



# Crisis management from an embassy point of view

A qualitative study on internal crisis communication

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Krisihantering ur en ambassads synvinkel

En kvalitativ studie om intern kriskommunikation

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# Summary

On the 7th of April 2017 a terrorist attack was a reality in Sweden. The incident put an embassy in Stockholm in to crisis mode. This thesis will examine how an organisation can implement a crisis management plan and have functioning internal communication during a crisis. Furthermore, the study will examine if stress played a role during the event as well as how the embassy prepared its employees to handle the different aspects of the crisis. In order to fulfil the purpose of the study 10 qualitative interviews was conducted with the employees who were working on the day when the terrorist attack occurred. In order to seek a deeper understanding of the purpose of the investigation, an overall question was formulated which was subsequently broken down into four different parts

- *How did the embassy prepare their employees for a crisis?*
- *How did the employees experience the implementation of the crisis management plan?*
- *Did the employees in this case study experience a functioning internal communication during the crisis?*
- *Did the employees experience stress as a factor that affected the internal communication?*

The empirical material was analysed together with the literature such as Coombs and Frandsen & Johansen who discuss the three-stage model. The model was also put in perspective by Carell's views on crisis preparation. Whitworth discusses the internal communication which is another perspective that has been used in this thesis. The result revealed that the respondents did not feel that stress was a factor that affected the internal communication. However, the internal communication had some issues during the event which slowed down the communication process. The conclusion that can be made from the study is that the employees at the embassy felt well prepared and the crisis management plan was easy to follow but the internal communication had some serious limitations when it came to contacting colleagues within the embassy.

**Keywords:** Internal communication, crisis management plan, crisis preparation, crisis management, stress.

## Abstract

Den 7 april 2017 var en terroristattack ett faktum i Sverige. På grund av denna händelse gick en ambassad i Stockholm in i krisläge. Denna uppsats undersöker därför hur en organisation kan genomföra en krishanteringsplan och ha en fungerande intern kommunikation vid en pågående kris. Vidare undersöker studien om stress är en påverkande faktor under den aktuella krisen och hur ambassaden förberedde dess anställda inför en krissituation. För att få svar på syftet har 10 kvalitativa intervjuer utförts med de anställda som jobbade dagen då terroristattacken hände för att få fram ett resultat. För att få en djupare förståelse av syftet har en övergripande fråga formulerats för att sedan brytas ner i fyra delar:

- *Hur förberedde ambassaden sina anställda för en kris?*
- *Hur upplevde medarbetarna genomförandet av krishanteringsplanen?*
- *Fick medarbetarna i den här fallstudien en fungerande intern kommunikation under krisen?*
- *Var enligt medarbetarna stress en faktor som påverkat den interna kommunikationen?*

Det empiriska materialet var analyserat tillsammans med litteratur av Coombs och Frandsen & Johansen där de diskuterar trestegsmodellen. Modellen sätts i perspektiv med Carrells synpunkt på krisförberedelser. Whitworth diskuterar intern kommunikation vilket är ett annat perspektiv som har blivit använt i uppsatsen. Resultaten visar att respondenterna inte kände att stressen påverkade hur de kommunicerade internt, men att den interna kommunikation hade brister som gjorde att den påverkade kommunikationen. Slutsatsen som kan dras från studien är att de anställda på ambassaden kände sig väl förberedda och att krishanteringsplanen var lätt att följa. Den interna kommunikationen hade dock allvarliga begränsningar när det gällde att få tag på kollegorna på ambassaden.

**Nyckelord:** Intern kommunikation, krishanteringsplan, kris förberedelser, krishantering, stress.

## Preface

This thesis has been co-authored by Rebecca Dorward and Amanda Kling who have been equally involved and responsible in the writing process and data collection.

We would like to thank those who have helped us during this process and a special thanks to our informants at the embassy for their availability and support and Fiona Dorward who helped us proof read the text that has been written.

Karlstad, January 2018.

*Rebecca Dorward & Amanda Kling*

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# 1. Introduction

On the 7th of April 2017 a terrorist attack in Sweden was a reality. A hijacked lorry drove at a high speed down the street Drottninggatan in Stockholm taking the lives of 5 people. This event mobilised numerous organisations into crisis mode and a massive crisis management process was initiated. When something like this takes place, it is important to act and work carefully to prevent a crisis event escalating into a full-blown crisis; as prevention and preparedness can contain this escalation.

A Stockholm based embassy will take part in this case study. The reason for choosing an embassy is because it highlights some unique aspects. An embassy is a foreign government on foreign soil and they generally follow the rules and regulations that apply in their home country. In the event of a crisis being declared, the embassy must first contact their home department to inform them that there is a situation and receive guidance regarding the next steps that must be taken. Once a go ahead has been received, they can then contact the Swedish authorities to find out the seriousness of the crisis and if this could lead to a negative impact on their home country. There is a difference between how an embassy and a Swedish organisation based in Sweden during a crisis would have to handle their external communication. The Swedish organisations would only need to communicate with the Swedish authorities, whereas an embassy must communicate with the two governments. It is also possible that the two countries can have different ways of handling things due to cultural differences. Therefore, it is important that the day to day communication between the embassy and the Swedish authorities including government departments is structured and that relevant contacts have been established so that there will not occur misunderstandings if there is a need for collaboration during a crisis.

The embassy in this case study has approximately 50 employees. These are divided up into six different departments; political department, management department, consular department, tourism department, defence department and commercial department. The employees at the embassy have different day to day assignments, but once a crisis arises they are divided into six different crisis teams who are all dealing with different areas of the crisis. As we are not able to disclose the names of these teams we have called them Team 1, Team 2, Team 3, Team 4, Team 5 and Team 6.

Each team has a team leader and the rest of the people participating are team members.

Team 1 has the responsibility of contacting the Swedish authorities and creating the travel advice for the embassy website. Team 2 is responsible for all media reporting. Team 3 have an important task supporting the nationals of the home country who are permanently living in Sweden. Team 4 have the responsibility of assisting the crisis leader to gather information and create the “official truth”. Team 5 is there to take care of the employees in the embassy and to account for all staff and their families. Lastly, Team 6 deal with security and logistics for the embassy.

Once the crisis has been declared all teams have to work through a crisis management plan. This is a document that includes checklists for each team stating the different tasks that must be completed. The plan is available for all types of crisis however sometimes all the tasks are not always applicable. This depends on the size, seriousness and type of the crisis event. During the terrorist attack on Drottninggatan, the teams needed to assess what tasks were necessary to be actioned. These included the following: How they should report back with information to their home country in a factual and timely manner. This decision was taken by the crisis leader and is called the “battle rhythm”. How often a situation report “sitrep” was to be created and sent back. This report is information that is compiled by one of the teams and gives regular updates regarding the status of the situation at that particular time. The situation report is also important for the all the teams as they too need to be aware of the latest updates. Sometimes rumours can circulate during a crisis and the information in the sitrep is the “official truth”. Another important assignment the teams have to complete during the crisis is the travel advice. This means that the employees have to update the embassy website with the latest information regarding the situation in Sweden and if it is safe for people to travel to the country. The embassy website could also provide information that the public should follow, regarding the recommendations posted by the local governments on their different communication channels such as television, radio, newspapers and social media. Once the travel advice has been completed it is shared on the embassies different social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook. This is so that the information can reach as many people as possible and create awareness.

This study aims to show how an embassy responded to the terrorist attack. It does so through investigating three factors; the embassy’s crisis management plan and its implementation, the internal communication amongst staff, and how they were affected by stress. Such a case study is of particular interest as academia to a large extent has not provided qualitative research on existing theories. Moreover, research is abundant in the psychology sector, but does not consider aspects of media- and communication.

This gap in research is important to fill as the internal communication and crisis management is crucial for every crisis. Furthermore, if stress affects these two factors within an organisation, knowledge is needed on how to deal with this type of situation. These areas go hand in hand as if one aspect does not work as it should, it is difficult for an organisation to work through a crisis without it affecting the organisation in a significant way.

## 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how an embassy can implement a crisis management plan and have a functioning internal communication during a crisis. Furthermore, the study will examine if stress played a role during the event as well as how the embassy prepared their employees to handle the different aspects of the crisis. This will be an attempt to partially fill a research gap within the different areas that have already been examined separately but could be considered to be combined with each other.

## 1.2 Research questions

1. How did the embassy prepare their employees for a crisis?
2. How did the employees experience the implementation of the crisis management plan?
3. Did the employees in this case study experience a functioning internal communication during the crisis?
4. Did the employees experience stress as a factor that affected the internal communication?

## 1.3 Background and definitions

A crisis is an event that can arise in any organisation and can vary in size. It can affect just a few employees or the whole of the organisation. In order to understand the context of the thesis and to make the topic researchable, it needs to be linked to organisational theory and crisis management. A crisis can be understood in many different ways, and is also defined very differently according to academia. Coombs (2014) identifies three types of crises; crisis management, disaster, and organisational crisis. With crisis management Coombs (2014) defines it as: an organisation should have components constructed prior to a crisis as these can lead to less damage for an organisation once a crisis arises. These can protect the different stakeholders and the organisation from harm. Disaster crisis is when a crisis can affect an organisation gravely, disrupting routines therefore making it inevitable that an organisation has to take new actions in order to handle the situation. Organisational crisis is when a crisis can affect the stakeholders relating to health, safety, environmental, and economic issue, and can seriously impact an organisation's performance and generate negative outcomes (Coombs, 2014).

At the beginning of a crisis it is challenging to know what the motive of the attack could be. Boin, Stern & Sundelius (2016) discuss that a crisis can be conflicts, man-made accidents and natural disasters. Pearson & Clair (1998) discuss an array of different organisational crises, which is also the subject of this thesis. Examples of this are terrorist attacks, natural disasters that destroy corporate products or service headquarters and hostile takeovers. The definition of an organisational crisis is according to Pearson & Clair (1998) “a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organisation and is characterised by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly” (Pearson & Clair

1998. p.3). Nowadays, terrorism is an aspect that must be taken into consideration when talking about crisis (Boin et al, 2016). Therefore, this thesis focuses on the organisational crisis within the embassy as a consequence of the terrorist attack, where the embassy had to act internally even though it was an external crisis.

Crisis management is an essential aspect of an organisation. When it comes to crisis management it is important to act and work carefully to prevent a crisis event escalating into a full-blown crisis. A crisis can vary but it is important to always have a crisis management plan in place. Together with the four factors, prevention, preparation, response and revision it can help to reduce the negative aspects of a crisis that will not only affect the stakeholders, but also the whole organisation (Coombs, 2014). An organisation must be prepared for what a crisis can bring and Pearson & Clair's (1998) definition of an organisational crisis highlights the importance of preparedness. Even though a crisis does not happen every day, it is crucial that once it does, the organisation has a plan in place and its employees know what actions need to be taken in order to minimise the damages that can be caused by a crisis. Therefore, crisis management is far more than a task that is handled during a crisis. It must be in place in an organisation during the day to day work.

Another pivotal factor relating to organisational crises is the internal communication, which is the exchange of information between employees within the organisation (Verčič, A. T., Verčič, D., & Sriramesh, 2012), and a significant factor in the day to day operation of an organisation. There are various types of communication channels, for example face-to-face communication and email, that can be used in an organisation (Men, 2014). Other internal communication channel options will be discussed in chapter 2. Noteworthy is also that an organisation's work is affected by the degree to which colleagues not only share goals and objectives (Whitworth, 2006) but also emotions.

