



# Bridging Boundaries in the Borderland of Bureaucracies

Individual Impact on Organisational Adaption to  
Demanding Situations in Civil and Military Contexts

Aida Alvinus

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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Sociology

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DISSERTATION | Karlstad University Studies | 2013:12

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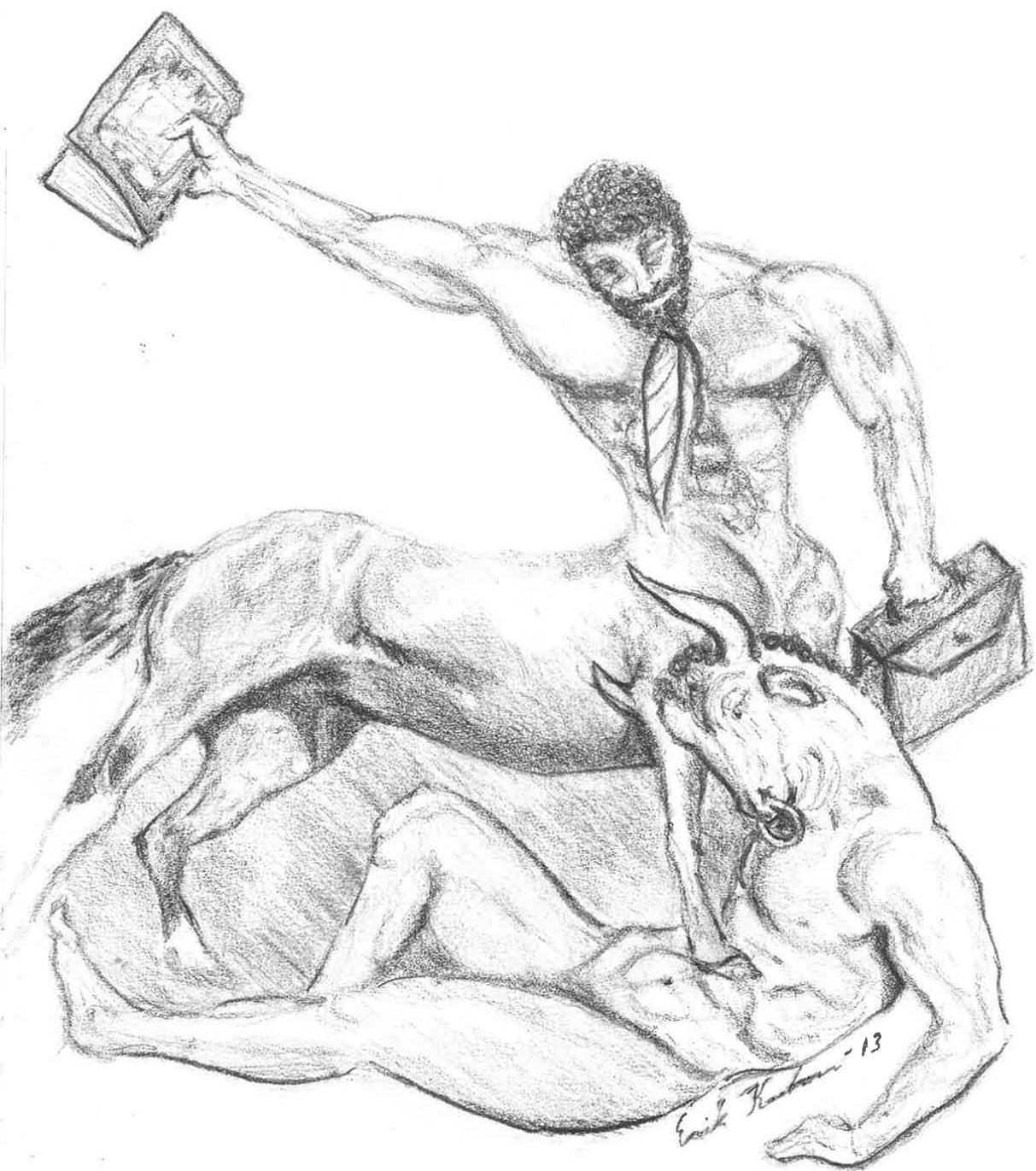
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Warmest regards,

Aida Alvinus

Karlstad 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2013

*To Victoria Elise Alvinius*



## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to reach a deeper understanding of how boundary spanners are bridging boundaries between uniformed bureaucratic organisations and their environment, characterised by demanding conditions. The main part of this thesis is based upon empirical data gathered through 71 interviews with Swedish civil and military informants from several uniformed organisations. Four articles have been included in this thesis in order to address the overarching aim.

The results show that boundary spanners are crucial to the adaption of uniformed organisations to demanding conditions. A number of aspects that are included in the process of organisational adaption have been identified. One of the tasks is to balance between structuring and improvisation where much is at stake. The other task is to create confidence among the involved actors and contribute in different ways to create a sense of symmetry between partners. Finally, the third task for boundary spanners is to recognise improvised roles such as spontaneous links in order to maintain stressful conditions and bridge a gap in the bureaucratic organisation.

The present thesis contributes to sociological theory of emotions, disaster management and military studies through a common denominator, namely the demanding context. Taken together, the findings increase awareness of how organisations act towards their environments and how individuals, especially boundary spanners, adapt the organisation to its environment. For leaders and managers, it is important to make decisions, provide mandates and authorisation, as well as invest confidence in boundary spanners. The hierarchical chain may remain in existence, but it can be made shorter and more transparent through this kind of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Uniformed organisations, bureaucratic organisations, rationality, adaption, systems theory, contingency, stressful environment, boundary spanners, civil-military relations, disaster management, emotional labour



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background and aim

Organisational adaption to the environment is a complex area of research, necessitating enquiry into how such adaption may take place (Gouldner, 1959; Thompson, 1967; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). The focus of a study may, for example, lie in the interplay between the organisation, environmental factors and individuals or organisational members. Most research in what is known as Environment-oriented organisational theory is over-arching, focusing on organisations as parts of a larger system (cf. Systems theory, Contingency theory). One line of enquiry held by some organisational theorists within the field of sociology pertains to bureaucratic organisations' function and interplay with their environment. Classical theorists suggest, for example, that bureaucratic organisations work best in stable, calm environments (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Thompson, 1967; Perrow, 1979/1986; Kirschenbaum, 2004). This thesis therefore aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the adaption of bureaucratic organisations (specifically crisis management organisations) to demanding circumstances – i.e. a non-stable environment.

The organisations studied in this thesis are limited to response organisations and the Swedish Armed Forces. Why is it important to study this particular type of organisation? According to Awasthy (2009):

*The uniqueness of disaster management agencies is that their goals are directly related to preventing the loss of life and property. It is for this reason that a great deal of attention must be paid to such organisations, as their success or failure has a direct impact on our survival* (Awasthy, 2009:91).

As highlighted by the above quote, these organisations are important for our survival but the research around them also contributes to important societal debate, as was the case in Sweden after the tsunami catastrophe that occurred during the Christmas holiday period of 2004.

The Armed Forces differ from response organisations in that they have the facility of armed combat should an infringement of national boundaries occur, such as in the event of an attack. The Swedish Armed Forces sends troops on peacekeeping and peace-promoting missions but also has a duty to support society at large in the event of catastrophes such as floods, storms etc. Response organisations handle everything from everyday accidents to larger

disasters on a national and international scale. They must be ready for contingency and disaster management but also assist in rebuilding after the actual crisis or catastrophe. However, the common denominator for both Armed Forces and response organisations is that they handle demanding environmental conditions and adhere to hierarchical and bureaucratic structure (Försvarsmaktens Högkvarter /Swedish Armed Forces Command/, 2012; Perrow, 1979/1986).

Why is it important to study this particular type of environment? Demanding conditions here refer to civilian crises and catastrophes as well as threats and risks during international military missions such as peacekeeping and peace enforcement. According to the latest update from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, (UCDP, 2012) the number of conflicts around the world significantly increased in 2011. After 2010, a year signalling hope of more peaceful developments, the number of ongoing conflicts worldwide rose from 30 to 37 (an increase of almost 20%) according to UCDP research. In 2011, The International Disaster Database (EM-DAT) reported the occurrence of almost 400 natural disasters worldwide, with close to 500,000 fatalities. Long term economic and social consequences are excluded from this data, as are technological, biological and other types of catastrophe. Vast numbers of individuals are affected by armed conflicts, putting demands on the organisations that need to deal with this. To cope with the challenges, exacting requirements are made on the skills and education of the organisation's members, putting them in a special position in civilian society.

The military, the police and the fire services are organisations in 'uniform', signalling authority, specific competences, hierarchical status, belonging to a unique organisation and rank (Soeters, 2000; Weibull, 2003). The unique, 'uniformed' organisations of the Armed Forces and others, such as the police, fire service and health service are usually given as examples of hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations characterised by rationality, structure, predictability, stability, rules, distribution of responsibility, mandate and sphere of authority. These organisations work not only with various incidents and disasters but also in preventative measures. When large scale accidents and catastrophes occur, their activities must be rapidly coordinated, putting demands on organisation and adjustment from the normal every day to crisis mode. Most usually, uniformed organisations enter the scene once the crisis is a fact and the objective is to prevent further consequences. In Sweden, both the Armed

Forces and 'blue light' authorities are independent organisations that self-coordinate their activities internally. Externally, their job is to act partly in response to demands from society around them and partly to cooperate with each other. As hierarchical and bureaucratic entities, these organisations must also adapt to the dynamic world outside of their own organisational boundaries and manage incoming input.

