



ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, ERASMUS UNIVERSITY

- ▶ Public safety from a management perspective

Rebecca Morris talks with Gabriele Jacobs and Saskia Bayerl

- ▶ Necessary Condition Analysis: more value from data

By Jan Dul

- ▶ Consumer insights: think of yourself when buying for others

By Gabriele Paolacci

- ▶ Industrial ecosystems: major opportunities for port authorities

By Frans A.J. Van Den Bosch, Rick M.A. Hollen and Henk W. Volberda

- ▶ Handling threats to the validity of online data

By Petra Saskia Bayerl and Babak Akhgar

- ▶ Enriching the customer experience with big data

By Evelien van der Hurk



The business school that thinks and lives in the future

Public safety from a management perspective

Rebecca Morris talks with Gabriele Jacobs and Saskia Bayerl

Concerns over public safety, whether it is the threat of natural disasters, social unrest, radicalisation or illegal immigration, are everywhere in the public and political discourse. Essentially, how we manage public safety in Europe is problematic, which is why RSM's new Centre of Excellence in Public Safety Management hopes to contribute to its improvement.

Perhaps what should be concerning us more is not a lack of safety – in fact Europeans have never been safer, with crime rates falling in every country – but the problematic ways in which we are protecting our public.

Management of public safety, says Gabriele Jacobs, associate professor of social and organisational psychology at RSM and scientific director of the centre, while once the province of public institutions such as law enforcement, now involves a complex interplay between public, private and government bodies – and is a process fraught with communication, transparency, managerial and harmonisation problems.

Jacobs and her colleagues are among those who wish to change that. RSM's new Centre of Excellence in Public Safety Management (CESAM), led by Jacobs and her colleagues Saskia Bayerl, Elisabeth Brein, Kate Horton, Mark van der Giessen and Bep Klop – is dedicated to the study of public safety from a management perspective.

Their goal is to take the management solutions applied so effectively within the private sector and apply them to improve the management of public safety on a pan-European scale.

'Here we have an area of public life that urgently needs our attention,' says Jacobs. 'Management scholars are not only equipped to do this, but we have an obligation to do so.'

More than anything, says Saskia Bayerl, assistant professor in technology and organisational behaviour, and programme director of research stream technology, they want impact: 'For me the most valuable contribution ▶



Public safety from a management perspective *(continued)*

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we can make is impact – to measurably improve the society we live in.’

Public safety is complex

New technologies, open borders, and the internationalisation of organisations and their supply chains have made protecting the public from crime or catastrophes infinitely more complicated than it was decades ago – and the boundaries as to whose responsibility it is, less clear.

When it comes to public safety, the private and public divide no longer applies, says Jacobs. Multiple stakeholders are now involved, says Bayerl, ‘each with different and legitimate interests and ideas about how public safety should be achieved.’

Moreover, these stakeholders often operate in their own independent streams. ‘We see technology companies not well connected to the legal discussion or societal discussion,’ says Jacobs, ‘and the public not properly informed of the activities of the police.’

Then there are the managerial challenges facing public institutions. Leaders of law enforcement organisations face the same strategic challenges – including massive organisational change – as the CEOs of major multi-

nationals, yet with less public support, managerial training, and the pressure of serious austerity measures.

How business schools help

Business school academics are in a unique position to help: they know how organisations inter-relate and can facilitate collaboration between different stakeholders; they can provide leadership education; and work side-by-side with organisations to address their diverse challenges. And that's exactly what the team at CESAM are doing.

Prior to the formation of the centre, only a few small projects in the field of public safety had been conducted at RSM. Then came COMPOSITE (Comparative Police Studies in the EU), a four-year-long EU-funded initiative led by Jacobs and concluded in 2014.

Requiring the participation of 15 partners across ten European countries, the project identified the factors most conducive to organisational change within police forces throughout Europe: insights ranging from the technology, resources and capabilities available, to the leadership styles and institutional cultures. The findings were presented at numerous confer-

ences to police forces, stakeholders, and fellow academics.