Emotions affect crisis response and management, one being stress. During a crisis there can be pressure put on the employees, and this situation is something that can affect how the employees react in different ways to stress. During a stressful situation there can be tasks that have to be done that can be difficult for the employees to handle (Erikson, 2014). An employee who suffers from psychological stress can feel certain emotions such as anxiety, guilt or shame (Janis & Mann, 1977).

## 1.4 Limitations

This thesis will focus on how one embassy handled the terrorist attack in Stockholm. The reason for only choosing the perspective of one embassy is because we want to see how one organisation handled a crisis, therefore it was not necessary to contact other organisations. When it comes to limitations to our study there are questions that can be asked regarding certain sources. When searching for literature regarding the area of stress it was challenging to find suitable information which was up to date and included the media-and communication aspect. Therefore, the sources found are from 1977 and 1998 also providing the question of why no more recent sources could be found.

When conducting the study, it focused mostly on how it was to actually work with the crisis and therefore the phase post-crisis is an aspect that will not be discussed in full in this thesis. The reason for this is firstly the time aspect as there was limited amount of time for this thesis but also, we wanted to add more focus to the preparedness prior to and during a crisis. This is an aspect that can be brought up in future research.

As mentioned, we only conducted a study at one embassy looking at only one type of crisis. This is because there has not been a major crisis prior to this attack. We also realised during the interviews that the interviewees already had difficulty remembering what had happened seven months ago. Therefore, it would not have been an option to go back further in time to find another similar crisis. We could have interviewed another organisation regarding the same crisis and compared the results, however due to lack of time this was not possible, but this could be a subject for future research.

## 1.5 The outline of the thesis

This thesis has been divided into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the thesis where our aim is to give a clear background to our research problem and the case study that will be discussed. The second chapter will examine the different theories and previous research that will help us answer the purpose of the thesis. The third chapter will present the method that has been used for this case study and will also discuss the validity and reliability of the method. In chapter four we will present the results from the interviews. Chapter five, the result from chapter four will be discussed and analysed. This will lead to chapter six where the conclusion of the thesis will be written and our recommendations for future research within this field will be presented. The final chapter seven will discuss the implications for society and work life and give recommendations to the embassy.

## 2. Theoretical background

This chapter will highlight the different theories and previous research that can be found in crisis management and organisational theory. It will bring up the different stages of a crisis, how an organisation can prepare for a crisis, what aspects crisis management should take into consideration and how an organisation can communicate in the best way: Finally, how a person can be affected emotionally and what stress may do to a person put in stressful situation.

Now these theories and previous research are not combined and presented separately. However, the idea is that they all are interlinked with each other in this study. If one theory does not function during a crisis it can lead to the other theories being affected. Below the theories and previous research will be listed.

### 2.1 Three-stage model

To describe the different stages of a crisis Coombs (2014), discusses a three-stage model. This model is also supported by the scholars Frandsen & Johansen (2016), Heide & Simonsson (2014), Johansen, Aggerholm, & Frandsen (2012) and Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer (1998). The stages that will be explained give an understanding to what the different steps of a crisis entail, and why they are important for an organisation when it comes to a crisis. The three-stage model is one way to see how an organisation can work through a crisis. It has been chosen due to the fact that Coombs (2014) is one of the scholars that talks a great deal of how a crisis is divided into different stages. The three-stage model is relevant for this study because firstly the interview manual is built after the model, where the questions following the three stages, and secondly, that we as researchers have used this model throughout the whole thesis.

#### 2.1.1 Pre-crisis

The prime focus of the pre-crisis stage is to prevent and to prepare (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). In this stage, there are three different subcategories. These are signal detection, prevention and crisis preparation. The signal detection is when the organisation searches the environment to see if there are any threats that can contribute to a crisis arising and collect any warnings signs. The information they gather can then be analysed to determine if the threat of a crisis is real or not. The ambition is to prevent a crisis from happening and keep the crisis from occurring (Coombs, 2014). However, if a crisis should happen the organisation must make sure they are prepared for the event.

During the preparation, the organisation should gather its resources (Coombs, 2014). To assist with the crisis preparation, the employees can share their own expertise gained whilst working within the organisation (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). A crisis team should be established to work with the issues, and a plan should be put in

place (Johansen et al., 2012). A crisis team is a group that has the appropriate resources and expertise when it comes to a crisis. These individuals have separate meetings to discuss what they will do if a crisis should occur. The members should also be trained to cope under stressful situations that will probably happen during a crisis (Seeger et al., 1998). One aspect that is important during the crisis preparation is to have a crisis management plan in place. This plan can have different elements that help the organisation during a crisis. The elements of this type of plan can be: Confidentiality statement, rehearsal dates, introduction, acknowledgement, crisis management team (CMT) contact list, incident report form, stakeholder contact worksheet, property information, technical jargon warning, crisis control central designation (Coombs, 2014, p.92). With this form to follow and using these points, it can help to organise the ongoing situation (Coombs, 2014). The next stage of the three-stage model is the crisis event.

### **2.1.2 Crisis event**

The crisis event stage marks the beginning of a crisis. The stakeholders decide when a crisis is to be declared to the organisation. It is a critical moment where the managers must make sure to take the correct actions. This stage is divided into two sub-categories, crisis recognition and crisis containment (Coombs, 2014). The prime focus of this stage is to handle the crisis and to make sense of it (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011) and the communication that must work, especially for the internal stakeholders. The crisis managers must process the information they have gathered about the situation and try to contain the crisis as much as possible (Coombs, 2014). The managers must inform the employees of what is going on within the organisation (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). This is the stage where the internal crisis communication is crucial. Without the information, the employees can neither support the organisation nor act as ambassadors (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). Once the crisis event is over it will lead to the next stage which is post-crisis. This stage will be useful when it comes to see who declared the crisis and how the internal communication worked during the crisis event and to see if there was enough information passed on by and between the internal stakeholders.

### **2.1.3 Post-crisis**

When the crisis is over the organisation should carry out a damage control assessment. The prime focus of this stage is to learn and to change (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). The crisis managers should evaluate how performance was during the event, and if they followed the guidelines that had been set out during the pre-crisis stage (Coombs, 2014). The employees must be able to talk to someone about the events that have taken place and the crisis managers should take everything into consideration in case there should be another crisis (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). This is the period when the organisation and its employees have the time to recover and heal from the crisis event (Seeger et al., 1998). To see how the organisation handles the aftermath of the crisis is important but more importantly is to see how the organisation handle their internal stakeholders after a crisis.

When an organisation has gained the knowledge of the different stages that play key roles during a crisis they can commence with the crisis preparation. Therefore, the next section will discuss how an organisation can be prepared in the best way and give examples of different types of training and what the new technology can do to help.

## 2.2 Crisis preparation

After a variety of attacks around the world, changes have taken place with the different routines for crisis preparedness. The most crucial and important phase is the preparation. Without this the organisation lacks a great amount of knowledge (Coombs, 2014). Therefore, preparation before a crisis is imperative for an organisation in order for them to be ready to act as soon as a crisis arises. Research shows that training can be an efficient way of improving changes in the organisation. It is the key for effective crisis preparation (Carrel, 2000). According to Carrel there were questions asked if it is possible to be prepared for all the challenges that an organisation can face, and if training and preparation has any value to the employees? The answers to these questions are both yes and no (Carrel, 2000). This is relevant for the present crisis preparation in society, because it is important to show that the “yes” saying side has increased and it is nowadays more important to have crisis preparation than Carrel (2000) implied. Throughout the years there have been developments for how an organisation can prepare their employees for a crisis event. One new idea is a game based simulation, this is a system that will help develop both better crisis management and crisis communication. The technique has been around for a few years and there is great potential for it to expand (Braun, Ranglund, Kjøning, Holen, Vold, Venemyr & Bakken, 2016). Why crisis training is positive for an organisation, is because it helps prepare the mindset of the employees to the better. They are prepared to cope with new possibilities and provide structure that will help them to handle the different tasks that are handed to them (Carrel, 2000). If this is true, then this is an aspect to consider further when it comes to the research and see how the preparation might affect the employees to the better. There are however, some people that are against crisis training. The reason for this is according to Carrel (2000) that if you do train for a crisis you might think that you are more prepared than you are and because of these mistakes can be made. The employees do not always want to be a part of the training, and that could depend on the fact that they are afraid to show leaders that they do not have all the knowledge they should have (Carrel, 2000). Coombs (2014) on the other hand thinks that crisis preparation is important and useful for the employees within an organisation.

According to Coombs (2014) there are six steps that should be involved in the crisis preparation. (1) Diagnosing vulnerabilities, the organisation need to use the combination of likelihood of occurrence and severity of damage and this starts by listing all possible crisis that can affect the organisation. (2) Assessing crisis types, make a list of the crisis and be aware that different crisis can have use of different crisis team members. (3) Selecting and training a crisis management team, a team or a person needs to possess the necessary knowledge for the upcoming tasks, upcoming crisis. Training practices and review of the crisis

management plan are a few tasks in training. (4) Selecting and training a spokesperson is an important part of crisis preparation since the spokesperson is the voice of the organisation and therefore an unskilled one can exacerbate the situation. (5) Developing a crisis management plan needs to contain the information that is needed to handle a crisis. (6) Reviewing the crisis communicating system and to make sure that the communication system is prepared to meet the needs of the crisis management plan (Coombs, 2014).

As a consequence of the crisis preparations, an organisation can determine how their resources should be allocated to the internal stakeholders once a crisis arises. The stakeholders within an organisation have an important role to play, as without them, it would not be possible to have a functioning internal communication. By defining the internal stakeholders, it will become easier during a crisis to know who to communicate with. Therefore, the next sections will address the concepts, internal stakeholder and internal communication channels in order to explain their vital roles and tasks within an organisation during a crisis. Because internal stakeholders have an important role to play during a crisis including their communication, this aspect should be thoroughly examined, as how they communicate is a pivotal aspect within an organisation.

## 2.3 Communication within the organisation

The area of internal communication is an issue that can always be improved and as according to Welch & Jackson (2007) there is limited research conducted regarding this topic. The research that has been collected does not specify how the employees should communicate with each other when a major crisis has been declared and if their emotions play a role in the way that the correct information is communicated to all the employees during the situation. By using the relevant communication channels, the employees will be informed about the ongoing situation. Furthermore, if the internal communication is handled correctly it will help to win the trust and respect of the employees which can benefit the organisation during a crisis (Dolphin, 2005).

Internal communication is divided into three sections; hierarchical communication, mass media communication and social networks. These sections are all of value in order for the communication to work without any problems. In hierarchical communication the chief executive officers, vice president and directors are important so that the communication process works. Their role is enabling the information to travel down hierarchical structure to reach all the employees within the organisation (Whitworth, 2006). To spread the information within the organisation the second section, mass media communication will help. Within this section newsletters, email, videos and blogs are used and they are important for the internal communication (Whitworth, 2006). The evolution around media and how we communicate has improved during the past years and changed how the internal stakeholders can now use the different communication channels. The last section is social media which includes the communication channels such as Facebook and LinkedIn. (Whitworth, 2006) It is important that these different sections work and co-exist together and help the internal

stakeholders to communicate with each other without any issues. The new technology also supports a faster way of communicating within the organisation. To see if the organisation has a hierarchical communication process is part of seeing how their internal communication works. Since it is important that all employees know what is going on they need that the internal communication ladder works in an effective way.