Existing knowledge of crisis management within the field of sociology has been collated but there is a need for deeper understanding of the organisation's adaption to demanding circumstances. Although research on risk, crisis and catastrophes has been conducted from a sociological perspective for many years (e.g. at The Disaster Research Center, University of Delaware, DRC) the field is relatively poor on theory. According to Perry & Quarantelli (2005) there is a lack of clear organisational theory that would explain the demands made on the organisation of entities acting in crises and catastrophes. More recent research conducted by Kendra and Wachtendorf (University of Delaware, 2013) indicates that there are still knowledge gaps in this field of research. These researchers are continuing to study sense making and improvisation, with the aim of contributing new knowledge to organisational disaster studies from a sociological perspective.

The overarching and general research coming out of DRC is an important anchor for this thesis. It defines the knowledge gap in crisis management studies, with organisations in focus.

*It is not a matter of being organized or disorganized at community, regional, or societal levels. It is not a matter of being organized formally or informally at any level of societal response. It is a matter of systemic adaption to disaster that includes both organized and many other forms of collective action that, depending on the circumstances at hand, are more or less efficient and effective (Lovegren Bosworth & Kreps, 2007:300).*

Lovegren Bosworth & Kreps (2007) have put forward a number of suggestions in a summary of existing studies conducted by The Disaster Research Center between 1963-2001. These suggestions entail studying organisational adaption to crises and disaster in the environment by looking at planned as well as spontaneous crisis management. According to these researchers, the starting point for future analyses should be focused on expected and improvised actions on an individual, organisational and inter-organisational level. One organisational theory development in this area is suggested.

## **1.2. Purpose and research questions**

The overarching purpose of this thesis is to reach a deeper understanding of how boundary spanners are bridging boundaries between uniformed bureaucratic organisations and their environment, characterised by demanding conditions such as accidents and disasters, and during international missions with clear and hazy threat scenarios. In other words, “bridging boundaries” means studying organisational adaption to the environment. The following research questions have been formulated:

- How can uniformed bureaucratic organisations designed to manage crises adapt to demanding conditions in their environment through boundary spanners?
- What obstacles and opportunities exist for boundary spanners to operate in the borderland between the organisation and its demanding environment?

The purpose and research questions are based on the four scientific articles presented in this thesis. The purpose of the first article was to develop a theoretical understanding of leadership during a complex rescue operation following a major disaster in a foreign country. The second article focuses on formal and informal boundary spanners within the framework of bureaucratically-organised emergency response agencies during severely demanding operations. The third study examines the processes of confidence-building and emotional management tactics among boundary spanners in a multinational, military peace enforcement context. The fourth article gains a deeper understanding of military organisations’ adaptation to complex environments.

## **1.3. Civilian crises and military missions**

In order to understand organisational adaption to the environment, and particularly the demanding environmental factors of crisis, war and catastrophe, an explanation is required as to what is meant by ‘crisis’ and how the environment affects organisations. By way of introduction, Fredholm’s taxonomy is presented to illustrate incident extent.

Fredholm (2006) has described incident extent from the management of everyday incidents to those of catastrophic proportions requiring high levels of management, leadership and resource distribution. His seven categories are

described below, with the purpose of giving an account of the extent of the studied incidents in this thesis. 1) *Leadership of interventions during incidents of routine character*. This type of incident is characterised by frequent occurrence but limited extent, the situation being relatively simple to gain an overview of and recognise. Examples include vehicle incendiary, traffic accidents etc. 2) *Leadership of interventions during more complex incident situations, involving a number of units from the same organisation*. Incidents in this category are more demanding and complex and it may be difficult to gain an overview of the disaster area. A serious fire in a building could be one example. 3) *Joint leadership of interventions in complex disaster situations, involving several units from different organisations*. The extent of the incident demands the collaboration of several crisis management organisations, and the damage situation is complex and difficult to ascertain. A train accident is one example. 4) *Joint local leadership of interventions in complex disaster situations with obvious and direct consequences for the local community*. This category relates to larger disasters affecting a large part of a local community. 5) *Joint local and regional leadership of interventions in complex disaster situations with obvious and direct consequences for people in one or several local communities and/or in a region*. An extensive intervention is required as the disaster area may include a number of local communities, as in the previous category. Cooperation between crisis management organisations is necessary on a regional level, the floods in the Swedish town of Arvika in the autumn of 2000 being an example in point. 6) *Joint local, regional and central leadership in complex disaster situations with direct and severe consequences for part or all of a country*. The nuclear power disaster in Chernobyl in 1986 is one such example. 7) *Joint local, regional, central and international leadership in complex disaster situations with direct and severe consequences for two or more countries*. The MS Estonia ferry disaster in 1994 is a case in point.

The empirical studies in this thesis concerned accidents (Mariefred hostage taking in 2004 and Kemira sulphur spill in Helsingborg in 2005) that affected local communities and/or a region, according to categories four and five in Fredholm's (2006) taxonomy, and a natural disaster (the tsunami catastrophe) which correlates to Fredholm's category seven. Further division is made in regard to the study of disasters, depending on whether or not they are caused by humans. Turner & Pidgeon (1997) distinguish between natural and 'man-made' disasters. Examples of natural disasters are earthquakes, tsunamis, avalanches, tornadoes, flooding and locust swarms. 'Man-made' disasters include things like vehicle accidents, drowning incidents, collapsed buildings, explosions, fires and biological and chemical accidents (Turner & Pidgeon,

1997; Perry & Quarantelli, 2005). Enander, Lajksjö & Tedfledt (2010) also point out social crises, such as school shootings, and ‘invisible’ accidents, such as Chernobyl.

Military operations are an additional context discussed in this thesis and characterised by demanding conditions. Here it is vital to know what risks are present in the environment, such as climate factors and threat scenario, the latter identifying which groups could be potential attackers. Klep & Winslow (1999), for example, describe the intense heat, dust and dangerous insect life encountered by soldiers in Liberia. The camel spider in particular was feared due to its size and resistance to repellents – all in all, “soldiers felt under attack by the environment itself” (Klep & Winslow, 1999).

Apart from harsh climate and natural phenomena, irregular warfare may also occur. When the Armed Forces encounter an enemy with similar resources, one can speak of a regular threat. Everything else is irregular, for example, cases of suicide bombings, improvised explosive device attacks (IED), rebellion and terrorism. The next section aims to give an account of the events at the heart of the empirical studies.

### **1.3.1. *Civil disaster environment – empirical studies***

**Paper I and II:** *The Boxing Day Tsunami* The Boxing Day Tsunami on 26 December 2004 resulted in momentous consequences for large parts of Southeast Asia, from personal tragedies to serious impact on the economies and populations of a number of countries. The disaster not only affected Southeast Asia, but also many countries far from its epicentre. A recent analysis lists almost 300,000 dead (Alvinus, Danielsson, & Larsson, 2010a). Of all the European countries, Sweden suffered the greatest number of casualties in the tsunami, some 20,000 Swedes being on holiday in Thailand when it struck. According to an official Swedish Governmental Report in 2005 (SOU 2005:154), it was confirmed that 543 Swedes died and 18 were still missing.

**Paper II:** *A sulphur spill* On February 4, 2005, a large sulphuric acid tank suddenly collapsed in the harbour area of Helsingborg (a medium-sized Swedish town). As a result, approximately 16,300 tons of 96% sulphuric acid was discharged into the plant area and partly into the harbour basin and the sea. Due to the presumed risk of acidic fume development, the emergency authorities closed certain residential areas that were located near the site for a

couple of days as a preventive measure. The accident did not cause any significant harm to employees, public health or the environment (Alvinus, Danielsson, & Larsson, 2010b).

**Paper II:** *A hostage-taking* On September 23, 2004, a hostage drama occurred in Mariefred (a small Swedish town). Despite preparedness and incident exercises among the prison officer staff, two inmates with knives fled the prison after taking a warden hostage. The prisoners moved across several counties, which increased pressure on the police investigations. The hostage managed to escape, reducing situational stress, but the hunt continued. After four days of intense pursuit, the prisoners were finally arrested outside a small city far from the prison. The hostage drama was a unique event in that it was the first time in Sweden that hostage-takers had managed to take a hostage outside a prison area. The event received a lot of media attention, which was perceived as stressful for the organisations involved (Alvinus, Danielsson, & Larsson, 2010b).

### **1.3.2. *Military environment – empirical studies***

**Paper III and IV:** *Characteristics of military context* There are geographical and social aspects to the context of a multinational peace enforcement mission, the former broadly concerning the environment of the host country, which is often characterised by squalor, decimation and extreme climatic conditions, while the latter concerns the variety of socio-cultural traditions and customs manifest therein. In addition to the local people of the host country, there is often a multitude of actors in the area of operation, including the armed forces from different countries, local actors, such as clan warlords, local police, politicians, and a range of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Typical military collaborative tasks in these contexts involve liaison, negotiation and intelligence gathering, observations and situation outlook reporting.

### **1.4. Outline and a foundation of project work**

The thesis consists of six chapters followed by the four individual papers. This brief introduction precedes an overview of the theoretical framework on the following themes: bureaucratic organizations, systems theory and contingency. The third chapter deals with individual impact on organisational adaption, while the fourth chapter deals with methodological considerations related to Grounded Theory used in the contributing studies. The fifth chapter

summarizes the empirical papers included in this thesis, with brief descriptions of the background of each study, as well as a presentation of the study's aims and methods, followed by a summary of the results. Finally, Chapter six contains a discussion of the thesis, including theoretical and practical implementations and suggestions for future research.

The thesis is based on a number of studies commissioned between 2005-2007 by the former Swedish Rescue Services Agency (now MSB) and the Swedish Armed Forces (2008-2009). The main enquiry of the first project was to illustrate how leadership and decision-making can and should occur in civilian crises, the second project focusing on military leadership during international operations, particularly in regard to civilian-military cooperation. Once the project work had been completed and the research reports submitted, ideas emerged about continuing to study the collated data with a view to creating a uniform picture of boundary spanning and organisational adaption to demanding conditions in the environment. Both projects therefore resulted in scientific articles which now form the basis for this thesis. A schematic description is given below of the overarching aim of the thesis, and the projects and scientific studies which together comprise the background and contents of the thesis.

