How Spain's Guardia Civil is using advanced information technologies to combat crime

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Formed more than a century ago, today Spain's Guardia Civil (Civil Guard) has 85,000 officers deployed throughout Spain. Their mission is "to protect the free expression of rights and freedoms and to guarantee the safety of the population."

Interview

Antonio Barragán, Brigadier General of the Guardia Civil, Chief of Staff.

Describe the environment in which the Guardia Civil operates today?

Our operational environment has changed dramatically in the last few years, with organized crime becoming increasingly globalized and the sophisticated use of new and emerging technologies. To combat organized crime, it is fundamental that we can connect up different police forces, both here in Spain and worldwide. We must bear in mind not only that the Guardia Civil operates within the framework of NATO and the European Union, but also that we need to coordinate with the autonomous regional police forces and local administrations across the world.

What capabilities are required to tackle these challenges?

Officers today need to be highly trained. Courses must include a general grounding for our officers as well as more skilled training to prepare them for the more specialized environments in which they are expected to operate. Our organization runs multi-disciplinary and general units deployed throughout Spain and other training modules of a more specialized nature where more specific data is involved.

Furthermore, our operating environment demands perfect coordination, which would not be possible without the use of effective information systems. Any advanced solutions must be perfectly integrated with our operational model so that we can benefit from the most accurate, up-to-date information. All of this must be based on systems that are open, interoperable and capable of adapting to a changing environment.

What influence has the SIGO project had on the development of the Guardia Civil's new operational model?

The aim of the SIGO project, the implementation of a new integrated operations management system, is to redirect the exchange of information demands toward a single system based on a centralized Web architecture. The system can be accessed using an electronic card from any of Spain's more than three thousand operational units and also supports mobile elements such as, for example, laptop computers. The system provides an effective response to the needs of the operational units and, at the same time, it is also future-proof with respect to the administrative, training, technological and organizational aspects of our work. For us, the SIGO project represents a firm commitment that will safeguard the future operating model for Guardia Civil in the 21st century.

How does the new system form part of daily operations?

The system's main objective is precisely that, to provide support for our daily operations by enabling us to access all the information we need. This immediate and ubiquitous availability of information plays a key role in our mission to uphold the safety of citizens and serves our commitment to preventing and combatting crime, investigating administrative violations, fighting against

illegal immigration, providing personal security services and carrying out search and rescue operations, among others. The system is vital for answering our officers' queries and enables them to extract all the desired information via the many different relationships that exist when undertaking a matter of police interest. The information can be presented in different formats, such as written documents, photos, audio or video. The system incorporates basic usability elements, such as personal authentication with secure access, a single input of operational data that can then be shared by the entire organization and a multiple information analysis and statistical capabilities. It also offers different query modes, and help aids which simplify the search process, guide users and make new services available to citizens.

How has the system contributed toward improving the effectiveness of the Guardia Civil?

The advantages of being able to access vital information in real time are numerous and extend from its influence on the daily work of the individual officer to improving the role of the Guardia Civil as a fundamental and essential aspect of Spain's public safety model. The system has had a clear influence and demonstrable improvement in officer safety and has helped achieve a greater efficiency in crime investigation. The information we manage now has greater strategic value, and today the Guardia Civil's ability to communicate its message to both Spanish and international fora and bodies is enhanced. We now have a deeper understanding of our own activities thanks to the numerous and diverse indicators SIGO provides around the service we maintain and the events in which we are involved. Other benefits include the fact that the SIGO system has made it possible to be more consistent with our procedures and to increase the officers' sense of belonging. In this respect I would summarize that "We are Civil Guards because we use SIGO and, because we use SIGO, we are Civil Guards."

What improvements have there been in the service received by citizens?

Our greater operational efficiency has clearly had an indirect effect upon the service received by the citizen. The process of dealing with complaints and reports at our facilities tends to be more laborious than in the past due to the amount of information that has to be recorded and the procedures that have to be followed. However, in exchange for this more labor-intensive and meticulous approach for fielding complaints, which requires citizens to spend longer on our premises if they are the victims of a crime, in the long

run, citizens are better off because the chances of arresting the criminals and recovering any stolen articles are increased. We must bear in mind that 80 percent of the Guardia Civil's current activity is contained in SIGO. Every day 25,000 officers connect to the system and every month it processes more than two million entries. It could be said that as far as the Guardia Civil is concerned, if it's not in SIGO it doesn't exist, and that represents a clear improvement in our operational model.

What is more, the project is a living entity; the very nature of what we do means it is necessary to continuously update the regulatory changes that occur to meet the demands of other institutions, technological changes and the need to integrate with other systems.

The benefits of greater integration

Conceived to support the daily operations of the Guardia Civil by enabling it to access information when it is needed, the SIGO project is one of the most technologically complex to have been developed over the last few years. Installing the new system has involved the review and transformation of operating processes which has brought greater consistency and increased the scope of common working practices. Developed by a team comprising Guardia Civil and Accenture, the solution has a modular structure for managing the different aspects of Guardia Civil's operational activity (innovations, incidents, services, complaints, etc.). Guardia Civil has experienced a profound process of change which has not only been extremely challenging, but also long and complex. The process also needed to accommodate the different perceptions of middle managers and end users with respect to the usability of the new system. To understand the full scope and scale of the project, Guardia Civil has around 85,000 officers deployed in more than 2,000 territorial units.

Clear advantages of the system have resulted in a notable improvement in crime prevention and investigation, a reduction of bureaucratic tasks, greater single data reliability, a standardization of procedures, more information security and easier access to vital data while performing operational functions.

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Has coordination with other police forces improved?

Dramatically! The advance towards the concept of a centralized information bank greatly eases a "single response" to external demands. The system significantly increases the control over the information we provide while making it easy to perform this exchange either electronically or through accessing other systems.

How do you see SIGO developing in the future?

We are channelling our efforts into constantly improving our ability to analyze and make better use of the information we gather. We have the total support and commitment of everyone in our organization. This project has initiated a process of strategic change by altering the mindset of over 85,000 people who constitute the Guardia Civil. We now work in a more consistent and integrated way, although we are actioning ongoing maintenance to improve functionalities. As this increasingly complex socio-political environment evolves, we are under pressure to provide well-trained police forces that stay abreast of the latest developments. To do so, we need to invest in information technologies that increase the workforce's effectiveness and enable officers to provide an appropriate response to citizen safety. Today, SIGO represents a quantum leap for the Guardia Civil and helps to position and motivate us to tackle the pressing challenges that affect all security forces and law enforcement agencies.

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