During a situation that can arise from a crisis it is important that the employees are informed about what is going on, as when people are in possession of information they can become calmer as uncertainty can have a negative effect. Once the information has reached the employees they can feel safer and can continue working toward their goal (Engquist, 2013). According to Engqvist (2013), he defines safety as having knowledge and control of a situation because without it the employees can be affected with anger and fear (Engquist, 2013 p.39). In order for the employees to be well informed within an organisation, it is necessary to know who the internal stakeholders are so that they can have a functioning internal communication.

### **2.3.1 Internal Stakeholders**

According to Coombs “A stakeholder is a person or group that is affected by or can affect an organisation” (Coombs, 2014, p.3). It is the stakeholders who decide when a crisis arises within an organisation, which makes them an important part of an organisation (Coombs, 2014). There are both external and internal stakeholders. The internal stakeholders are not just the group called employees, they are divided up depending on the level of authority they possess within the organisation. The levels can be divided into line managers, team members and other internal groups (Welch & Jackson, 2007). This is relevant since there is knowledge beforehand that the organisation that is going to be researched have their internal stakeholders divided into different levels and that they have different tasks during a crisis. Because of these levels it depends when the different groups will receive information about what is happening within the organisation, for example during a crisis (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

A stakeholder within an organisation should be a part of the process when it comes to the prevention part of crisis management (Coombs, 2014). To achieve this, the stakeholders need to be constantly involved and updated with the latest information they need for the different tasks they must carry out but also need to be confident within their role (Coombs, 2014). Tasks that are most common for stakeholders are evacuation and taking shelter (Coombs, 2014). They need to have a feeling that they can act without any issues also the knowledge of the structure regarding the communication channels that can be used.

### 2.3.2 Internal communication channels

Internal communication is a massive factor in the day to day operation within an organisation. If an organisation does not have appropriate internal communication channels it can lead to the organisation not functioning in the most optimal way.

Research shows that internal communication is the specialisation in communication management. This is the fastest growing and has evolved into a specialist domain itself (Verčič, A. T., et al, 2012). Therefore, all organisations need to find an approach that works for them when it comes to communicating with their employees. This is relevant since there is a need for excellent communication during a crisis, and therefore important to see if an organisation succeeds in finding an approach that works for them and the whole organisation. Being a part of a company, the employees do not need to know everything, but they need to know something (Whitworth, 2006). With that said, internal communication is an important factor for all the employees. As a communicator it is your desire that everyone is aware of everything that is taking place within the organisation. It is an admirable goal for a staff member to know everything, but in a larger organisation this is unrealistic (Whitworth, 2006).

Within an organisation today there is a lot of information that is distributed internally. It is important to spread the same message on all the different communications channels an organisation utilises (Crescenzo, 2011). Today there are various types of communication channels that are used by organisations. The traditional ones are for example, newsletters, magazines, posters, phone calls, voice mail and face-to-face communication. With the new generation technology, it opens up a two-way communication within the organisation (Crescenzo, 2011), by using the channels email, intranet, blogs, instant message and internal social networking sites (Men, 2014). These new channels that have been introduced by the latest technology enhance new ways for the employees to communicate within the organisation (Crescenzo, 2011). Therefore, it is important to see if an organisation can succeed in distributing the same messages on all channels or if they change and adapt the message depending on the channel. This new technology does not build up the same kind of trust and relationships as many of the methods used earlier, however it can bring people closer together within the organisation (Men, 2014). Email is appreciated by the employees, as it is a tool that is simple to use when wanting to contact a co-worker. However, the disadvantage with this channel is that sometimes information can lack detail leading to a misinterpretation of the message (Men, 2014). Johansen, Aggerholm & Frandsen (2012), discuss that the most important way to communicate an urgent message is the traditional way of face-to-face meetings (Johansen et al., 2012). This approach secures that the correct information is passed on and that managers can then see the reaction to the message straight away. By using this strategy, it builds up a better trust and relationship between the managers and the employees (Men, 2014).

In order to accomplish a high level of communication it is important to have a working communication plan that assists employees, helping them to gain knowledge of both which channels to use and how to use them. This will be beneficial for effective internal communication in the day to day work but also how the employees should act during a crisis. When having the appropriate channels of communication in place, they will help a crisis situation as the employees are well informed of what channels they can use and how to use them. If they are not aware, it can cause confusion and incorrect messages can be sent out and passed on. To make sure the correct channels are used, it is up to the crisis management team to decide prior to a crisis on how the employees should act. It should be stated in the crisis management plan, exactly what kind of channels for communication should be used during a crisis in order to help the employees. During our research there will be an opportunity to look at the crisis management plan and therefore have a good idea of what kind of communication channels the selected organisation used during the crisis event.

## 2.4 Crisis management

This is a very important role within an organisation as it will help guide the organisation in the correct way once a crisis arises. The crisis management team can contribute with their own knowledge and expertise. When preparing for a crisis it is essential for an organisation to have a crisis management team in place. The members of a crisis management team are the employees within an organisation that can share their different knowledge and experience (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer 2003). The crisis management team are the ones who set out the communication structure for a possible crisis.

To accomplish a high level of communication it is important to have a working communication plan that assists employees, helping them to gain knowledge of both which channels to use and how to use them. This will be beneficial for effective internal communication in the day to day work but also how the employees should act during a crisis. The crisis management plan is a document that has been created before a crisis has occurred. The document is there to assist the organisation and providing guidelines of what actions need to be taken throughout a crisis. This plan will help the organisation to stay on track. If the organisation has a plan to follow during a crisis this will benefit the organisation by enabling it to perform to a higher standard during a crisis than if it were without (Coombs, 2014). The crisis management plan should be clearly written, so the employees have something to fall back on during the crisis. This structure can help them handle the stress that may occur. The communication plan is the heart of the communication. The plan is a written statement of what kind of actions an organisation should take to accomplish the best way of conveying information within the organisation (Potter, 2006). During the years, plans have been altered to fit the chosen organisation and help the employees towards effective communication. This research is important as the embassy has a crisis management plan. With help from the research mentioned above there is a possibility to see if the crisis management plan contributes with the help and knowledge that the organisations employees

need during the crisis and therefore take the action the scholars above discuss. Since a crisis has its own life it needs to follow certain steps to function.

A crisis has a life cycle, this means that the crisis management plan needs to follow the three different stages, pre-crisis, crisis event and post crisis. The management plan must be seen as an ongoing process in the organisation, and therefore be included in the everyday life of the organisation (Coombs, 2014). The employees can be affected if the crisis management plan is missing important information during a crisis. The employees can then become stressed and this can affect how they will handle the event.

## 2.5 Stress

An area that is lacking research is personal emotional stress once a crisis arises. It has not been examined how an individual can feel and react to a crisis (Pearson & Clair, 1998).

According to Pearson and Clair (1998) it is important to sometimes merge different disciplines when researching crisis management. They can be psychological, social-political, and technological-structural issues (Pearson & Clair, 1998). The earlier research has not paid sufficient attention to the individual's experience of an organisational crisis when it happens. Therefore, Pearson and Clair have focused their research on the trauma an employee can experience during a crisis event (Pearson and Clair, 1998). Since there is a lack of research regarding stress it is important for this study to see how the individuals in an organisation react to a stressful situation.

When a crisis occurs, there are different ways for an employee to cope with the stress and pressures they are facing. According to Pearson & Clair (1998) there are three different assumptions regarding cognitive approaches during a crisis situation. The first is that a crisis is uncertain and complex which could lead to the interest of the employees within an organisation working against each other. The second is that the employees have difficulty processing the information that is given during a crisis and the third is that the crisis can become out of control because the management team have not acted correctly when it comes to their decision making (Pearson & Clair, 1998). It is important to see if the employees in our study had difficulties in processing the information that was given to them, if they felt that the management made the right decisions and if they felt comfortable in their role as an employee. What these three different stages mean is that there are certain things that happen during a crisis that will affect the emotional state for its employees. When a crisis does happen, it is important for the employees to make sense of the situation. The more Sensemaking that is applied to the crisis the less damage it can do to an organisation (Weick, 1988). One aspect that is important during a crisis is the employee's mental health and if this is not taken into consideration it can lead to a great disaster during a crisis, therefore it is important for an organisation to have crisis preparation (Pearson & Clair, 1998).

When it comes to crisis effect on the individual employee there is a lack of previous research, but to find information on the subject of how the individual person is affected there is trauma related research that can be of help (Pearson & Clair, 1998). As mentioned above, cognitive approaches are a part of how the individual reacts during a crisis. According to Erikson (2014) stress is more a feeling we tend to discuss when it comes to periods in time when we have too much to do, and there is not enough time to perform the task. All people handle and react to stress in different ways, one individual can experience stress in completely the opposite way to a co-worker (Erikson, 2014). Therefore, it will be interesting and useful research to see how the different individuals reacted to the attack on Drottninggatan and if it affected their crisis management. The pressure during a situation is also something that can affect how the employees react in different ways to stress. During a stressful situation there can be tasks that have to be carried out that can be difficult for the employees to handle. When an employee is starting to feel that there is too much to contend with, they can become paralyzed by the situation and overwhelmed. This could eventually lead to the person having difficulty in sleeping and even experiencing some physical pain (Erikson, 2014). For a stressful situation it is good to know what type of behavioural profile the employees have as it can help managers to adjust the situation and allocate tasks that are appropriate for the different personalities. This will lead to an improvement in the productivity of a group as the members are aware of exactly how much stress they can handle during a situation (Erikson, 2014).

## 2.6 What is missing?

After presenting the theory and previous research, we can notice that these are not interlinked. When searching for the theories for this thesis all the academia was presented separately. However, what we want to do with this study is to indicate that these theories can actually be combined and therefore show that they do have common elements. An example of this being that if there is one aspect of the internal communication theory that does not work in an organisation it could potentially affect parts of the crisis management plan.

The field of internal communication has not been explored thoroughly enough when it comes to handling a crisis, therefore all angles are important to look at as they are all of material value when handling a crisis. The research today focuses to a great extent on the external communication even though the internal communication is just as important. If the internal stakeholders are not well informed about the situation it can cause problems with how the information is distributed within an organisation. Another field is stress, this is something that an employee can suffer from as a crisis can become a stressful situation. If the crisis management plan does not consider that aspect, it can prevent many employees within an organisation taking part in crisis management. There is research conducted on trauma, however this is not an aspect that we want to consider in this thesis as none of the employees interviewed were exposed to a traumatic experience. But as a crisis can be stressful there are many aspects that need to be taken into consideration even during a shorter period of time therefore the area of stress is an aspect that should be examined more thoroughly.

This thesis has collated the pivotal aspects of a crisis and combined all the different theories and previous research that has been conducted. This will give a wider view of the important aspects that an organisation should take into consideration during a crisis especially the crisis management and how it is affected by the internal communication.

### **3. Method**

This following chapter will introduce the method that has been used to conduct the study. Together with population and sample methodology and the critique of the method, the chapter will provide a deeper understanding of the sections needed when using this method. Furthermore, a discussion on validity and reliability will be carried out.

#### **3.1 Choice of method**

The study is based on qualitative analysis interviews. The reason for using this method is because personal interviews give the opportunity to obtain a deeper understanding of how people think and act. It will also provide a clear picture of how the individual person interprets the situation (Ekström & Larsson, 2010). A total of ten interviews were conducted and they have been divided between three team members, two deputy team leaders, four team leaders and one crisis leader.