<b>Overarching aim</b>	The aim of this thesis is to reach a deeper understanding of how boundary spanners are bridging boundaries between uniformed bureaucratic organisations and their environment, characterised by demanding conditions. In other words, “bridging boundaries” means studying organisational adaption to the environment.			
<b>Project</b>	<b>Project 1, former Swedish Rescue Services Agency (now MSB)</b>		<b>Project 2, Swedish Armed Forces</b>	
<b>Time scale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2005-2007</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2008-2010</li> </ul>	
<b>Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil context (national and international collaboration during crisis management)</li> <li>• Empirical and literature studies</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Military context (international collaboration during military missions)</li> <li>• Empirical and literature studies</li> </ul>	
<b>Scientific articles</b>	<b>Paper I</b> Collaboration and leadership during the 2004 tsunami disaster, civilian crisis management	<b>Paper II</b> Spontaneous and planned links – collaboration and boundary spanning in civilian crisis management	<b>Paper III</b> Collaboration in a military context. Links must be flexible in order to gain confidence in collaboration	<b>Paper IV</b> Bureaucratic organisations’ adaption to demanding conditions
<b>Common thread</b>	<b>Discovers that link functions facilitate collaboration. Structure and freedom is necessary</b>	<b>Differentiates between various link functions (planned and spontaneous) and their tasks</b>	<b>Links require emotional management for collaboration</b>	<b>Favourable and unfavourable adaption – need for links and the creation of temporary organisations</b>
<b>Doctoral thesis in Sociology</b>				

Figure 1: Schematic description of the thesis project.

### 1.5. Included articles

Four articles have been included in this thesis in order to address the overarching aim. These are referred to as Paper I, II, III and IV and follow a chronological order in terms of publications and conclusions. Where one concludes, another picks up.

<b>Paper I:</b>	Alvinus, A., Danielsson, E. & Larsson, G. (2010). Structure versus Freedom: Leaders' Interaction Strategies during the 2004 Tsunami Disaster, <i>International Journal of Emergency Management</i> , Vol .7, Nos. 3/4, p.p. 304-322.
<b>Paper II:</b>	Alvinus, A., Danielsson, E. & Larsson, G. (2010) The Inadequacy of an Ordinary Organisation: Organisational Adaption to Crisis through Planned and Spontaneous Links, <i>International Journal of Organisational Behaviour</i> , Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 87-102.
<b>Paper III:</b>	Alvinus, A., Kylin, C., Starrin, B. & Larsson, G. (accepted for publication). Emotional smoothness and confidence building: Boundary spanners in a civil-military collaboration context. <i>Journal of Work, Emotion and Organisation</i> .
<b>Paper IV:</b>	Alvinus, A. (2012). The Inadequacy of Bureaucratic Organizations - organizational adaption through Boundary Spanning in a Civil-Military Context. <i>Res Militaris – European Journal of Military Studies</i> . Vol. 3, No. 1, Autumn, pp. 1-23.

*Figure 2: Included articles.*

## 2. Theoretical background to the studied organisations

*The purpose of this theoretical background is to explain which types of organisations are included in the studies of this thesis and to explain their ability to deal with their environment. Two different theoretical platforms form the basis here. Initially, I aim to describe the concept of bureaucracy as well as the theoretically positive and negative aspects of bureaucratic organisations which affect their ability to adapt to demanding conditions. Following from this, the next section concentrates on providing a contextual perspective and encompasses a systems- and contingency-theoretical view of the interplay between the organisation and its complex environment. More precisely, the question I ask here is whether or not uniformed organisations can be seen as bureaucratic and whether they have the ability to adapt to their environments. It is important to point out that the choice of the theories in this theoretical section stems from the empirical studies, where the problem is based in the ability of the bureaucracy to adapt under demanding conditions.*

### 2.1. The characteristics of bureaucracy

*In the beginning, there is organization (Ahrne, 1994:5).*

Organisations with varying life spans are a natural part of modern society (Andersson, 1994; Ahrne & Papakostas, 2002). Defining the concept of 'organisation' is a challenging task, considering the great number of existing conceptual definitions. Firstly, organisation can be defined as a group of people who have deliberately organised themselves in order to achieve one or several common objectives (Bohlman & Deal, 2005). What specifically characterises organisations is that they encompass a great deal of communication and interaction, internally as well as externally. In this study, I see the organisations I have included as bureaucratic.

Bureaucracy is a special structure of administrative character that emerged in medieval times and reached its full development in Western civilisation during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Weber (1978/1904) developed the theory which explains how bureaucracy has developed over time, distinguishing between different types of organisation depending on how the legitimate authority of each type of organisation is manifest. According to Weber there are three types: a) traditional organisations with traditional legitimate authority, b) charismatic movements dominated by emotions, and c) bureaucratic organisations dominated by rational-legal actions and the authority of objective-oriented

legitimacy (Brante, Andersen, & Korsnes, 1998; Andersen & Kaspersen, 2000; Giddens, 2007). In Weber's view, bureaucracy was a solution to the problems associated with administrative routines at the time. The following distinguishes bureaucracy from other forms of administration: task distribution among employees is fixed; there are rules prescribing how work tasks should be carried out; property and rights associated with a position are inherent to the position, not the person occupying it; employment is granted on the basis of technical qualifications; employment provides lifelong career progression creating security; the employee receives a fixed salary based on rank; the employee is protected against temporary coercion, which can only be exercised under certain pre-determined circumstances; the individual has the opportunity to make appeals and lodge complaints. Hierarchical ranking between positions is also part of the structure (Weber, 1978/1904; Brante, Andersen, & Korsnes, 1998; Abrahamsson, 2005) and needs to be explained in more detail.

Hierarchy is a characteristic of bureaucratic organisations but it is important to distinguish bureaucracy from hierarchy. Bureaucracy is really a form of leadership, while hierarchy is the structural form of an organisation. Hierarchical organisations are depicted as pyramids, with defined areas of responsibility and authority. The height of the pyramid indicates the degree of power and responsibility, while its width indicates the number of people at each level. Hierarchical order was inspired by the military and the church, as it was a way of organising a large number of people more effectively (Johnson, 1995). According to Johnson, hierarchies are appropriate when it is important to create equal opportunities for all and make prudent use of scarce resources. This is one reason why hierarchical structures still predominate today. Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford (1950) mentioned the emergence of rationality as part of bureaucracy, which Weber also discusses in his theories.

Rationality is based on reason and is a basic concept in humanistic sciences such as philosophy and sociology. Rationality is associated with concepts such as law abidance, standardisation, control, routines and clarity, and is attributed to people, organisations, patterns of thought and other collective entities. According to Weber, rationality aims partly to achieve goals and partly to master reality, and that this means performing one's tasks without any kind of emotional engagement. In his view, bureaucratic organisations are based on this de-humanising rationale.

*The bureaucratic dominion means...a dominion of formalistic impersonality; sine ira et studio, without hate or passion, and therefore also without love and enthusiasm...*  
(Weber, 1948:215)

In summary, the criticism of bureaucracy relates to positions, ranking, distribution of power, power struggles in relation to titles, influence and rewards, slow decision-making and managerial levels which are not in daily contact with their subordinates several levels further down, as well as too much inward rather than outward focus.

## **2.2. The dysfunctionality of bureaucracy**

There are, however, both classical and modern researchers who highlight the positive aspects of bureaucratic and rational organisations. As Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick, & Kerr (1995) conclude, bureaucratic and hierarchical organisations are effective societal tools for getting things done, notwithstanding the criticism.

Bureaucracy is regarded by many to be inflexible, and incapable of dealing with chaos in the environment that occurs from time to time. In everyday life, bureaucracy has become a swear word for the activities of the authorities which cause direct inconvenience and frustration to individuals.

Merton (1957) highlighted the dysfunctionality of bureaucracy in the sense that the rules of an organisation can be directly counter-productive: too much focus on *how* detracts from *what*. Other critics, for example, Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford (1950), asserted that the march of rationality and bureaucratic method of organisation has created scope for highly impersonal and also inhumane acts, such as the war crimes of WWII. This same theory drives the work of Bauman (1991). Less extreme than Adorno et al. and Bauman but a critic nonetheless is Von Mises (1944), who asserts that bureaucracy completely kills creativity and the ability to take initiative in its members. The image of the prim bureaucrat is that he or she only does what is absolutely adequate and nothing else creative. Crozier (1964) directs his criticism of bureaucratic organisations inwards, stating that they are incapable of adapting to external circumstances because inner conflicts and power struggles preoccupy. The perception of how meaningful work tasks are in a bureaucratic organisation is strongly influenced by how much the individuals focus on means and regulations rather than the chief objective of the organisation's activities.

Some organisational studies criticise bureaucracies for being inefficient, pointing out that they are less functional, ineffective and unwieldy when fast action must be taken (Lanzara, 1983). In the articles 'Bureaucracy meets catastrophe' (examining the 2004 tsunami catastrophe and Hurricane Katrina, Takeda & Helms, 2006ab) a long list of reasons are given for why bureaucratic organisations in particular are not adaptable to crises in their environment. Researchers state the following reasons in both studies: "Like in the Tsunami disaster, the reports from Hurricane Katrina highlight the key problems of bureaucratic management including slow decision-making, inability to absorb and process outside information, and escalation of commitment to failed courses of action" (see Takeda & Helms, 2006ab). More general criticism concerns suffocating, time-consuming and unnecessary routines, formalism, slowness and a lack of flexibility, which can hamper effectiveness in a dynamic environment. More recent research and organisational theories criticise the bureaucratic order, even Weber himself warning about the regulation-bound and controlling nature of the 'iron cage of bureaucracy' in which people could become trapped (Weber, 1978/1904).

