valuable source of secondary data for this case study. Table 4 illustrates the nature of those work-based projects and indicates whether the programme assisted with their HR strategic objectives. The black dotted boxes illustrate where the manager felt the objective had been achieved.

Table 4. The work based projects

Title of work based project	Does your project link into the HR strategy?	Does your project link into the general organisational strategy?	Has the programme of study enhanced your professional practice?	Did the module 'managing change' help with linking your work-based project to the HR strategy?	Did the module 'design and deliver training' help to link your work based project to the HR strategy?	Did the module 'managing the training function' help to link your project with the HR strategy?	Did the module 'employee development' help link your project with the HR strategy?	Did the module 'international perspectives' help link your project with the HR strategy?	Overall has the programme helped your organisation focus its HR strategy on EU integration?
The new curriculum for training the border police agents	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Management of the externally provided training for the Romania border police	●	●	●			●		●	●
Training of the county inspectorate of border police: Giurgiu personnel in the field of communication	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Improvements of the staff appraisal system in the border police HQ (360 degree appraisal)	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
The bureau against documentary fraud		●	●			●		●	●
Communication systems with the mass media	●	●	●	●		●		●	●
Analysis, demands and perspectives of Bucharest-Otopeni border cross point		●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Training and evaluations methods in the Constanta border police directorate	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Professional training of Romanian border police - Hungarian border	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Improving HR systems at the Romanian border police	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Teaching English classes to the Romanian border police	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Analysis of management styles in the Romanian border police	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
Training in the field of international cooperation at the borders	●	●	●		●	●		●	●
Legislative considerations in fulfilling the requirements of the EU	●	●	●					●	●

The overall picture is one of success with only a few unmarked boxes, thus illustrating areas where the programme of

study had not made a contribution in helping with the HR strategy. From the table we can see the least effective modules taught on the

programme, in terms of helping the organisation formulate strategy and help facilitate the change process is 'employee learning and development', and the 'design and delivery of training'. Ongoing dialogue with the managers revealed that these areas of the programme were least helpful because of the vast differences traditionally between training, learning and development in Britain as compared with Romania. The most helpful area was the 'managing change' module. However all managers stated that their work based projects were based on real work situations and helped with the development and improvement of the HR processes, systems and formulation of strategic objectives.

Interviews of the managers will take place later this year, as part of this ongoing research, in an attempt to reveal whether their individual plans for transferring the knowledge and skills acquired has continued, and if so how this has been achieved.

Summary

This paper has attempted to capture a snapshot of an organisation preparing for accession into the EU. The case study presented national and organisational culture, and then linked the HR strategy to the culture. It then looked at the RBPs strategic objectives, and presents an analysis of how the programme of study at the University of Wolverhampton Business School has helped managers start to achieve those objectives.

The purpose of this case study however, was not to find answers to how this organisation should prepare itself for EU integration, but rather, to present an account of significant preparatory events over a ten month period, as seen through the eyes of the change agents. They have faced significant changes. It is inconceivable that any organisation can hope to achieve change on this scale without ensuring that those involved in the change process are suitably trained with the requisite knowledge and skills to enable them to do this. What the training did, in addition to giving them the requisite knowledge and skills, was to change their mindset i.e. their attitudes towards training. Human resource development is now viewed as a much more powerful tool than previously, and a means for achieving organisational change and development. This raises questions as to why training and development was not valued

before. The most interesting aspect of this research will be to see how this is used between now and 2007.

Rezumat

În acest an zece țări europene vor adera la Uniunea Europeană, ceea ce va modifica nu doar mărimea, dar și natura acesteia. Europa a devenit un spațiu mult mai diversificat, cu variații imense la nivelul bunăstării statelor membre. România, una din țările mai puțin dezvoltate ale Europei, depune eforturi pentru integrare în următoarea fază din anul 2007. Acest articol prezintă o organizație care se pregătește pentru intrarea în UE în anul 2007, Poliția Română de Frontieră, încercând să realizeze o imagine cât mai realistă a incidentelor apărute pe parcursul unei scurte perioade (zece luni), la începutul procesului de dezvoltare și implementare a strategiei de resurse umane. Această cercetare este focalizată asupra unui grup de senior – manageri din domeniul dezvoltării resurselor umane și asupra impactului pe care aceștia l-au avut asupra dezvoltării și implementării planului strategic. Pentru a facilita proiectul de modernizare, principalilor specialiști în domeniul resurselor umane (pe bază regională) li s-a oferit oportunitatea de a participa la studii postuniversitare în cadrul Departamentului de Resurse Umane al University of Wolverhampton Business School. Această cercetare încearcă să evidențieze dacă managerii au acum cunoștințele necesare pentru a facilita schimbările, și cum pot fi aceste cunoștințe transferate în mediul de muncă.

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