RSM is now in the process of developing executive education programmes for leaders of police forces and the stakeholders they work with. While COMPOSITE was initiated prior to the inauguration of the centre, the project led to a body of knowledge and networks that inspired the creation of CESAM. What followed was a passionate exploration of crisis management and a proliferation of projects relating to general questions of public safety.

Interdisciplinary solutions

A quick glance at the centre's project list captures the scale and breadth of its ambitions. In the 12 months since its inception, the centre has acquired another high-profile EU-sponsored project and three Dutch government grants. Several new national and EU proposals have been submitted.

One project recently completed was the evaluation of the much-publicised reorganisation of the Dutch national police force, conducted on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice, and won by the CESAM team in a public tender. A current project led by Elisabeth Brein involves evaluating the success of a change initiated in the Dutch law system.

Research at the centre is divided into two streams: the role of new technologies for the management of public safety, led by Bayerl, and the role of identity for organisational and inter-organisational practices, which is led by Kate Horton. An overarching theme is the evaluation of large-scale organisa-

“...the most valuable contribution we can make is impact – to measurably improve the society we live in.” *Saskia Bayerl, programme director, CESAM.*



tional changes and the management of international collaborations.

'The topics we tackle at CESAM are at the interface of the various communities that need to co-create public safety,' explains Bayerl. 'We can help facilitate the dialogue between these communities.'

Interdisciplinary work is something the CESAM team is passionate about. 'At Erasmus University Rotterdam a lot of valuable research has already been conducted on public safety in other disciplines,' says Jacobs. 'Our goal is to work with these faculty members from other disciplines. We start with the topic, then organise expertise around it from different disciplines.'

All projects are conducted together with practitioners. 'We enter into a project with a public institution and develop solutions together,' says Jacobs. 'It is in this way we hope to contribute new knowledge both to academia and the organisations we work with'

The centre also actively contributes to academic discussions. A recent CESAM-led study investigating the effects of stakeholder feedback on police identity was published in the *Academy of Management Proceedings*. Other recent publications have targeted academic audiences in information systems, new media and communications.

Exploring crisis management

A good example of the impact of their work can be seen in CRISADMIN (Critical Infrastructure Simulation of Advanced Models on Interconnected Networks Resilience project). Researchers at CESAM – led by Brein –

developed a simulation tool for exploring the impact of major catastrophic events (natural, industrial or terrorist in nature) on critical infrastructures.

The possibilities this tool affords are considerable. Practitioners can use it to assess the risks and impact of critical events on quality of life and the factors that trigger the domino effect between interdependent critical infrastructures. They can use it to assess possible intervention countermeasures and pre-

vention policies. By simulating the effects of particular policies, the tool can be used to understand, evaluate and update already implemented process and procedures.

The model has been made freely available in a prototype form for both public (civil protection, fire brigades, for instance) and private organisations throughout EU member states. Practitioners have free use of the tool and will be able to customise it to meet their needs.

Improving engagement

The centre's current EU project is UNITY, which aims to improve the engagement of law enforcement agencies with citizens and will develop new technologies to facilitate the interaction between communities and police.

"We enter into a project with a public institution and develop solutions together."

Gabriele Jacobs, scientific director, CESAM.

Under the leadership of Bayerl and Jacobs and involving PhD student Mark van der Giessen, CESAM is responsible for the collection of community policing best practices in at least six countries, for analysing the technology needs of stakeholders and evaluating the implementation of a technology tool. The project will run from May 2015 to April 2018.

'Management scholars can be useful within this area of public safety,' says Jacobs. 'Our goal is simple: to contribute to the improvement of an area that is at the core of public life.' ■

More information about the research priorities and aims of RSM's Centre of Excellence in Public Safety Management (CESAM) can be found at [WEB www.irim.eur.nl/cesam](http://www.irim.eur.nl/cesam)