### **2.3. In praise of bureaucracy**

Bureaucracy in its purest form is completely impartial and free from prejudice (Weber, 1978/1904). This form works best in managing standardised routines with predictable results, and is conditional on a stable unchanging environment surrounding the organisation.

Du Gay (2000) defends bureaucracy in his book, *In praise of Bureaucracy*. In his view, bureaucratic work places actually create security and stability, something that those internal and external to the organisation value. Bureaucracy is a "many-sided, evolving diversified organizational device" (Du Gay, 2005:5). Bureaucracies can be "something of an expert", as found when the public administration in Britain, "in the aftermath of the Second World War, under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, succeeded to establish the National Health Service" (Ibid., p. 4). It could therefore be argued that the shortcomings found in earlier studies could in some aspects be due to lack of clear boundaries, responsibility and authority, i.e. aspects of a bureaucracy. Goodsell (in Du Gay, 2005) claims that bureaucracy has the ability to fulfil two main functions of governance: rules and response. He argues that bureaucracy is the same as being an accountable authority. For many years, researchers have predicted the death of bureaucratic and hierarchical organization (Bennis, 1965)

but as long as hierarchies have these roots in everyday life they will have immense staying power.

#### **2.4. Systems theory and the contingency perspective**

Systems theory had its origins in biology, and only started to develop as a field in the 1920s. It gained a foothold in the natural sciences (biology) and later also in social science. The main idea of systems theory is that there is in reality no cause and effect, instead one must think holistically – in context. This idea has been further applied to organisational studies, with focus on the relationship with the environment. All relationships, between organisations, individuals and the environment are, in fact, circular, not linear. Neither are there any absolute truths, and everything affects everything else all of the time (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1967). Abrahamsson (1975) is of the view that advocates of system theory are not sufficiently self-critical, that the theory is too general and that it is based on an unrealistic view of harmony between parts and ignores power and conflicts. Arbnor & Bjerke (1977) observe that the criticism most commonly directed at the systems way of thinking is that you ‘can’t see the forest for all the trees’ – a concept that tries to encompass everything can only be an empty one.

An important fundamental assumption of contingency is that there is no best method of organisation and that different methods can be effective in different situations (Woodward, 1965; Galbraith, 1973). Another fundamental assumption is that managing uncertainty is one problem that all organisations must face. Moreover, it can be said that there are different points of emphasis in an organisation’s approach to its environment, based on its organisational shape, its immediate environment and the way in which adaptation is to take place. In essence, contingency theory, as it is known, is about uncertainty. And labelling contingency as the contextual perspective becomes most relevant in this context, the need for a situational or contingency view of organisation and management having been highlighted by early organisational studies from the USA and Great Britain. Contingency theory’s points of departure are three important determinants: complexity, uncertainty, and diversity. These aspects are important for all organisations to manage in order to perform the tasks they need to (Dessler, 1976). Being able to respond to the variation of different factors in the environment without actually having direct influence or complete control of them is at the core of this school of thought. Coined as a concept by Lawrence & Lorsch (1967), contingency theory is linked to systems theory

because both bring attention to the environment around the organisation and the interaction between them. Contingency theory is, however, more tangible than systems theory, the difference between them lying in contingency theory's clearer focus on external factors – in that these change without individual actors being able to influence them, elicit variable reactions, and cannot be explained by general laws of nature which govern the dynamics of a social system.

A common denominator among systems theory and the contingency perspective is their criticism of earlier studies of bureaucratic organisation, which considered bureaucracy to be closed in relation to its environment. They especially criticise the school of bureaucracy for its view of humans as a wheel in the bureaucratic machinery. Nevertheless, systems theory gets similar criticism for ignoring the significance of human actions (Silverman, 1970), which later organisational theories consider very important to the life of the organisation. Since the role of people has now been acknowledged as much more important, this should have been considered in systems theory – a theory of systems in which people outside of organisations and the environment are included and interact with one another.

In this thesis I will discuss the perspective of the individual, which is important in combination with bureaucracy and the systems theory school of thought. Besides the individual perspective, why are systems theory and contingency relevant here? If an organisation succeeds in its adaption to factors in the environment, how do we know that this adaption equates to effectiveness and success? What element of the actual adaption makes an organisation effective? This was also a question posed by Morse & Lorsch (1970). Scott (1987) follows a similar line of criticism and questions to what degree adaption to the environment occurs. Such questions are difficult to answer as there is no empirical evidence for how adaption takes place. No-one has operationalised or identified the concept of adaption and especially not in relation to the organisation's efficiency (Abrahamsson & Andersen, 2000/2005). My ambition is to understand organisational adaption from an individual perspective.

The purpose of this first chapter has been to present the characteristics of bureaucracy, i.e. its advantages and disadvantages, due to the nature of the organisations studied in this thesis. Whether or not uniformed organisations can be seen as bureaucratic is a question I have tried to answer through my selection of theories. Another question is whether or not these organisations

can adapt to their environments. The main criticism of bureaucracies has been that they cannot adapt to uncertain conditions. I therefore chose systems theory and contingency to highlight the concept of organisational adaption in general, believing this to be particularly important when uniformed organisations operate in demanding contexts.

### **3. Individual impact on organisational adaption**

*This section aims to describe the role of the individual in the organisational adaption process. Starting with bureaucratic organisations, this role will be examined in relation to boundary spanning, after which the role of boundary spanners will be defined. Finally, we will look at what individuals do in order to adapt the organisation to the environment and what demands they may have to deal with in their role as boundary spanners, the latter discussion resting on a theoretical and empirical basis.*

#### **3.1. Individuals in bureaucratic organisations**

Bureaucratic organisations tend to survive while other types of organisation do not, their hierarchical structure appearing to be one contributing factor to their survival. Even other types of organizations, such as networks tend to be hierarchically structured, gaining a more informal weight which is not always seen as positive from the perspective of equality (Forsberg & Lindgren, 2010). Whatever the organisational structure, however, it is the individuals within the organisation who are of greatest significance to its function and efficiency. According to Holmblad Brunsson (2002), individuals in bureaucratic organisations benefit from a number of advantageous conditions. These individuals or organisational members have largely accepted the order of things and the relationship between managers and staff, and have also agreed to be controlled through regulations and procedures. To a degree, they share the same goal in that they work alongside each other for a length of time and learn to trust one another. The people working for the organisation must like its activities and the directors must at least believe that they can control their subordinates. At the same time, the subordinates are obliged to fulfil work tasks that they may sometimes dislike (Holmblad Brunsson, 2002). This reasoning may explain not only the individual's organisational belonging but also his or her loyalty to the organisation.

Nevertheless, individuals have a great ability to put a personal stamp on work tasks and other organisational actions. They become, in Ahrne's terms, 'organisational centaurs' – half human, half organisation (Ahrne, 1993). The idea of the organisational centaur conveys the fact that organisations are not homogenous actors and indeed cannot act at all, as only individuals have that ability (Ahrne, 1993; Johansson, 1997). Ahrne (1993) further maintains that when an individual acts on behalf of an organisation, it is still the person who brings something of him or her self in each act, as illustrated below:

*When organisations do something, it is always the individuals who act. However, they do not primarily act on the basis of their own impulse but on behalf of the organisation. Their actions are not their own but those of the organisation. However, since people are still acting with their own experiences and thoughts there is always tension between the actions of the organisation and the human actor. Organisational action is a social hybrid. The actor is a human individual but the action is organisational. One can talk of organisational centaurs: part human – part organisation (Ahrne, 1993:63).*

A similar discussion has been led by Johansson (1997). In his opinion, one can view an organisation as an actor but one consequence of doing this is that the actual actor, i.e. the individual, is left in the shadows. Organisational members not only act as organisational representatives but also as separate individuals with their own feelings and characteristics. Since organisational studies do not specifically discuss the individual, they do not get to grips with the details of the interactional form or the content of the relationships (Ahrne, 1993; Johansson, 1997). Against this backdrop I would like to develop the idea of which type of organisational member is most like an organisational centaur, and by this I mean boundary spanners.

### **3.2. Definition of boundary spanners**

Individuals who are in a position to traverse boundaries can stretch an organisation's boundaries in different ways, making them more flexible and fluid (Kochan, 1975; Adams, 1976; Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Williams, 2002). There are different concepts assigned to the different roles, many of these sometimes ascribed to people who manage across boundaries, for example, *networker, broker, collaborator, cupid, civic entrepreneur, boundroid, sparkplug, collabronaut* and *boundary spanner* (Thompson, 1967). Another example of a boundary spanner is the '*street-level bureaucrat*' (Lipsky, 1980), who operates at the edge of the organisation and is in direct contact with the environment. Much of this is described in social services, where staff are in direct contact with clients and customers (Johansson, 1997). A third and fourth type are the spontaneous volunteers (Johansson, 2009) and spontaneous links (Alvinus et al. 2010b) which sometimes do not even belong to an organisation but emerge directly from the environment when the need arises, thus both facilitating organisational efficiency and making life more difficult for it at the same time. A fifth type is 'the spider in the web'. In the book, *Följarskap* (Followership), Monö (2010) has described 'the spider in the web', a person working as an organisational link between, for example, the members of a team. These

individuals are similar to boundary spanners in that they have an ability to facilitate collaboration between others.