The aim of this study is to examine how an organisation can implement a crisis management plan and have a functioning internal communication during a crisis. Furthermore, the study will examine if stress played a role during the event as well as how the embassy prepared their employees to handle the different aspects of the crisis. Therefore, a qualitative analysis interview is an appropriate method as it gives a clearer view and can be on a more personal level. The answers that the interviewees give can lead to a wider picture of the situation and more in-depth answers when it comes to finding out if the stress had any impact on the internal communication and the crisis management plan.

The interviewees are usually seen as respondents rather than informants as they give their own view and their perceptions regarding the subject (Ekström & Larsson, 2010). The terrorist attack in Stockholm will be chosen as a case for this study to see how the organisation acted and felt during this event. According to Larsson and Ekström a case study will help to obtain the answers regarding how and why the organisation acted as they did (Ekström & Larsson, 2010).

#### **3.2 Critique against interview as a method**

The criticism against qualitative analysis interview as a method is that it took longer than anticipated to transcribe the material. Even though we were prepared for this to be the case, it felt that the timescale for writing this thesis was dependent upon the interviews. Because the writing process was in its turn dependent on the transcribed material from the interviews, it was difficult to continue before all the interviews were completed. One part of the process is linked to the other and in this case, it is this material that is needed in order to begin analysing. Another criticism is that the interviewees did not recall as much information from the day in question as expected and that a few of the interviewees answered the questions very briefly even

though supplementary questions were added during the interview. Because of this, some of the questions became leading to obtain a broader answer.

There is a great risk when the interviewer needs to ask leading questions to the respondent when performing an interview and this is also criticism against research interviews. However, this should not be a problem, because leading questions can be used to measure the reliability of the answers from the person who is being interviewed. To use a question that is leading can help to minimize the risk that the person who is interviewed misunderstands the question, and therefore enhances the reliability (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014).

### 3.3 Population and sample

The population for this study is an embassy situated in Stockholm and the sample is the employees. There are about 50 employees at the embassy but due to time aspects it was not possible to interview all the employees that were working during the day of the terrorist attack. Therefore, a sample was chosen to interview the team leaders of each team and one of the team members per team. Once the interviews were scheduled it was clear that not all team leaders were available on the interview day. Therefore, there are more team members than team leaders and the population that was planned at the beginning of the study would not be the same once the interviews were conducted.

A strategic selection was chosen from the population (Ekström & Larsson, 2010). The reason for this is that the study required employees who were involved during the day of the crisis, working within different teams and in different positions. The result was, one crisis leader, four team leaders, two deputy team leaders and three team members who were all involved in some way or another in the crisis on Drottninggatan.

We have used one of the embassies in Stockholm as a case in this thesis, but we also think that this study could be available to apply to other organisations in Sweden.

**Tabell 3.3.1 - Information about the informants**

Team	Role during a crisis	Gender	Age	Years working at embassy	Interview time
Team 3	Team member	Woman	47	17 years	32 min
Team 4	Team member	Woman	31	3 years	31 min
Team 4	Team member	Man	36	1 year	44 min
Team 5	Deputy team leader	Woman	55	30 years	32 min
Team 1	Deputy team leader	Man	29	3 ½ years	18 min
Team 3	Team leader	Woman	45	19 years	40 min
Team 5	Team leader	Woman	58	16 years	37 min
Team 1	Team leader	Woman	48	9½ years	39 min
Team 2	Team leader	Man	40	3 ½ years	18 min
Not part of a team	Crisis leader	Man	38	3 ½ years	41 min

### 3.4 Practical approach

Prior to the study, an embassy in Stockholm was approached via a personal contact. The contact person was positive to the study and helped establish the connection with the rest of the employees.

After the contact person received a go ahead from the embassy and the employees that would be interviewed, an email was sent out explaining the reasons why the interviews would be conducted. The appointments were then booked for the two days that would be spent interviewing.

All our interviews were going to be face to face with the respondents. We had two days in Stockholm where we carried out all ten interviews. Mobile phone recordings were made of each interview. The reason for this was because we wanted to listen to the complete interview and not miss out any details once the transcription was about to start. Another reason for recording the interviews is so the interviewee felt that it was a conversation and that the interview would run more smoothly rather than stopping in order to document the answers. Before the interview commenced the interviewee was informed that this study would be anonymous regarding name of both those being interviewed and the embassy we are studying. More regarding the ethics of the interviews can be found under the section ethics.

### 3.5 Pilot interview

The first interview guide that was created for the pilot interview does not have the same content as the one used during the following interviews. The reason for this is that it was clear during the pilot interview that the interview guide was lacking themes such as stress and emotions during a crisis, and as this is an important theme to answer one of our research questions for this thesis, the interview guide was rewritten.

The pilot interview was conducted over Facebook messenger together with audio and webcam. It became clear that by using this method for interviewing we did not achieve the personal contact that we had hoped for, therefore it was decided that the following interviews would be conducted as face-to-face interviews. The pilot interview did not only prepare us for the coming interviews when it came to see which questions were successful or not, but was also helpful to make sure that our recordings were of a good quality. This is something Ekström and Larsson (2010) point out is extremely important during an interview.

### 3.6 Operationalisation

An interview guide was established prior to the interviews. When interviewing all the ten participants the same guide was used but questions were changed to adjust the interview situation. The guide was created by using the three-stage model, pre-crisis, crisis event and post crisis that are discussed in the theoretical background chapter. When creating the questions for the guide the themes that are used are; crisis training, crisis

management, internal communication and emotions. With the three-stage as a model and the themes that are pervading throughout the guide there are different answers that could be given to all the questions and this would later on benefit the chapter of the analysis.

We will now discuss the main questions in the interview guide. A complete copy can be viewed in appendix 1.

### **3.6.1 Information**

The first section with questions will give an overview of the participants as the questions cover age, how many years they have worked at the embassy in Stockholm and in what team they were assigned to during the crisis on Drottninggatan. The reason for opening the interview with these questions is because we wanted to find out something about the background of the person who was being interviewed. Together with the number of years they have worked at the embassy and in what team they were assigned to, it would offer subsequent support to the analysis and discussion. Once these questions were asked we started to follow the guide with the first step pre-crisis.

### **3.6.2 Pre-crisis**

During the pre-crisis phase, crisis training is a major part of preparing for a crisis. Therefore, it was important to see what type of training the interviewees had been given prior to the attack.

#### **Have you received crisis training, how often have you received crisis training and what type of training have you received?**

With these questions we wanted to see if the interviewee had received any type of training as this was dependent on the follow-up question that was to be posed. All the interviewees had received some type of training and therefore we could continue to ask what kind of training it was and how often it had taken place. As we were not aware prior to the interviews what their training schedule was, it was important to have meticulous questions that could be answered in different ways depending on who was going to be interviewed.

#### **Had you seen the crisis management plan before the terror attack? How was the crisis management plan presented to you? Do you know where you can find it for a crisis situation?**

During the pre-phase a crisis management plan is crucial to have in place. With these questions we wanted to see if all the interviewees had knowledge of the crisis management plan before starting to ask questions about the different tasks that the plan entails.

#### **Do you have a plan of what type of communication channels should be used if a crisis happens?**

Communication, is a subject that is important during a crisis. We wanted to see if they have a communication plan if a crisis should become a reality and if everyone knew what it entailed.

### **3.6.3 Crisis event**

The questions during the crisis event will ask how their experience was during the event. This is important as the aim of the study is to see how they handled the internal communication and the crisis management plan during a crisis.

#### **What different communication channels did you use during the event? How was the communication speed?**

This question was a follow up to the previous question regarding the communication plan. As if they had a communication plan what then were the different channels they actually used? With the second question regarding the speed, it was to see if the channels they used worked, and that they received the information necessary at a steady pace during the event.

#### **Could you follow the crisis management plan? Do you have any examples from the crisis management plan that were handled in a positive way? Any examples that were handled badly?**

We wanted to see if they could follow the plan that is already in place and to see what the interviewees felt was positive and negative about it. There are always aspects that can be improved therefore it was a way of understanding the interviewees own thoughts about the plan.

#### **How did it feel to work with this crisis? Did you have time to make sense out of the situation to understand what was happening? Did you stop and think about your emotions during the crisis event?**

These questions helped us to see how the interviewees reacted to the crisis and what different emotions they experienced during the event. The first question is about how it felt to work with the crisis and we wanted to see what different answers we would get, and therefore the questions were open ones. This was in order to gain a deeper understanding of their emotions during the crisis event.

### **3.6.4 Post-crisis**

The final stage, post-crisis is the area with the least focus on in the thesis. But to obtain the complete picture we added in this section during the interviews.

#### **What have you brought with you from the terrorist attack event?**

With this question we wanted to see what thoughts they have after the attack. If there is anything in particular that they remember from the day of the incident.

### **Do you have anything you want to add?**

This is the last question that was put to the respondents before finishing the interview. The reason for asking this question is if the interviewee felt that he or she wants to add anything else to the subject that had been spoken about or if the respondent had thought of anything else relevant during the interview session (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014).

## **3.7 Generalising**

The study that has been conducted cannot generate general knowledge and results. The reason for this is that the study must be larger and include both more case studies and more organisations than just the one, as we have done for this thesis (Ekström & Larsson, 2010). However, the organisation that has been a part of this study has about 50 employees and a sample of ten interviews have been chosen. This has enabled us to obtain a wide spread within the organisation, receiving a generalising result within the embassy (Ekström & Larsson, 2010).

## **3.8 Validity**

When discussing validity, it means that the result measures what it intends to measure (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). One aspect that is important to take into consideration is that when creating the interview guide and asking the questions it can be difficult to be objective. When conducting the interviews, we can have certain expectations on what answers will be received due to the fact that the sections theories and previous research have already been created (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). Because of the time pressure we could not interview all the staff at the embassy. We decided to exclude the employees who were not at the embassy during the day of the attack because we felt that they would not contribute to the purpose of the thesis, and it would therefore not affect the result of the study.

## **3.9 Reliability**

The requirement that must be fulfilled to achieve a high reliability during an interview study is a sufficient number of interviews. This means that if more interviews should have been added to this study it would not have affected the outcome of the result, so called saturation (Ekström & Larsson, 2010). The reliability can however be affected due to the fact that the interviews have been divided between two people when transcribing the material. Because every person is different, the data can look different even though it is the same interview but transcribed by two people (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). However, because for this study it

was not important to examine the linguistics or if the interviewee had a particular tone of voice or body language the reliability is not affected by having two people transcribe the material (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). Another aspect that can affect the reliability is the time period since the attack (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). As it was eight months since the event had occurred a few of the interviewees had difficulty remembering the exact details of the day and what feelings they had experienced.

To enhance the reliability, all the interviews were led by the same person and the other person observed and added follow up questions if necessary. There was a gap between each interview, which gave time for discussion with each other and enabled reflection about the interview that had just been held (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014).