Boundary spanners represent the organisation and operate at its boundaries in relation to actors in the world around it (Johansson, 2009). The organisation's interaction with its environment can be successful to a larger or lesser degree; as previously stated from an empirical and theoretical perspective, such interaction is determined in the borderland between the environment and the organisation, where individuals also operate (Adams, 1976; Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Johansson, 2009). Williams (2002) describes boundary spanner roles such as health-promotion managers, anti-poverty officers, community safety co-ordinators and the like. Within the very definition of the word 'boundary spanner', the role has freedom of movement over designated boundaries (Adams, 1976). Mintzberg (1979) discusses liaison positions and comments thus:

*When a considerable amount of contact is necessary to coordinate the work of two units, a liaison position may be formally established to route the communication directly, bypassing the vertical channels. The position carries no formal authority, but because the incumbent serves at the crossroads of communication channels, he emerges as an organizational nerve center with considerable informal power (Mintzberg, 1979:162).*

In order to act on behalf of the organisation, boundary spanners must be authorised to do so and be accepted and trusted by their own organisation (Alvnius, 2010b). Aldrich and Herker (1977) are of the opinion that boundary spanners have two main tasks or functions. One is managing information going to and from the organisation, and the other is representation. The latter is a kind of an external embodiment of the organisation, which can occur through negotiations or collaboration, for example. In terms of information management, it may concern filtering information in both an advantageous and disadvantageous way (Adams, 1976; Aldrich and Herker, 1977, Williams, 2002; Kapucu, 2005). Hoskins and Morley (1991) see boundary spanners as functions that facilitate the mobilisation of the right resources and competence. Ebers (1997) defines boundary spanners as links who assist the flow of resources and manage uncertainty in complex environments in and outside of the organisation. By being a key actor, boundary spanners manage the information asymmetry that can occur between parties. The right kind of information management assisted by boundary spanners facilitates the work of the organisation in achieving its own goals and visions. Boundary spanners, in their

purest sense, may also serve as conflict dissipaters and go-betweens, but also as innovators and ideas men, as they have a better operational picture of what is going on outside the organisation's boundaries (Dodgson, 1994; Ahuja, 2000). Challis, Fuller, & Henwood, (1988) and Leadbeater & Goss, (1998) discuss the ability of boundary spanners to be flexible, creative and employ lateral thinking, as well as have the courage to break rules if need be (Leadbeater and Goss, 1998).

Boundary Spanners are unique in that they are placed and operate in the borderland between the environment and the organisation, especially when the latter absorbs uncertainty from the environment. This should also apply in crisis management and military situations. Ancona & Caldwell (1988) add to this by pointing out that the combination of high interdependency, high uncertainty, and multiple forms of interdependence with multiple groups especially ask for boundary spanning activities. Given the great similarity of the above characteristics with military operations and disaster management, it may well be that boundary spanning is a key enabler to achieving successful results.

### **3.3. The process of organisational adaption through the individual**

A number of aspects that are included in the process of organisational adaption have been identified. These pertain to individual actions but also to the conditions individuals must reconcile themselves with in order for adaption to take place. These aspects are: 1) organisational demands and control of the individual, 2) demands on the individual's ability to span organisational boundaries, 3) the task of boundary spanning – collaboration, 4) using soft and hard power as a collaborative tool, 5) improvisation as adaption and improvising roles, 6) emotional boundary spanning – an organisational adaption.

#### **3.3.1. *Organisational demands and control of the individual***

In regard to uniformed organisations, the relationship between bureaucracy and the individual is very clear. Weibull (2003) and Soeters (2000) agree that military organisations are 'greedy institutions', and demand a great deal from their organisational members, who are trained, practised, educated and specially selected to execute the activities of the organisation. Their symbols attest to rank, grade and position, i.e. their place in the organisation. The sense of fellowship is very specific, pervasive, and in certain cases male-dominated (Soeters, 2000; Weibull, 2003; Kylin, 2012; Weibull, 2012). Paramedic care

organisations, however, have more equal gender distribution than other uniformed organisations.

Even in uniformed organisations it is common for organisational members to operate “at the boundary of the organisation”. The individuals who do so tend not to be in leadership positions, although it is possible. Nevertheless, those who are in leadership positions also have a kind of boundary-spanning, collaborative role (see the descriptions of informants in the empirical articles). Whether they are leaders or not, boundary spanners can be seen as a useful tool in the leadership of their home organisation, their role extending the arm of leadership out into the field, outside the organisation’s boundaries. Their ability to obtain an operational picture of the environment can be very advantageous and save a great deal of time, as I make mention of in all the empirical studies supporting this thesis.

There are, however, some negative aspects of this, for example, when the operational picture communicated upwards is untrue, misleading, too extensive or when it is not taken seriously on the part of the organisation (Alvinus, Danielsson, & Larsson, 2010b). In other, unfavourable situations, boundary spanners become obstacles, and here it is a question of control and evaluating the efforts of the links or boundary spanners. Ahrne (1993) discusses the issue of what happens when organisational members operate outside the organisation’s boundaries or out of sight of other members. This discussion stems from Lipsky (1980), Johansson, (1997) and the concept of street-level bureaucrats who have contact with clients. The issue of control becomes even clearer if links act some distance from the organisation, which is the case for military personnel on international missions. While those who act from a distance are naturally bound by predetermined organisational routines and regulations, as human actors they will always act as half organisation, half individual. This is highlighted as an explanation for the organisation’s vulnerability, especially when organisational members’ feelings and intentions are not in line with the organisation’s vision. From an organisational perspective, this human factor could be a ‘spanner in the works’ (Ahrne 1993:73). Informal contacts may have value but if they become an objective in themselves, the survival of the organisation may be jeopardized. Used in the right way, the ‘human factor’ can be favourable for the organisation’s adaption to its environment, and especially in demanding conditions. In uniformed

organisations, the task is of such a character that demands on an individual's loyalty and performance on behalf of the organisation are very stringent.

For example, in the military, its culture and sense of fellowship are very strong (Weibull, 2003, Soeters, 2000). Individuals share "blood, sweat and tears", giving them a strong social identity which makes them part of a family (Kylin, 2012). Any mistakes they make may be of a life-threatening nature and may destroy trust in the individual, in leadership (Fors Brandebo & Larsson, 2012), the organisation, and ultimately, the credibility of the nation (Alvinus, Kylin, Starrin, & Larsson, 2011). In short, tolerance of 'mistakes' in the military is less than it would be on the civilian employment market, due to its right to use weapons and violence. For this reason, the members of uniformed organisations are trained, practised and specially selected to be able to manage such difficult tasks.

### ***3.3.2. Individuals' abilities to bridge organisational boundaries***

Boundary spanners in uniformed organisations do not merely employ weapons, they must have an ability to persuade without needing to use violence. Earlier research has focused on the need for boundary spanners in ordinary organisations within public sector (Friend, Power, & Yewlett, 1974; Webb, 1991; Degeling, 1995) in terms of their skills, competencies and behaviour, such boundary spanners being networkers, cultural brokers or policy entrepreneurs or even leaders (Challis, Fuller, & Henwood, 1988; Trevillion, 1991; Luke, 1998; Williams, 2002). To manage their role as boundary spanners they need to be personable, respectful, reliable, tolerant, diplomatic, caring and committed. Fairthlough (1994) writes, for example, that diplomacy, tact, dispassionate analysis, passionate sincerity and scrupulous honesty are essential traits – "the boundary spanner needs an impossible string of virtues". Other researchers consider collaborative values to be characterized by honesty, commitment and reliability (Beresford & Trevillion, 1995; Williams, 2002).

The empirical data in this thesis highlights that a need for boundary spanners exists regardless of context – whether international military operations or civilian disaster management (Alvinus et al. 2010ab; Alvinus, Kylin, Starrin & Larsson, forthcoming; Alvinus, 2012). Their ability to quickly form an impression of the operational picture at the scene (far away from their home organisation), convey information for better decision-making and communicate

between organisations which speak ‘different’ organisational languages has led to a more favourable result in all the studied cases.

### ***3.3.3. The task of spanning boundaries – collaboration***

The concept of collaboration is commonly found in the terminology of public authority and means collectively achieving common goals (Danielsson, Johansson, & Eliasson, 2011). This is seen to be very important in dealing with demanding conditions as it is rarely known when events may arise which demand coordinated measures with collaboration as a tool (Perrow, 1999; Hart, Heyse, & Boin, 2002). Collaboration is a concept associated with rationality, efficiency and taking responsibility (Morrison, 1996) and can promote trust in one’s own organisation. In public authority terms (bureaucratic organisations), collaboration is defined as the dialogue which occurs between independent, free-standing and sideline community actors in order to achieve common goals (Försvarsdepartementet, SOU 2007:31). Danielsson, Johansson, & Eliasson (2011) describe different formations of the collaboration concept. It can be horizontal, vertical, formal and informal. The definition of vertical collaboration is that it occurs in the relation between superiors and subordinates, while horizontal collaboration occurs between two equal partners. Formal collaboration builds on things like instructions, regulations and agreements which shape the operations of each partner, while informal collaboration may be of different kinds and occur spontaneously.

The task of the uniformed organisations, for example, the Swedish Armed Forces has increasingly come to be characterised by a need to cooperate with different actors, such as other military organisations in connection with multinational operations. An increased need for collaboration with civilian individuals and organisations is also apparent. Typical examples in regard to international missions may be collaboration with individuals in Swedish governmental office, different organisational representatives in the mission host country, or with voluntary organisations etc. Not uncommonly, local actors in the host country (e.g. chiefs of police), who are seen by Swedish officers as corrupted, are the very parties with whom they collaborate (Alvinus, 2012). The main point of all empirical studies is that one must put on a good face and collaborate in stressful situations where much is at stake. For boundary spanners, this is an enormous challenge as collaboration does not take place on equal terms with partners of a similar background. In fact, the very opposite is often true, with asymmetrical relationships requiring a balancing act between

many different aspects, for example, the desire for structure or improvisation. For the collaboration to be successful, the boundary spanners must contribute in different ways in order to create a sense of symmetry between partners – an illusion that collaboration is being carried out on equal terms. This can be explained in terms of hard and soft power.