### 3.10 Ethics

When conducting this study there are different aspects to consider when it comes to ethics. There are four main claims that need to be respected when it comes to research. These are: information requirement, consent claim, the confidentiality and useful claim (Østbye, Knapskog, Helland, Larsen, 2003). Information requirement means that we have a responsibility to inform the people who will be interviewed about the purpose of the thesis and what role they will play in the study (Østbye et al, 2003). This was carried out prior to the interviews commencing. We informed each individual of why we had chosen this particular embassy and gave the managers example questions that could be asked regarding this subject. Because we informed the embassy of the purpose of the study they had the opportunity to decide if they wanted to be part of the study or not. By informing, we showed that we were aware of the importance of the consent claim necessary during research (Østbye et al, 2003). The confidentiality was something that we considered was an important aspect (Østbye et al, 2003). What confidentiality means is that the data regarding the interviewees that is collected will not be revealed (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). Because we have chosen an embassy it is important to keep the nationality of the embassy anonymous and also explain that the identity of the interviewees would not be released or published (Østbye et al, 2003). The last condition that we had to consider during our interviews was the useful claim. This claim states that all data that is collected could only be used for research purposes (Østbye et al, 2003). Once the interviews were being transcribed it was crucial to maintain the confidentiality of the interviewees and make sure that the transcribed material was accurate and was the same information as was given during the interview session (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014).

## 4. Result

This chapter will discuss the result of the interviews and will be divided into two sections, one for the team leaders of the embassy and one for the team members. The deputy team leaders are in this case team members, the reason being that on the day of the crisis they had the role of a team member as they were not located in the crisis centre together with the team leaders. This is to enable a comparison of the results if there should be a difference between team leaders and team members. Furthermore, in the analysis and discussion this will help establish if there is anything that distinguishes the two groups.

### 4.1 Enable safety on foreign soil

The embassy in this study is a foreign government operating on foreign soil. Therefore, it is crucial that all the different communication aspects are effective. If they are, this will benefit not only the embassy but also the Swedish government as there can be collaboration between them during their day to day routines and also during a crisis. As the embassy is an extended part of the home country, it is important that the embassy is involved in any type of crisis, in this case the attack on Drottninggatan. It is essential for them to find out if the event will have a negative impact on their own country and furthermore, the embassy is also there to support all the nationals who permanently live in Sweden if something should happen to them.

The news that a lorry had driven into a building in Stockholm on a Friday afternoon did not take long before it had reached the embassy. It was through an employee's family member that the information was received so quickly. The crisis leader took the decision after consulting the home department to go into crisis mode straight away and sent an all staff message through the embassies speaker system. Just after the message, all team leaders gathered in the crisis centre and started to discuss how to move forward with their tasks during this incident.

All teams had diverse tasks during the day of the crisis, having to communicate and receive information both from external and internal sources. The crisis leader of the embassy is the one who activated their crisis plan. [...] *“This wasn't serious enough for them to activate their crisis plan, but we told them we are activating our crisis plan locally [...]”* - (Crisis leader, man 38). This means that it is up to each post to activate their own crisis plan if needed. It does not necessarily mean that the home country does the same, because it would mean a whole different thing for the home capital compared to the local post. If the home capital would activate their crisis plan it would mean a grander version of crisis management and they would bring in more backup, in this case the armed forces. This attack on Drottninggatan was not serious enough for the home capital to activate their plan but they supported Stockholm during the time of the crisis. From the initial moment that the crisis was declared in Stockholm all of the teams were on top of their tasks and could start to communicate to the necessary stakeholders, both internally and externally.

During this crisis there were four teams who were active with the task of communicating to the different stakeholders. Because we are not able to specify the names of the different crisis teams we have named them: Team 1, Team 2, Team 3 and Team 4. The reason for only discussing these four teams and not the complete six teams is because team 5 were not involved in communicating with many different stakeholders during the day and we were not able to conduct interviews with team 6. However, Team 5 will be discussed later on in the result chapter.

During the crisis, Team 1 had the responsibility of contacting the Swedish ministry and Foreign ministry to find out if the attack had a political angle. Though this was not an attack with a political agenda, Team 1 also collected information about the situation in order to create the travel advice for the nationals of the home country who permanently live in Sweden but also the tourists who are visiting Sweden or thinking of travelling to Stockholm. Once the travel advice has been written it is sent to the home department to be approved. When it has been approved the latest version is uploaded on the official website for the home country by the home department and thereafter published on Facebook and Twitter by the local post. During the interview a respondent shared that Facebook is used to communicate to the nationals of the home country and therefore it is important to have the information there, while Twitter it also updated but it is more directed to businesses.

For Team 2 they had the task during the crisis to monitor different media channels and collect information regularly regarding the situation. They were also in contact with the home department to make sure that they had the correct press lines agreed and what information could be communicated if any media made contact with them. Team 2 did not have a great deal of contact with the Swedish media, but used it as a source of information. Another task they had to accomplish was to do was to make sure that their social media under control. With this it means that they had to check that there were no inappropriate posts present on their Facebook or Twitter account as this could have created an uncomfortable situation.

Team 3 had an important task during the crisis too. It was this team's responsibility to be in contact with the local authorities such as hospitals and the police to find out information if there were any people who had been injured in the attack. However, they did have issues with the Swedish authorities during that day as the relevant authorities would not release any information even though they were aware that a national was in fact missing. As one interviewee pointed out in the interview that it was very frustrating to not receive any answers despite repeatedly asking for updates.

Lastly, is Team 4. They have the responsibility to assist the crisis leader to gather information and create the “official truth”. By finding out information this team had to speak to the rest of the teams who were working during this day to find out what they knew. They were the ones who had to collect all the information that all the different teams had gathered and feed this information into the crisis hub where all information is collated. This hub is then linked to the decision makers in the home department.

The crisis leader was not part of a team but was responsible for all actions that were taken that day and had to deal with both internal and external communication. The tasks for the leader were to be in contact with the foreign ministry in the home capital and to be the decision maker in the crisis centre. Another task that the crisis leader had was to gather all employees within the embassy and hold a meeting to give updates.

The teams working with the communication have a wide range of tasks. There are many stakeholders both internal and external that are in need of the latest updated information. This can be with very demanding as the teams not only have to stay in contact with their home capital but also the Swedish government and authorities. To provide the latest information for these groups there are many departments involved and it is an important task to get it right.

In order for the above tasks to be completed successfully they are divided up between the different roles. These employees have distinct responsibilities and skills, and can in turn both be team leaders and team members. The next section will present the result from the team leaders.

## **4.2 Result from the interviews with team leaders**

The result from the team leader's interviews will be presented below. The result has been divided into three different sections and combines the answers from all the five interviews that were conducted.

### **4.2.1 Crisis preparation and experience**

Approximately six years ago the embassy had a different view regarding crisis preparation. Before, a crisis was solely a consular issue. This meant that only the consular department had the responsibility of taking care of a crisis should it arise. But this all changed and became a whole mission approach. When it changed the embassy had to start training the rest of the employees in crisis training and divided up all members of staff into different teams. There are 6 different teams who all have team leaders and team members. Now is it up to the consular department to prepare the rest of employees at the embassy. The person in charge of training the employees claims that it gets harder and harder to come up with new ways to prepare the employees for a crisis.

All the team leaders have different levels of crisis experience. The result from the interviews gives an overview that the team members who have worked in different parts of the world have experienced real-life crisis such as natural disasters, political crisis, terrorism and assassins. Whereas the employees who have only worked at this particular embassy have only their crisis training to fall back on. The crisis leader had received other types of training to prepare for the role of crisis leader prior moving to Stockholm. He could therefore bring his knowledge and prior experience to Stockholm and enhance their crisis training. [...] *“Before I came out to post*

*[...] just a part of my pre-posting training I did the crisis leadership course [...] focused on some of the hard skills that you need but also theory on how to put a crisis plan together, how to respond as an embassy “[...] - (Crisis leader, man 38)*

Each team leaders have a deputy who can step in as team leader if there is a necessity during a crisis. At the embassy crisis training is provided twice a year for the team leaders. The team leaders have extra training once a year as they need to receive more extensive training compared to the team members. Together with all the team leaders they have a table top exercise. With this it means that they sit around a table and discuss a crisis scenario. This can also be called a paper exercise. Once they have carried out this exercise, the idea is that the team leaders should pass on the information to their teams once the training session is completed. The team leaders are also involved in the mock-up training and this will be presented in the result section for the team members.

During the training opportunities the focus is more on a crisis and following the crisis management plan than the aspect of stress management. When asking the team leaders, the question if they have received training for stress the answers differ. Some of the interviewees say that you cannot be prepared for a crisis situation whereas some say that the training itself helps the employees to be prepared so that they know what tasks they have to do and not feel stressed regarding this. [...] *“The biggest stress is having several different responsibilities and what do you do if you need to be doing three tasks at the same time” [...] – (Team leader, man 40)*. As this man says during the interview is that what can be stressful is having too much to do during the day and this is agreed by Team leader – Woman 45. During the day she felt that she had too much to do and a number of different roles to play which led to her feeling very stressed by the situation. [...] *“It was very difficult for me, I felt I was not very good at delegating [...]– (Team leader, women 45)*. Most of the team leaders think that the aspect of stress management could be added into the crisis training, even though the feelings that can be experienced does not have anything to do with stress but just how to deal with having many things to do at the same time.

#### **4.2.2 Crisis managements plan and the internal communication**

The crisis management plan is a document that has originally been created for the embassy by their headquarters to have something to follow during a crisis. The document is however updated by the consular department and distributed to the rest of the employees within the embassy and lays the foundation for the crisis training. After the interviews, we received this document from the embassy. When analysing the content, we could then see how the plan was made up and what was set out in the different chapters.

The plan includes;

- Checklists for each team.
- Communication plan.
- Guidance on how to keep a log during a crisis.
- Key crisis telephone numbers.
- The names on all the crisis team members and who is in each of the teams.

- Kit list on what things they have at the embassy that can help during a crisis.
- Evacuation plan if this scenario occurs.
- Risk profile discusses different scenarios that could happen and list the risk if it could occur.
- Telephone numbers to other organisations in Sweden that can be good to contact during a crisis for example hospitals, police, hotels, airport.

All the team leaders had seen the crisis management plan prior to the attack. “Each team has to have a copy” – (Team leader, women 58) This is because it features in all the exercises and they all have received it from the consular department and have a copy printed out in case of a crisis. The crisis management plan is easy to follow as it is very straightforward regarding the different tasks that must be executed by each team. “The beauty of the plan is it starts from the moment when you know something has happened and it takes you through it” [...] – (Crisis leader, man 38). They only follow their own chapter during a crisis and therefore do not have knowledge of the other teams’ tasks.

A challenge for the consular department is how the plan can be presented to everyone. After trying different approaches such as PowerPoint presentations, films and workshops, they decided that the responsibility for informing all team members about where they can find the crisis management plan and the different tasks that each team are responsible for is that of the team leader. [...] “So what we have tried to do is put responsibility on the people that are team leaders” [...]– (Team leader, women 45) The crisis management plan also features as mentioned previously in all the exercises so that the employees are aware of what it entails. This approach seems to work well even though there are still a number of the employees who have not seen the plan or know where they can find it.

The team leaders have discussed the positive and negative aspects of the plan and they all agree that the crisis management plan is easy to follow, and all the teams knew what they were doing on the day of the actual crisis thereby could deliver a good result and that the situation report was factual and timely. One example that led to a positive result due to following the checklist was that the team responsible for accounting for all the employees and their families and finding out if they were safe and had not been victims in the attack. They could carry out this exercise very swiftly by both following the instructions on the plan and by being well prepared for this crisis because of preparation. “I remember looking around thinking we are really on top of this”– (Crisis leader, man 38).

There were however a number of negative aspects regarding the plan;

- The IT created a barrier for some of the employees as their computers did not work at the beginning of the crisis.