### ***3.3.4. Using soft and hard power as a collaborative tool***

In his book, *The Powers to Lead*, Nye analyses the world power position of the USA, coining the conceptual pair of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power. Nye (2008) defines the concept of power as something used in order to get others to do what you personally wish to achieve. To succeed in this, there are three different approaches: through force and threat, through various kinds of reward systems, but also through attraction and cooperation. Hard power refers to the first two approaches, the objectives of which are to change other people’s position. The police and the military, who have a mandate to use violence, utilise hard power in order to effect immediate change, for example, the behaviour of an individual. Soft power refers to the third approach of attraction and cooperation. One fitting definition of this might be the Barry White song title, ‘*Your sweetness is my weakness*’. Attraction and seduction is a means of power in itself in changing someone else’s behaviour. Soft power is based on the dynamic between three base pillars: emotional intelligence (the ability to handle one’s own emotions and that of others), communication (rhetorical ability) and vision (an idea inspiring a mutual goal). According to Nye (2008) a combination of hard and soft power – so-called ‘smart’ power – is the best combination, employing different degrees of the different approaches depending on context and situation. Some situations require more hard power than soft, and vice versa. For a combination to be successful, Nye considers contextual intelligence to be necessary. Contextual intelligence is the ability to understand different environments and thus choose those strategies which best suit the specific environment.

### ***3.3.5. Improvisation as adaption and improvised roles***

Jackall’s (1988) study of morals and ethics in bureaucracies points out that organisational members at both leadership and collegial levels depart from the prescribed regulations – no-one blindly follows all the rules. In my empirical studies this manifests itself as a need for freedom in a crisis management situation, and is considered essential in order for lives to be saved. Whether to stick rigidly to the rules and endanger life or break the rules to save it has been

a relevant discussion but has become more topical in several specific contexts such as health and care services, but also crisis management in a military context (Jackall, 1988; Nilsson, 2011). In the quote below, Tierney illustrates his view of improvisation in the individuals who have knowledge about an organisation's resources and the conditions in which it operates.

*Organizational improvisation ... Research on jazz musicians shows that people don't just pull stuff out of the air when they're improvising. These are people with an extremely wide knowledge of musical genres. They have always practiced and practiced and practiced. Similarly, improvising involves a deep understanding of the resources you have at hand in your community (Tierney, 2012).*

Organisational adaption to the environment may occur through improvisation and freedom of action, as evident from empirical studies in this thesis. Many sociologists, and particularly from the Delaware Disaster Research Center, point to the need for adaption through improvisation to varying degrees. They name four different types of disaster response, depending on how much planning and preparation is required. One of the four is described as *emergent*, meaning it requires a high degree of improvisation (calculated to be 13%), (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977; Lovegren Bosworth & Kreps, 2007). The other three are 'established', 'expanding' and 'extending'. Even though well-planned initiatives dominate in their studies, these researchers are of the view that initiatives that require a great deal of improvisation also require examination (Lovegren Bosworth & Kreps, 2007).

From a practical point of view, there is no opportunity to optimally prepare for dealing with external uncertainty, although Lovegren Bosworth & Kreps emphasise that flexibility is to be preferred compared to command and control. Improvisation is a significant feature of every disaster. Tierney (2002) has argued that if an event does not require improvisation, it is probably not a disaster. However, it is important to emphasise not just improvisation in itself but also improvised roles. As Lovegren Bosworth & Kreps point out: "Capturing individual responses within and among organizations, however, requires focused research on how individual roles are enacted," (Lovegren Bosworth & Kreps, 2007, s. 308). They also found that role improvisation is more likely to occur in extending and emergent organised responses (Lovegren Bosworth & Kreps, 2007, s. 309). Further study of the roles that may arise during crisis management is also advocated and there is emphasis of the fact

that regardless of whether an initiative is planned or not, improvised roles will always arise and to varying degrees. This brings us to a discussion of the role of boundary spanners in demanding contexts.

Empirical data indicates that regardless of whether the context is civilian crisis management or military service, boundary spanners not only have the opportunity to improvise themselves but also to come into direct contact with improvised roles that arise in the environment, for example, spontaneous links (Alvinus, Danielsson & Larsson, 2010b) and spontaneous volunteers (see Danielsson, Johansson, & Eliasson, 2011). Johansson explains this as the boundary spanners' interaction taking place with other boundary spanners, as representatives of other organisations (Johansson 1997). Nevertheless, some of the communication taking place in the borderland between the environment and the organisation occurs with individuals who do not represent any organisation whatsoever, meaning that spontaneous links can be of the kind that have absolutely no organisational belonging but possess the skills that may be helpful on that specific occasion in the management of a particular crisis. Further, Johansson states that the organisational member is a boundary spanner whereas there is no corresponding term for the spontaneous equivalent. It is true that the term 'external actor' is sometimes used (Scott, 2003), but it is too broad in meaning and includes far too many different roles.

Johansson's concept of spontaneous volunteers as the individuals who assist at the scene of a disaster and his discussion of how they are viewed by involved organisations, for example, the rescue services and police (Johansson, 2009) is an important contribution to the definition of roles which occur spontaneously. In Paper II, spontaneous links are shown to encompass volunteers as well as other boundary spanners from other organisations. What makes them spontaneous links is their actions, which are improvised and adapted to the situation. They do not belong to any organisational plan. Spontaneous links can also arise at different stages, as contacts or resources associated with other boundary spanners, thus creating a network. Although these individuals can make a substantial contribution, there is a risk that, like 'cooks', too many spontaneous links 'spoil the broth'. A discussion of this matter is taken up in Paper II, but the most important point therein is that: "the empirical studies teach us that an organisation must learn to recognise spontaneous links and ensure they are accepted in order to be able to operate. Most interview data from these studies indicate that spontaneous links were

skilled and had resources which could have assisted operations but they were not taken seriously or could not be organised in a good way (Alvinius, Danielsson & Larsson, 2010b). Since they appear to come into contact with formal boundary spanners who do have some kind of organisational belonging, it is precisely the latter, ordinary boundary spanners who need to be able to recognise, select, organise, employ and document these kind of improvised roles.

### **3.3.6. *Emotional boundary spanning***

We have so far focused on the necessary actions, roles and qualities that facilitate the adaption process in an organisation. A further dimension to the crisis management and military context can be gained from sociology of emotion, its application herein having been researched very little (Weibull, 2012). The purpose of this section is to present the significance of emotions in the boundary spanner context, and to discuss the opportunities for boundary spanners to use emotions in order to attain and maintain confidence in themselves and the organisation they represent.

In recent years, emotions have gained a special place in organisational research. Previously, emotions were seen as belonging to family life, and everything else was ruled by rationality (Barbalet, 2001) Now it is accepted that even organisations (meaning the organisational members within them) “have feelings” (Albrow, 1992) they can be of different kinds and be played out in emotional arenas (Fineman, 1993/2003). Fineman is one sociologist who has attempted to unite organisations and emotions and is of the view that the emotional life of organisational members is played out in the emotional arenas that exist – in the same way as in everyday family life. All feelings arise and are caused by the social activities that occur within organisational boundaries. According to Fineman (1993/2006) emotions in an organisation can be studied in three different ways, depending on how one sees them. Emotions linked to rationality can be seen as ‘grit in the machinery’, as lubricant for rationality or as something in-between: the interweaving of rationality and cognitions without any one dominating (Fineman, 1993/2006).

In her studies of military personnel, Weibull (2012) has concluded that emotions are not discussed in military organisations, although they exist to a high degree, are managed and are really significant. Wettergren, (2005) states that emotions and rationality, or ‘sense and sensibility’ stand in relation to one

another and should therefore be the focus of modern sociological analyses. From that perspective, one should demonstrate that emotions are not dramatic but constitute a manageable entity, and are not separate from human action – they are integral to the action itself. Actions cannot be described as only rational or emotional – an idea that fits hand in glove with Ahrne's (1993) concept of the organisational centaurs, whose actions are both of the organisation and characterised by the individual.

Feelings can also be commercialised, as Arlie Hochschild discusses in relation to work and employers. Concepts such as *emotional labour* and *feeling rules* have allowed Hochschild to 'pull' studies of emotion away from psychologists, their traditional guardians and give them a sociological perspective (Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Fineman, 1993/2006). Hochschild's work has centred on emotional labour and emotion management (emotion work) in employment. For the individual, emotion management may have to do either with other employees in the organisation or external clients who come into contact with them. Her studies also show how emotions become objects of control and training on the part of the employer so that the 'right' feeling can be shown and elicited in the customer (Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Tracy, 2000). In this perspective, emotional labour is a consequence of increased bureaucratic regulation (Macon, 2012) of what was once the most private sphere of an individual life with personal feelings. This is accomplished through the enforcement of two slightly different types of emotional labour rules: display rules regarding what is and is not appropriate to demonstrate in a given situation and feeling rules regarding the appropriateness of actual emotions felt by individuals, whether or not they are displayed (Hochschild 1983/2003).

Hochschild points to three important aspects characterising emotional labour:

- 1) The occurrence of face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact between organisational members and clients/customers
- 2) Organisational members should elicit an emotional state in the customer and in themselves
- 3) The employer controls emotion work through training and monitoring (Hochschild, 1983/2003).

Emotion management or emotion work is about managing feelings that are not expected in a given situation, for example, 'stifling' laughter or 'keeping

back' the tears. Further, Putnam & Mumby (1993) discuss work emotions that colleagues renegotiate with one another and which also affect their experience of their work, or their perception of colleagues as a 'family' (Kylin, 2012). Bolton (2005) and Bolton & Boyd (2003) present a taxonomy of four different emotion management strategies: Pecuniary, Prescriptive, Presentational and Philanthropic. Each state prescribes different pre-actions, feeling rules, displays and consequences. The pecuniary state is similar to the negative state of Hochschild's (Hochschild, 1983/2003) definition of emotional labour, with consequences such as 'alienation', 'conflict', and 'resistance' (Bolton, 2003, 19). The other two presentational and philanthropic states align with the positive state of emotional labour, with consequences such as 'stability' and 'satisfaction' and giving "the little extra" (Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Bolton, 2005, 19). The last state, the prescriptive state, which emerges from 'professional' or 'organisational' feeling rules, aligns with both negative and positive states or outcomes, with consequences such as 'contradiction' and the formation of 'professional identity' (Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Bolton, 2005; Grey & Smith, 2009).