- All the teams had their own task list on the day from the crisis management plan. This meant that it was possible that one team could need to obtain information from another team during the crisis event, but as everyone had their own tasks to carry out this created a disturbance within the team as a whole.
- There was a lack of communication between some of the teams. Due to this some tasks were carried out by another team without notifying the actual person responsible for that particular task that it had been completed. This created confusion about which tasks had been finished or not.
- Some of the teams did not have enough people in their teams during the day as people were not at the embassy during the crisis. This meant that one team only had one person whereas another team had five or six members.
- Lack of communication with the team members who are situated in another room

Some of these negative aspects that the interviewees mention during their interviews, could be due to the lack of communication between the different teams during the crisis event. Therefore, it is interesting to see what type of communication channels the employees use during their day to day operations. The employees at the embassy use a variety of communication channels. They can be email, telephone, instant messenger, formal and informal meetings. During a crisis the teams all have their own way of communicating with each other and the most common methods of communication are through instant messenger, meetings, face to face, internal telephone lines, email, WhatsApp. Regarding WhatsApp this is a channel that had been introduced prior to the attack during an exercise where they decided that it was a good way to start communicating with each other. The team leaders felt that they all received the right amount of information from the crisis leader when sitting in the crisis centre and that the “battle rhythm” as it is referred to, was good once they had information to send out. It was however difficult to get the “official truth” of the situation because in the beginning of the crisis there were many rumours floating around.

The communication plan that is in the crisis management plan only specifies the external methods of communication. One of the interviewees said that during the last exercise it was agreed in advance that the team leaders should give updates every one or two hours to inform the rest of the team members of the “official truth”. They also advised staff to use messenger as it is quick and instant, so as not fill the email inbox during the day. [...] *“We have agreed that it makes sense to use messenger because it is quick, it is instant”* [...] – (Team leader, women 48). But this information is not documented in the crisis management plan. However, when asking another team leader if they knew what the communication plan was the interviewee did not know anything about a plan. One aspect that the crisis leader said could improve the communication with the team members is having more regular meetings where everyone is given the latest updates about the situation. During this crisis there was only one all staff meeting, and this was held at the end of the crisis [...] *“on reflection, I think we had not really thought about how to communicate with the people who were in the building, but not involved [...] this is one of the things we took away in the evaluation”* – (Crisis leader, man 38).

### 4.2.3 How was it to work with a crisis

When asking the interviewees who were team leaders of how it felt to work with the crisis there was a range of different answers that were received. *“Challenging and exciting”* - (Team leader - woman 58) *“It went so quickly I don’t really remember”*[..] - (Team leader - woman 45), [...] *“It is horrible but if a crisis is going to happen anyway it is good to know that you are doing things to help”* [...] (Team leader - man 40), [...] *“We have done so many scenarios already it was sort of afterwards you realised that actually was real”*[...] - (Team leader - woman 48), [...] *“I could look around the room and see that everyone knew what they were doing”* [...] - (Crisis leader - man 38). The feeling everyone had was that they had the knowledge so that they could all deal with the crisis.

This crisis was very brief, at 8-9 pm everyone was sent home and the crisis management came to an end. The length of the crisis is something that was mentioned by the interviewees during the interviews. They mentioned that it felt like a practice. If it had been for a longer period of time it could have felt different and therefore increased the level of stress. During this time, they all had a lot of things to do and therefore did not have time to stop and think about their emotions regarding the situation. At the beginning of the crisis they all called their families to make sure that they were safe and then they started to work. Some of the team leaders had a lot of tasks that had to be carried out and this did however lead to a stressful reaction. But with the help of adrenaline they could continue working with the situation.

An issue that was raised by all the interviewees was that the crisis centre became very crowded as those team members who did not have any tasks to carry out came into the room. This was the place where the TV was located and where they could follow the latest news. As the information and updates were given in this room they assembled there. This affected the volume of noise and is something to learn from the next time a crisis should occur.

The above was the result from the team leaders and crisis leader. In the next section we will continue with the results from the team members.

### 4.3 Result from interviews with the team members

The result from the team members interviews will be presented below. This section is divided in the same way as the previous paragraph about team leaders. However, the one aspect that differs from the results section for the team leaders, is that the information provided by the team members is not as comprehensive as that provided by the team leaders. Also, some of the answers were similar and therefore easier to compile into one conclusion.

### 4.3.1 Crisis preparation and experience

A common answer from all the interviews we conducted is that everyone had received crisis training in one way or another. If not at the embassy, then they have had the opportunity to receive crisis training somewhere else or had worked with a real crisis first hand.

The team members who were at the embassy on the day the attack happened had all had crisis training prior to the crisis event. Four out of five had received crisis preparation at the embassy. The fifth interviewee was involved in the Arab spring in 2011, and had experience from previous employment. He did not feel that he lacked any knowledge when it comes to the crisis management at the embassy. *“I think with every crisis is probably the same the first 20 minutes”* - (Team member, man 36). The team members that were interviewed have different levels and types of experience prior working with this crisis. But there is only man 36 who has experienced a real-life crisis before the attack on Drottninggatan. Women 31 did not have any real-life experience or crisis training before working at the embassy, but she thought that the training they received was really well prepared, *[...]” I got really good access to a lot of information as possible, but you can never really be prepared” [...]*- (Team member, women 31)

Mock-up practice is for all the employees at the embassy, but this is the only training that the team members receive. A mock-up scenario means that they act out a made-up crisis. This means that they have a crisis scenario and are divided up into their already assigned teams. They must work through the crisis following the crisis management plan. This exercise takes place once a year. According to the team members the crisis training itself does not cover the subject stress or how to manage a stress related event.

### 4.3.2 Crisis managements plan and the internal communication

When conducting the interviews, three out of the five team members had seen the crisis management plan prior to the attack. The three team members who had seen the plan knew exactly what they had to do during the crisis. The two who had not seen the plan prior to the attack received tasks from the team leader or created their own tasks. The team members agreed that the crisis management plan was not affected by the stressful situation. The reason for this is because the plan has a checklist that takes you through all the tasks which must be carried out during the time of a crisis. When they were asked if there had been any adjustments made to the plan after the attack the interviewees who have the position of deputy team leaders were aware of the changes. However, the team members did not have any knowledge of the amendments that had been made. The crisis management plan does not have a paragraph that indicates what kind of internal communications channels should be used in a crisis. However, during the attack there were a number of communication channels that were in fact used. An SMS was the first thing sent out to all the employees announcing that there was a situation in Stockholm. The embassy also used their internal speaker system to announce the

message to everyone in the building to make them aware of a crisis situation. WhatsApp and instant messenger are two other channels that were used. Not everyone has instant messenger for example women 55 does not use instant messenger, but used WhatsApp. [...] *“I do not use if you are after instant messenger or anything like that”* - (Team member, women 55) At the beginning of the crisis there was some confusion as to which WhatsApp group you had to respond to. Just after the attack had taken place, a message was sent out via WhatsApp informing the employees that there had been an incident and to stay clear of the area and not leave the embassy. The employees started to reply to this message but were informed that they had to report to another WhatsApp group if they were safe. This created confusion in the beginning but after the first moments was it sorted out as to where they should actually respond that they were unharmed

“It was a little bit of a misunderstanding because he alerted everyone there was something happening there, also I think he mentioned in the same message do not leave the embassy, or something like that. Then there is another group where you are supposed to feed in if you are ok, if all within your family is ok. People started to answer into the first WhatsApp group.”- (Team member, Women 31)

During the event everyone agreed that speed of the communication was good. There were some issues on how to communicate to the other team members who were spread out within the building. To solve this issue, some of the employees took it upon themselves to run around the embassy in order to deliver a message and find the correct person that should receive the information face to face.

### **4.3.3 How was it to work with a crisis**

The interviewees were very positive to the outcome of working with this crisis. It was a relatively short crisis and for that duration the majority of those interviewed felt very calm. Woman 31 was very motivated, and she thought that the embassy was the best place to receive information about the ongoing event. *“I was really motivated, I had the best channel to gather information”* - (Team member, Women 31)

Because of their good crisis preparation a few of the interviewees said, *“This crisis felt like it was one of our exercises”* - (Team member, women 47). The interviewees did not feel stressed during the time of the crisis. They all agreed that once they had the opportunity to contact their families they could focus on their assignments. This helped them to release the stress that might have occurred if they had not been able to reach their loved ones.

For the consular department, the crisis did not end that Friday, because unfortunately one of the victims had the same nationality as the embassy. For this department the work proceeded into the following week and this affected a member of staff in a stressful way, as the workload was far heavier than compared to a regular week. Overall everyone felt positive during the whole event. They did however indicate that the crisis was too short to develop any stress.

## **5. Discussion and analysis**

In this chapter the result will be discussed and analysed. Our findings will be reflected upon and compared with the both theory and previous research. The result from the previous chapter regarding team leaders and team members will be combined and compared to see the similarities and differences.

### **5.1 Collaboration equals teamwork**

All teams are equally important and support the crisis management in different ways. In the result chapter we present Teams 1, 2,3 and 4 because they are important for the embassy regarding the communication aspect. If these teams had communicated with the external stakeholders in an inappropriate way it could have led to misunderstandings and the fact the information would not have reached the appropriate stakeholders in a timely manner. The respondents mentioned that there were some difficulties for Team 3 in getting hold of the Swedish authorities in order to find out information regarding the missing person, although as this was a situation that was relevantly new for Sweden it is understandable that the authorities did not want to release the information too early before all the facts were confirmed. Even though the employees at the embassy already had established their Swedish contacts this is a relationship that must be nurtured for future collaboration. The embassy and the Swedish authorities need to establish what information is possible to be released to the embassy during a crisis and the authorities need also to explain to the embassy if there are any legal restrictions. During this incident this did not happen which created frustration for the team that was dealing with the particular case.

In the result we do not discuss the role that Team 5 has as they do not play a role in communicating with the external stakeholders. They do however have an important task to account for all staff and their families in initial phase of the crisis. This team also have an important role within the embassy as they are responsible for ensuring that the rest of the staff are capable of carrying out their tasks by providing food and beverages and also making sure that none of the employees are suffering from stress as without this team there is a risk that the other teams cannot function effectively.

### **5.2 High and lows of the internal communication**

The internal communication within the embassy had both highs and lows. The channels that are used during a crisis event are very similar to the channels that are used by the staff during their day to day work. These channels are face to face, email and instant messenger. Johansen et al., (2012) discuss that when it comes to urgent messages the best method is to use the face to face channel to communicate and pass on information (Johansen et al., 2012). Since the embassy is very familiar with using this method as a communication channel during their daily routines it enhances the way the employees can communicate with each other during a crisis. The informant of the message can make sure that the receiver not only gets the message but also understands

the full meaning of it. This approach and strategy builds up a better trust between employee and managers (Men, 2014) and this is something that the crisis leader tried to implement. During the crisis he had one face to face meeting with the employees who were not situated in the crisis centre throughout the crisis, to brief them on the latest updates. This was for them to have the same fundamental understanding of what was going on during the crisis as the team leaders. The crisis leader highlighted however, that in hindsight there should have been more meetings and updates for all staff rather than only once during this crisis period even though the crisis only lasted for a few hours.

However, when discussing the crisis communication, it does not feel that the embassy has a straightforward communication plan that is applied to everyone in the different teams. The crisis management plan should have a well thought through system of how the employees should communicate internally with each other in the best way. The conclusion is that even though the communication was working in an acceptable way there are still many modifications that could be made to the crisis management plan when it comes to how the employees communicate internally and what different channels should be used (Coombs, 2014).

According to the interviewees, they had some sort of communication plan decided prior to the attack. Though this plan cannot be found in their current version of the crisis management plan that we have taken part of. Because of this unofficial communication plan, it was brought up in the interviews that there were some issues on how to communicate with other teams. To solve this issue this is an aspect that should be discussed during the meetings that the team leaders participate in (Seeger et al, 2003). Because of the size of the embassy, it can be difficult to distribute the information so that it reaches all employees and it is unrealistic that all employees should know everything (Whitworth, 2006). Although in a crisis it is important that everyone has certain information about the situation. The embassy has solved this by the team leaders receiving all the relevant information about what is going on. It is their responsibility to distribute this information to their team members who are not located in the crisis centre. This path of action is not always suitable as the team leader cannot leave the crisis centre for a longer period of time in order to update their team members. There were also difficulties for one team as it was difficult to use the WhatsApp group to deliver the correct message. They need to find a way to improve the method of communication within their own teams and at the same time, make sure that all channels spread the same message (Crescenzo, 2011).

During the interviews we received different answers regarding how the internal communication was. Some of the interviewees felt that the internal communication was working without any problems whereas some of the interviewees felt the opposite even though they were a part of the same team. *“After we found everyone it was fine. It was dispersed across the whole office maybe more of a challenge, but people were willing to give information and it was just kind of tracking them down.”* - (Team member, man 36). There could be different reasons for these answers being diversified. *“I think so, I do not have any sense I mean it is obviously several months ago and you kind of tend to forget after a while”*- (Team leader, women 48) One is the fact that the terrorist attack was seven months ago and the

memories from the day can fade during time. Another reason could be that the interviewees had different roles within their teams during that day.

The team leaders felt that they received the correct information during the whole event, the reason for this was because they were situated in the crisis centre at all times and were constantly receiving updates from the crisis leader. In that room, face to face communication is the main communication channel, which as mentioned above is one of the best ways to communicate internally (Johansen et al., 2012). However, there are many employees who are not located inside this room always and this could lead to lack of information being delivered to them. One example is all team members felt that to receive information, they had to go to the crisis centre to become updated. This shows that there is a lack of communication between the teams and the reason why the crisis centre became very crowded. This is something which many of the interviewees mentioned.

It is clear that embassy needs to improve the communication plan. According to Whitworth (2006) internal communication should have three sections. These are, a hierarchical communication structure, mass media communication and social networks. Using these three sections is necessary for the organisation in order for the communication to work without any problems. In this case is it the crisis leader who is responsible that the communication starts from the top and travels without delay to those at the bottom of the hierarchical structure.

WhatsApp was a successful channel. As Crescenzo (2011) discusses, it is with the new technology such as WhatsApp, that opens a two-way communication between the co-workers within the organisation. By using this means of communication the messages were able to reach the employees, even though they were not in the crisis centre. However, as the team members felt that they were out of the loop this channel should have been more frequently used to send out messages to the rest of the embassy.

The crisis preparation is a vital part in this organisation. At present the embassy's main focus that is discussed is the crisis management plan and the tasks that are in this plan. However, if the embassy should start focusing more on the internal communication plan during this preparation stage, as it would definitely benefit the organisation. They could be even more prepared by agreeing as to which communication channels should be used in order to reach all the employees who are not involved in the crisis to the same extent as the team leaders.

After analysing the crisis management plan together with the interviews that have been conducted, we can see that the communication plan and the crisis management plan do not coexist with each other. The communication plan only mentions how the organisation should communicate externally during a crisis, and not internally. [...] *"This space is to be crisis centre, so the idea is that in a crisis rather than everyone sitting in their offices all*

*of the crisis leaders and the crisis manager and crisis leader himself move down to this space so that we are all together and we can all communicate [...] The team leaders have to work out how to best communicate with their team who are located somewhere else in the building” - (Crisis leader, man 38).* What the crisis leader is saying can indicate that there is not a set plan on how to communicate internally. Since every team leader should decide how they should communicate to their team can that result in that all the teams have different internal communication channels. Is there a reason why internal communication is not a part of the crisis management plan? Is it because this is an area that always can be improved and developed, and that there has been limited research conducted on the topic (Welch & Jackson, 2007). What can be seen is that in the research that is available regarding internal communication it does not specify how the employees should communicate with each other when a major crisis is declared (Welch & Jackson, 2007) “Yes and no. [...] *We have agreed that it makes sense to use messenger because it is quick.*”- (Team leader, Women 48). This might have affected the embassy’s crisis management plan and it could be the reason why some of the employees had to run around the workplace in order to be able to deliver certain messages. It is imperative that the internal communication works well as without this the organisation can have difficulty in managing a crisis.

### 5.3 How to act during a crisis

We asked a few questions about the crisis management plan and one question was: Have there been any adjustments made to the crisis management plan after the attack? The overall answer was: “some adjustments have been made”. The interviewees did not specify what adjustments had been made, this showed they that they do not have knowledge of the answer themselves. What is the reason for this? Are the employees ignoring what is being conveyed and not paying enough attention to the information that is sent out regarding the crisis management plan? Or is it poor communication from the managers regarding what changes have been made to the plan? Could the problem be higher up in the hierarchy therefore affecting the employees when it comes to how they receive information about changes? There can be different reasons why the employees answered that “some adjustments have been made”, and all of them can have different reasons for why they do not mention the exact changes. As according to Coombs (2014) the plan is there for an organisation to give directions and remove the stress element that could occur during a crisis event. It also helps them to follow through each action they decide to take (Coombs, 2014). If the employees do not know if changes have been made or not, then how can it help them to follow through a crisis event and reduce their stress levels in the future?

Therefore, all members of staff should be aware of all amendments that have been made to the crisis management plan. It can also be the employees fault that they are not aware of the changes to the plan. It could be that they are not interested in keeping themselves updated with the crisis management plan. If that is the case, then how would that affect not only the employees but also the embassy? If this was the case, then it is up to the employees to make themselves aware of what changes have been made and it is their

responsibility to keep themselves up to date with all the modifications that will be made in the future. If not, there could be consequences during the next crisis. If all employees are not aware of the adjustments, then they will not have the possibility to perform in accordance with the recommended adjustments. This could lead to a negative outcome and have knock on implications for the organisation. This is a problem that the whole embassy could come together and solve, to find the best approach of how the employees should keep themselves up to date with the crisis management plan. Maybe if they all do it together as an exercise, they can see where the problems lie and solve it through a whole mission approach and not just for each individual team. Another approach would be research. Maybe the problem is located in the research, maybe there is a gap in how a manager should get their employees to keep themselves up to date with the crisis management plan. Time should be invested in how to get the organisations employees more interested in the crisis management plan in order to be prepared.

## 5.4 Dealing with stress

When we asked the employees about the aspect of stress and how they reacted during a crisis all the interviewees had similar answers. Once they had contacted their families and found out that they were not harmed in the attack they went into work mode. The event itself went on for a short period of time and therefore they did not feel the stress that can arise during a longer crisis. Pearson and Clair (1998) mention that an employee's mental health is important. This is an aspect that could have been affected if they had not been able to get hold of their families. It would also have affected the whole crisis management because they would not have been able to focus on the tasks ahead of them.

The interviewees felt that they were not affected by stress due to this situation, however, one aspect that was mentioned is that some felt that they had too many tasks that they had to deal with during the event. This in its turn did lead to stress and even though they were able to manage it, in the end this was a factor that slowed down the process of working with the crisis. An adjustment that could be made to this is that the employees should feel that they can delegate their tasks more to other co-workers. As it was mentioned, there were many people without anything to do during the crisis event, so this situation could have been solved by just asking for help.

When we asked the interviewees if they are a person who become affected by stressful situations they more or less had the same answers that they were not affected during the crisis event. But this can have something to do with that they went into their work mode and could process all information that was given them. As according to Pearson & Clair (1998) during a stressful situation the employees can feel a difficulty to process information, but if the employees are well prepared and know what steps have to be taken it can minimise the chances that the employees cannot process the information that is given to them during a crisis event. This can have something to do with their experience, that the years at the embassy have helped them to cope with

stress and because of that they felt well prepared. However, since all of them have different backgrounds it is difficult to say what it can depend on

Some interviewees said that they can become stressed in other situations that took place in the working environment but not this particular one, and we ask ourselves why? One reason could be that the employees are so well prepared prior to a crisis and that they are confident in their crisis roles that they have already been assigned during the preparation period. In their daily work routines there can be aspects such as heavy workloads and other issues that unexpectedly need to be handled and this can affect how they deal with the situation. But because they know exactly what they have to do during a crisis event they can handle the different tasks that can arise during a crisis. As they are so many people within the embassy it is easy to receive support from co-workers and managers and work through the different tasks with full back-up.

One element that is worth discussing is that a number of the respondents commented that they were not affected by stress but their co-workers others were. This is an interesting aspect to discuss because it seems that they are aware of colleague's stress but not of their own. Does this depend on the randomly selected respondents having a higher stress level or is it because the interviewees are not aware or do not want to admit that they were feeling stressed during that day? To reach a conclusion for these questions this study would have needed a wider range of people to participate in the interviews. All the interviewees did however feel that it was easy to follow the crisis management plan and they did not feel that the communication within the embassy was affected by stress. This could be because they are so well prepared and knew what the crisis management plan entailed, and they knew who they had to speak to in order to receive a correct answer. Before a crisis, which can be a stressful situation, it would be good to know what type of behavioural profile the employees have as this can help managers to adjust the situation and allocate tasks that are appropriate for the different personalities (Erikson, 2014). Therefore, both the crisis leader and team leaders should have a good knowledge of how their team members may react to stress. This could be a good way to know how to delegate a task when the crisis arises. This can lead to an improvement in the productivity of a group as the members are aware of exactly how much stress they can handle during a situation (Erikson, 2014).

## 5.5 Preparedness is the key

Before a crisis happens and during a crisis there are different teams who work in different ways to prevent and handle a crisis. According to Coombs (2014) there are six steps that are a part of the crisis preparation. (1) Diagnosing vulnerabilities is the task that the crisis leader and crisis manager take care of. (2) Assessing crisis types is up to the consular department together with the crisis leader. (3) To train a crisis management team is what the table top exercise does, together with the consular department who coordinate the crisis preparation exercises. (4) The crisis Team 2 select and train a spokesperson and at the embassy this is the crisis leader. (5) Developing a crisis management plan is up to the head of the consular department together with

the crisis leader. (6) To review the communication systems and make sure they are prepared to meet the needs of the crisis management plan during a crisis. This final step has unfortunately been neglected. As we have mentioned earlier there are gaps in the internal communication that need to be taken into consideration and be developed. This is because the internal communication is a crucial part of the crisis management plan and for the whole organisation in general.

These answers have been combined with the theories and previous research regarding crisis preparation. It is during the pre-crisis stage that the employees meet and share their own experience about a crisis (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). This is exactly what the embassy has as a goal to achieve once every year. The employees who are a part of the crisis team and have extensive expertise when it comes to a crisis (Seeger et al.,1998) sit down and have a table top exercise where they discuss different crisis scenarios. This gives the crisis management team a chance to discuss what actions need to be taken and if any adjustments need to be made to their crisis management plan. Later, there is the mock- up exercise for all the team members and the team leaders and research shows that training can be an efficient way of improving and implementing changes in the organisation. This is the key to effective crisis preparation (Carrel, 2000). The embassy has a set amount of times that they should provide crisis training per year. As the employees within the organisation are given the chance to discuss during the exercise they are being given a chance to discuss a crisis. This brings knowledge about what they must do, and they learn what the crisis management plan stands for and what their different tasks will be if a crisis occurs.