Morris & Feldman (1997) have developed Hochschild's theory and assert it is important to study how lasting relationships are built with customers and what demands are made on these relationships depending on whether they are long or short-term. The longer a relationship lasts, the more preparation and planning is necessary, while brief meetings need only to be schematically structured or based on template 'scripts'. The message here is that relationships are based on different degrees of confidence.

In general terms, confidence and trust are important aspects of all human and social relationships and society would crumble without a general sense of trust (Simmel, 1900/1978). Confidence and trust appear to be important in inter-organisational collaboration and indeed in crisis management (Ödlund, 2007), where trust is identified as a success factor but also described as the time it takes to build lasting confidence and establish a network of contacts. Distrust and suspicion, i.e. the opposites of trust and confidence, are one of the chief obstacles to collaboration between organisations (Webb 1991). Trust can also be described as an organisational control mechanism with a great deal of influence – perhaps even more than a hierarchical structure (Sydow, 1998). Brehmer (2008) confirms the meaning of trust in complex operations. In his view, trust facilitates the functioning of a more or less decentralised system of

leadership. Gambetta (1988) states that trust facilitates cooperation and Miles & Snow (1992) maintain that it encourages an organisation's ability to adapt through transformation from hierarchy to network. The importance of trust in effective responses to crises is also claimed by Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer (1996), who say that "trust facilitates rapid formulation of ad-hoc work groups" (as cited by Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 394). Kramer (1999) concludes that trust enhances individuals' willingness to engage in various forms of spontaneous sociability, although in complex and often unexpected ways.

Bachmann, Knights, & Sydow (2001) refers to trust as another mechanism, the purpose of which is to manage uncertainty and complexity – at individual and organisational level. The connection between trust and organisation also applies conversely: organisation in itself is a way of enabling social relations in the long term, where results are more certain and possible to predict (Barbalet in Wettergren, Starrin, & Lindgren, 2008). The organisation's existence may thus make us less dependent on trust as a tool for realising goals. Trust and the organisation are co-dependent for their own existence.

Having confidence or trust in something has a downside, as it carries the risk of being disappointed, trust existing on the level of the individual. Since organisations as such cannot have relationships with each individual, it is the task of each one to make relationships manageable for the organisation (Johansson, 1997).

Being a boundary spanner is about creating and maintaining relationships. Through this relationship creation, boundary spanning becomes a form of emotional labour. By acting at the edge of the organisation, boundary spanners, especially those from uniformed organisations, are well-trained in what they should feel and how they should treat others in their environment – it is part of the job. When Hochschild says that one requirement of paid work is to elicit and manage emotions in others, this is referred to here in relation to confidence-building, as will now be further explained.

The empirical data in this thesis (Alvinus, Kylin, Starrin & Larsson, forthcoming) particularly highlights a deeper understanding of the processes of confidence-building and emotion management among military boundary spanners in a multinational civil-military operational context. The study shows

that boundary spanners strategically utilise a variety of emotion management strategies in order to fulfil the demands laid upon them by their collaborating counterparts in the hostile environment and by their own organisation. They do this in order to solve the task but confidence is very much based on what they do, say, their appearance, what they avoid saying and doing.

We have chosen to talk about emotion management strategies in terms of different types of smoothness: cultural, structural and smoothness in risky situations. The purpose of such smoothness is to build and maintain trust, avoid distrust and regain lost confidence. The emotion management perspective comes in when these different types of smoothness are processed between individuals in order to avoid feelings of embarrassment or cause someone to lose face, to uphold hierarchical structure – thereby preventing yourself from losing trust if you fail to follow the established hierarchical regulations; and to avoid and manage fear – the fear of making a fool of oneself or fear of risking life and limb. So, to achieve and maintain confidence one needs to employ all these types of smoothness, but on the basis of the situation's requirements. For the organisation, this ability to employ smoothness is important from an adaption perspective. What an individual does can affect the reputation of the organisation and its legitimacy in the short and long term.

## 4. Method

*The aim of this section is to outline my reasons for choosing the Grounded Theory Approach (GTA) and for highlighting its advantages and disadvantages. Further, I discuss in-depth the ethical approach and Grounded Theory Approach in relation to making a valuable discovery (in scientific terms known as serendipity or happy accident).*

### 4.1. Why I chose qualitative method

According to Bryman (2004) and Åsberg (2001) there is, however, a dilemma in the definition of qualitative and quantitative research. Bryman (2004) asserts that it is not entirely unproblematic to determine what the differences between these research types are and what are not. There are a number of reasons why it is difficult to separate qualitative and quantitative research. Bryman (2004), for example, mentions that it is incorrect to believe that quantitative data is not generated and collated in qualitative research – what makes the research qualitative is not an absence of numbers. Miles & Huberman (1994) assert that both words and numbers are necessary to understand our world. Allwood (2012) as well as Åsberg (2001) challenge the separation of qualitative and quantitative methods and advocate discussing research on the basis of the data (Allwood, 2012). This is also my point of departure, in choosing to start with the interview data and use inductive and explorative analyses. To proceed further with the data, another active choice was made, namely to employ Grounded Theory Approach.

The original research plan, as mentioned in the introduction, was of an explorative nature and did not require us to discover new knowledge in new contexts. We performed initial studies with Swedish informants who had dealt with the tsunami catastrophe, which they described as a “once in a lifetime” event. A Grounded Theory approach could productively address such ‘new’ experiences very well. By identifying gaps in the existing research, a voyage of discovery through the empirical data began.

### 4.2. “An open mind, not an empty head”

Grounded Theory is an interpretive qualitative research method originally conceived by two sociologists, Glaser and Strauss. In 1967, Glaser and Strauss published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. The book is a description of a qualitative approach to handling and interpreting data collected among hospital

staff who were caring for dying patients (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Since then, The Discovery of Grounded Theory has been reborn many times. Grounded Theory is visible in many organisational studies and also spread across a number of domains. It originates in sociology and is very common in psychology, educational studies and nursing. Grounded Theory may be defined as: *the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research* (Glaser & Strauss 1967:2). This method provides researchers with a unique tool for theoretical development and differs from other qualitative methods for two major reasons according to Pole & Lampard (2002): (1) it is “unencumbered by explicit expectations about what the research might find, or by personal beliefs and philosophies”, therefore allowing the researcher to make discoveries without *a priori* knowledge allowing “an open mind not an empty head” (Dey, 1999, Pole & Lampard, 2002, s. 206), and (2) “it is an approach that leaves itself open to charges of relativism” (Pole & Lampard 2002, s. 206), meaning that the findings and theoretical assumptions are not uniquely valid (Jones, Kriflik, & Zanko, 2005).

Other researchers using the same method are equally likely to derive empirically grounded explanations for other social processes which have equal substance in any given field of investigation: “the constant comparative method is not designed to guarantee that two analysts working independently with the same data will achieve the same results” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, s. 103). These two distinguishing principles of Grounded Theory render it an excellent tool for analysis of social phenomena, particularly when there is little known about the situation under investigation (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Martin & Taylor, 1986; Sarantakos, 2005). Grounded Theory takes a research approach, which is contrary to most of the more conventional research models (Figure 1). As Glaser says, “The best way to do GT is to just do it” (Glaser & Holton, 2004).

The ontology and epistemology adopted in this research accepts that knowledge is not static but is always emerging and transforming and is interpreted by both observer and participant. Meaning is conveyed through dialogue and action, and within dialogue and action understanding, experience and emotion are embedded; only through interaction and discourse can meaning be unlocked and conveyed to the observer. From this perspective, Grounded Theory provides a method which enables a researcher to adduce true meaning and understanding. Most of all, Grounded Theory allows researchers to get into the field, quickly acquire an empirically grounded understanding of

social phenomena and evaluate the phenomena without reliance on extant theory. The research allows theory to emerge through the inductive process of Grounded Theory.

### 4.3. Expected results, application and constant comparison

The tools for using Grounded Theory are theoretical selection, coding and constant comparison in the course of the process. The researcher writes down his or her own thoughts in memo form at the same time as performing the coding. Theoretical selection is made with a view to discovering categories and their qualities and demonstrating how their mutual relationships may be included in a theory. Coding data consists of open coding, which is the fundamental measure made on a descriptive level. Axial coding is the second stage, in which the researcher looks for a common denominator for these codes and tries to group them into categories. Selective coding is an abstraction of categories in which the researcher tries to find a central concept characterised by density and variation.

The interviews in this study were analysed to start with and supplemented with new ones as time went on. Further, all 71 interviews were analysed manually several times with the cut and past method until no more nuances of the same phenomenon could be found at this time.

According to Bryman (2001), the results one can expect to achieve using the GT method are as follows:

***Concepts** – labels for discernable phenomena and categories – representing real occurrences; qualities – these are the attributes or aspects of a category, and hypotheses – assumptions.*

***Theory** – substantive and general theory, the former relating to theory in an empirical situation, the other at a higher level of abstraction.*

Another important step has been the theory selection during the research process, which has meant delimiting the quantity of data and data retrieved at a later stage that had most significance for the core variable and its characteristics. I have employed constant comparison analysis, which is seen to be at the heart of the process. Once codes, categories and core variables are compared, theoretical patterns emerge which one can then try to match with existing literature and theories. The results of the empirical studies in this thesis have not only led to developing the concepts of planned and spontaneous links,

highlighting their connection to boundary spanners, they have also made visible the relationship between planned and spontaneous links and its association with trust. Initially, focus lay on civilian crises but as time went on and new projects were started, the research area widened to include the military context. All in all, one can see this thesis as a theoretical development that explains a certain phenomenon, i.e. how boundary spanners contribute to the adaption of uniformed organisations.