Women 45 who is in charge of creating the crisis preparation exercise talks about the fact that it is a difficult to come up with challenging scenario. But what if the embassy should start to explore new ways of crisis training and develop the way their employees see and experience crisis training? According to literature there are new ways of providing crisis training by combining it with the new technology. This can make the training more advanced and an example that is discussed by Braun et al (2016), is a game that has been created to enhance crisis training. This is something that the embassy could learn a great deal from. It is always good to keep up to date with the new types of technology that have been developed and introduced to the market that can help make the employees feel even more prepared for a crisis. But scholars do not agree if crisis preparation is for the better or not. Coombs (2014) states that it is important to have crisis training within an organisation and we agree with him since it is more common with attacks similar to the one in Stockholm than it was for over 10 years ago when Carrel (2000) claimed that crisis preparation was not always such a good idea. But as mentioned, this was more than 10 years ago, and the society looked very different then.

## **6. Conclusion and future research**

In the conclusion chapter we will discuss the answers to the research questions. The answers will be drawn from the collected empirical material together with the theory and discussion.

The purpose with this study was to examine the implementation of the crisis management plan and the function of the internal communication. Furthermore, the research also covered the following: how stress played a role during the event, how the embassy prepared their employees to handle the different aspects of the crisis and the lessons learned following the event.

The research questions that were asked to answer the purpose for this study were:

- How did the embassy prepare their employees for a crisis?
- How did the employees experience the implementation of the crisis management plan?
- Did the employees in this case study experience a functioning internal communication during the crisis?
- Did the employees experience stress as a factor that affected the internal communication?

### **6.1 How did the embassy prepare their employees for a crisis?**

The crisis leader had the understanding that everyone was on top of the situation. They received positive feedback from the home country regarding how they handled the crisis. The embassy did therefore prepare their employees well and delivered a good result, handling the crisis in an efficient manner from the start to the finish. All the employees agreed on this. Several of them thought that this felt like an exercise and that affected the crisis management to the positive. According to everyone crisis training is a good way to be prepared when a crisis arises. If the employees had not received crisis training, the outcome of the crisis would have been completely different. Therefore, crisis preparation plays an important role in how a crisis event will be handled, including the outcome of the situation. This is an aspect that should be considered in all organisations.

### **6.2 How did the employees experience the implementation of the crisis management plan?**

All the interviewees agreed that the crisis management plan was very easy to implement during the crisis. The respondents said that the plan was extremely easy to follow due to the checklist that each had for their own team. Even though there were some respondents who had not seen the plan prior to the attack, they were still able to receive directions regarding the tasks they had carry out from their team leaders.

### **6.3 Did the employees in this case study experience a functioning internal communication during the crisis?**

After analysing the results that were collected from the interviews, we can establish that there were both positive and negative aspects with the internal communication during the terrorist attack in April 2017. There were different answers depending if the respondents were a team leader or team member. As the team leaders were situated in the crisis centre at all times during the crisis event they felt that the communication flow was at a level that enabled them to receive appropriate information during the crisis in a structured and timely manner. However, the issue was to communicate with the rest of the team members as they were not located in the crisis centre. It resulted in the fact that the team members constantly went into the centre as it was there the latest information was presented. The interviewees explained that prior to the crisis event they had decided to use WhatsApp as a method of communication if a crisis should occur, but there is no internal communication plan in place for everyone to follow. During the crisis, each team decided on how to communicate with each other in. Issues evolved when trying to communicate between the teams as everyone was using their own agreed methods and lacked collaboration. The common channels that the employees used were instant messenger, face-to-face and WhatsApp. After this study it is clear that the embassy need to have a more straightforward plan that can be used not only to communicate to their own team members but a channel that will enhance crossover communication.

### **6.4 Did the employees experience stress as a factor that affected the internal communication?**

The stress level during the crisis event was low for almost all of the interviewees. For the informants who were feeling stressed during the day they were not affected by the attack itself. This stress was more due to the fact that they had a heavy workload during the hours of the event. This aspect did however not affect how the internal communication was handled. The conclusion is that stress was not a factor that disturbed the way the employees could communicate with each other.

### **6.5 Future research**

Because this study focused only on the attack on Drottninggatan, which was not a crisis that went on for a longer period of time, all of the interviewees expressed that they did not experience any stress that was related to the crisis itself. This depended on the fact that the crisis event was quite short and therefore the employees did not have time to develop any stress related feelings.

A new approach would therefore be to firstly to study a crisis that has a duration of more than a couple hours. To investigate how the employee's levels of stress are affected by working in a stressful situation for a longer

period of time and secondly how the organisation supports their employees during and after the event. Since this study's approach was to research at an embassy, a new approach could therefore be to study a similar organisation that works for the Swedish government. Examples of this are the Ministry of Foreign affairs (MFA) or the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (SCCA) to see how these two organisations handle their crisis management plan and what type of crisis training they have to offer their employees. Not only could it be a good approach to look at the MFA or SCCA for new future research but also to consider studying other organisations. For example, does the police force or the municipality of Stockholm have different routines to SCCA and MFA. For that reason, this study is easy to expand and apply to organisations who handle different types of crisis situations in their day-to-day work.

The interviews we conducted were carried out in November and the attack took place in April and some of the interviewees had a difficulty in remembering the details from the event itself, which can affect our result. The actual effect on the result should not be too substantial, but a recommendation for future research would be to conduct the interviews closer to when the actual event took place.

## **7. Implications for society and work / working life**

The results and the conclusion are different to what we had expected from at the beginning of this study. This case shows that an organisation can be well prepared if the management takes crisis training seriously, which this embassy has done. It was shown in the result that once the crisis came to an end the employees felt that all actions that were necessary had been taken and this resulted in good crisis management. Therefore, the embassy in questions is a good example for other organisations of how to prepare for a crisis. With a crisis management plan that is straightforward and employees who are well prepared for a crisis, the end result can be that the organisation will not be as affected from the crisis once it ends. As seen from this example this study is crucial for all organisations to have a crisis management plan in place that they can use when needed. It does not have to be a detailed plan but if the plan has some type of structure it will be of great support to the employees who will work with and handle a crisis.

Not all organisations have good crisis management, which one of the employees did point out during her interview. This also includes lack in the preparation department. All organisations might not have the opportunity to prepare their staff for when a crisis arises, but they should at least have some sort of plan ready for the employees, a plan they can fall back on in different crisis situations. The world is changing and there is a greater chance that what happened in April 2017 will happen again, the same type of situation or a new situation that changes the society's view on how they should handle a crisis situation.

### **7.1 Recommendations to the embassy to future crisis events**

As the interviewees expressed that there were some issues with that the crisis centre became very crowded during the crisis, some recommendations will be made below to the embassy if another crisis should arise.

The first recommendation that would benefit the organisation would be that the employees who are not involved in a task for the crisis and who are not able to leave the embassy in order to go home, should gather in a separate room where a TV is located for regular news updates. A member of the crisis team should address the group and give them updates on a regular basis.

The second recommendation would be that meetings should be scheduled more frequently towards the team members who could be located elsewhere in the building. This would minimise any anxiety experienced by the rest of the team members as they are not aware of what is going on in the crisis centre.

The last recommendation is the usage of WhatsApp as it seemed to have worked well to an extent. There could be a possibility to carry out more research regarding this channel for example creating different groups

within the embassy. A designated person could be responsible to send out the “official truth” to all employees on this WhatsApp at regular intervals during the crisis event.

The recommendations above could benefit the embassy. They could contribute to making the employees feel that they are more involved in what is actually going on and also create a better working environment in the crisis centre.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1

### Information

- How old are you?
- How many years have you worked at the embassy in Stockholm and what position do you have?
- Have you any experience to working with a crisis that is similar to the terrorist attack?
- What team were you assigned to during the terrorist attack? And what role did you have in that team?
  - o Team leaders: How many years have you been team leader prior to the terrorist attack?
- Can elaborate what different tasks you had to do during the crisis?

### Pre-crisis

#### Crisis training

- Have you received crisis training?
  - o if yes -
    - What kind of training have you received?
    - can you explain in more detailed what the different training exercises entailed?
- Did you feel that the training you received prepared you for the terror attack crisis?
- How many times have you received training since working at the embassy?
  - o If no -
  - o Do you feel that you lacked knowledge how you were supposed to act during the terror attack?
- Did the crisis training teach you how to handle the stress and feelings that comes with it?
- Could you apply the knowledge that you have learnt during the crisis training exercises?
  - o If no -
    - Why? What could not be applied to the crisis management team?
- How much flexibility was it to the plan?
  - o If yes
    - In what way?

#### Emotions

- Have you learnt anything on how to handle the stress in crisis training?
- Do you know how to deal with your feelings during a crisis?
- Are you a person who get affected by a stressful situation?

#### Crisis management plan

- Had you before the terrorist attack seen the crisis management plan?
  - o If yes

- How was the crisis management plan presented to you?
  - If no
    - do you know where you can find it for a crisis situation?
- Do you have a full understanding what the crisis management plan contains and what different aspects have to be done by you?

### **Internal communication**

- During your day to day work what communication channels do you use to communicate to your co-workers?
- Did you have a plan what type of communication channels should be used if a crisis happens?

### **Crisis event**

- On the day of the attack who decided that the embassy should enter crisis mode?

### **Internal communication channels**

- How was the information sent out within the embassy that there had been a terrorist attack?
- Did you feel that the correct information was sent out to you?
- What different communication channels did you use during the event?
- Did you think these channels were good and appropriate for the event?
- How was the communication speed? Did you receive the information quick?
- Were there any changes done to the communication channels during the crisis?
- Was there a channel used in the beginning that did not work?

### **Crisis management plan**

- Could you follow the crisis management plan?
  - if yes -
    - why? Is it because it was easy to follow, and it was a good structure?
- Could you apply it on the event?
  - If no
    - What was not followed, any examples?
- Did you feel that the stressful crisis situation affected how the crisis management plan was followed and the different steps that need to be taken?
- Do you have any examples from the crisis management plan that was handled in a very good way?
  - Any examples that were handled bad?

### **Emotions**

- How did it feel to work with this crisis?
- Did you feel that you could deal with all the information that was given to you during the first hour of the attack?

- Did you feel that the managers took the correct decision during the crisis?
  - o If no - Did that affect the stress?
- What did you do to cope with the stress?
- Did you have time to make sense out of the situation to understand what was happening?
- How did you deal with personal emotional feelings when the crisis happened?
- Did you feel that it affected your work?
  - o If yes -
    - Did it affect the internal communication between you and your co-workers?
- Do you feel that this is an aspect that has to be taken into consideration during the crisis training?
  - o If no -
    - How did you do to suppress your emotional feelings?
- Did you work around your feelings?
- Have you experienced another crisis where you felt that the situation was stressful?
- Did you stop and think about your emotions during the crisis event?

## **Post crisis**

- Did you feel the need to speak to someone outside the embassy after the crisis has happened?
- How did the embassy support you after the crisis has happened?
- What have you brought with you from the terrorist attack event?
- Do you know what adjustments have been made to your crisis management plan?
- Did you feel that the internal communication worked during the whole of the event?
- Do you have anything else you want to add?