#### **4.4. Ethical approach**

In the following section I will present my approach to selection, data collection, reflections in regard to this, analysis of collated data, feedback to respondents and my thoughts on this research as a contribution to organisational studies. The researcher's approach is bound by ethical rules which are intended to protect the individuals serving as study objects. Four main ethical requirements exist (as issued by the Swedish Research Council, 2012): a) information – participants must be informed of what they are going to do, as well as the terms and conditions of their voluntary participation b) consent – this must be obtained from the participants, who are allowed to discontinue participation at any time c) confidentiality – individuals must remain anonymous and must also be given the opportunity to read the transcribed interviews and approve their use in further analysis, d) utilisation – parameters for how the results are used. The studies in this thesis adhere to these requirements, as explained in more detailed here next.

The greatest ethical challenge for me has been the selection of informants and data management in accordance with the requirements of the Swedish Research Council. This challenge involved attempting to provide the same information to all the informants in the introductory phase, collating all interview notes, and storing these, the recording devices and transcriptions appropriately. I transcribed most of the interviews myself but in some cases called on the assistance of extra staff, who were obliged to sign duty of confidentiality agreements. To ensure correct transcription, I listened to all the interviews. The informant selection process is more closely described below.

The introductory chapter mentions two research projects, this thesis being one product thereof. The first project focused on leadership and collaboration in situations that were perceived as 'new' for Sweden, for example, the tsunami catastrophe. This was an explorative study in which a Grounded Theory

approach was used. For the informant selection we started with as wide a group as possible, according to the guidelines for GT. Informants from civilian crisis management were selected on the basis of their experiences, gender, competence, education and organisational level. Experience from each event was a prerequisite but we tried to obtain a mix of female and male participants with various backgrounds and skills and representing different organisational levels.

By contacting the respective authorities we ascertained which individuals were suitable for interview and subsequently compiled a list. These were contacted by email and telephone in order to obtain consent and to arrange a time and place for interview. The interviews were carried out close to the time of the respective incidents, which meant they were recent memories. Data collection for the tsunami catastrophe and the sulphur spill in Helsingborg took place during the end phases of the actual events.

Interviews concerning the hostage drama were collated approximately one year after the incident occurred, while interviews executed in the military context were not as time focused and concerned experiences from international liaison tasks in general rather than one particular incident. In October 2007 I participated in a workshop on international service for military personnel, subsequently inviting workshop participants to be interviewed regarding liaison tasks. The participants were also asked to suggest other individuals who might be interesting for the study, and I soon received a number of emails from willing volunteers.

A total of 71 people were interviewed, 10 of which were women. This is not surprising since the organisations being studied are male-dominated workplaces. Although we aimed for an even distribution of male and female interview participants, experience of liaison and disaster management weighed more heavily than gender distribution. Moreover, in the field, there were simply fewer women than men managing the crises in each case. This was also true of the military context.

The respondents in the interview study were asked if they wanted to see the transcribed interviews and the compiled results. Of the 71, two wanted to take a closer look at the transcribed interviews and a large number wanted to see the compiled results. Many of these participated in workshops arranged by

the Swedish National Defence College and were able to learn of the results this way. Regarding the choice of GT method here, one might consider the use of only this method as inadequate for a thesis. It is worth defending, however, as the 71 interviews which form the empirical basis of this thesis have been subjected to a number of analyses over the years. Rich material such as this cannot only be analysed once. The first occasion prompted a literature search to learn more about the various phenomena, as well as eliciting new questions and facilitating several analyses of the same material. The constant comparison between empirical data and theory supports the choice of method and a complete extraction of the empirical data. How one is to move on from here will be discussed in the section, suggestions for future research.

As Glaser himself expresses it in his book, *Basics of Grounded Theory. Analysis vs. Forcing*, the sociological analysis must grow from the empirical material – the material must not be forced out of a specific predetermined framework of ideas. Approaching the collated data without prerequisites and analysing it from several perspectives enables this kind of discovery (Glaser, 1992).

Naturally, I have reflected on my own role and ethical considerations in the research process. I have pondered a great deal over whether, as a woman from a different background, I influenced the responses of my interviewees. I may have, but with hindsight I can say that the interviews I conducted over the telephone for practical reasons were productive but brief, while the face to face interviews tended to be very long in duration, sometimes up to three hours long. My experience was that the interviewees had a great deal to say and were glad to talk about their experiences in colourful detail. This made for an enjoyable and productive Grounded Theory analysis. In one interview, I noticed how the interviewee had tears in his eyes as he talked about his experiences of being a military observer. If the presence of a female researcher influenced the informant's willingness to show his feelings or not, I cannot say. However, there is research that highlights the relationship between the social position of researchers and the perspective on contributing to the prevailing knowledge. One example is the introduction of feminist theories which have questioned the prevailing view and resulted in a broader knowledge base. (Schiebinger, 1999). It is thus thanks to the inclusion of researchers from other social positions in the research field that wider knowledge is achieved, something that is called double vision (Zimmerman, 1991) or outsider-within

status (Collins, 1991:40). In relation to this thesis, my foreign background, gender and age, which differ from that of the informants, could be understood as contributing to a form of outsider-within status.

I conducted many of the interviews alone although some were conducted with other colleagues from the project at the beginning of my employment when I did not have much interview experience. Alongside experienced supervisors I learnt to listen actively, follow up with questions at the right juncture and be curious about the respondents. After this I felt secure in my role as interviewer. Further, I took an active part in transcribing many of the interviews, although not all of them. I made a habit of noting down my thoughts aside each interview if there was something in particular that struck me. One example was the interview with a liaison officer who had been despatched from the Swedish Armed Forces to work with the former SRSA (now MSB) and mentioned the word 'link'. He said, "My role was to be a link between different organisations." The picture of a link in a chain came to mind and I drew it, illustrating how he 'linked' two organisations together. This formed the basis for further discussion.

Finally, I would like to discuss the criticism of GT and reflect on how it could have affected the results. Even if it is difficult for GT advocates like myself to admit it, the method does have its limitations. Bryman (2001) and others mention a number of these: the codes and categories that we 'see' are coloured by our previous knowledge despite brave attempts to avoid preconceived ideas. Another point of criticism is that research applications must outline expected results and how these will be later utilised. In employing GT the researcher finds themselves in a sort of catch 22 situation in terms of research planning. Employing GT takes time, from transcription to finished script and there is no guarantee that the method will lead to a theory. The theories the researcher generates are substantive even though he or she is aiming to create general ones. And what is the real difference between concept and category? While Glaser (1967), Strauss and Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) neglect the role of the researcher in the generation of theory, Charmaz (2006) maintains that the researcher is of significance, as he or she belongs to the same reality (Bryman, 2001, Starrin, Larsson, Dahlgren, & Styrborn, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). Some researchers describe certain misunderstandings associated with GT such as actual inconsistencies in the method itself, semantic inconsistencies in the method, and inconsistencies due to the fact that ever

since the ontological bifurcation of the GT founding fathers, several versions of GT exist. Moreover, similar and some conflicting misconceptions exist because of “misreadings of seminal texts” (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634) and probably subsequent “miswritings” and “misteachings”. A tendency for researchers to have insufficient methodological training in qualitative research in general and GT in particular further leads to insufficient attention to process, especially when coaching PhD students, causing an inapt fit between research question, researcher and (type of) GT; and/or a combination of the above. But qualitative research is strongly context related and Suddaby (2006) reminds us to constantly remind ourselves that we “are only human and that what [we] observe is a function of both who [we] are and what [we] hope to see” (Suddaby, 2006, p. 635).

In terms of my own critical reflection on working with this thesis I can say this: I have had the advantage of being able to ‘play with the data’ for several years. To begin with, this could be a criticism of the first studies, for which, as a new researcher, I needed a lot of guidance in learning to see patterns in the data. This improved as time went on and more interviews were conducted. Further analyses of the same data and reading up on theory also improved my skills. Still, this was some years ago. Things can change over such a long period. The advance of social media in the global arena was not palpable when data collection took place but today it may well have impacted on data collection itself, the results, selection of informants etc. So, when ‘reality’ changes, there is an expectation that continued research will probe for further discoveries.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that the empirical studies of this thesis do not permit generalisations. The interview data is based on a limited number of informants during a limited time period which affects our understanding of the informants’ work duties and the organisation that they belong to. The selection of other methods could have contributed to yielding different results. A triangulation of, for example, phenomenology, discourse analysis and Grounded Theory would have given more depth and shades of meaning to the results, just as a questionnaire study would have contributed to a wider understanding of organisational adaption that occurs with the help of boundary spanners.

Continued research is important to gain more in-depth knowledge of the area, and to evaluate the generalizability of this study. In particular, further studies of the adaption factors of flexibility, structure, emotional smoothness and spontaneous links should be operationalised and studied deductively with the aid of a larger questionnaire study. It would be interesting to see the connection between these factors and successful/unsuccessful organisational adaption. A final suggestion would be to build on a gender perspective. Uniformed organisations are largely male-dominated, and it would be valuable to study the role of women in the organisational adaption process. On the other hand, it would also be interesting to study the form and expression of masculinity in regard to emotional smoothness. Previous studies have shown that women use more soft power strategies than men (Nye, 2004). However, this thesis highlights that soft power is very much utilised by male-dominated organisations, as shown in Paper II and III.

#### **4.5. Coding**

The coding process is described in the articles herein. In this section, I endeavour to give examples of my thoughts on coding in depth and from the top down. This is the opposite of the descriptions found in the articles. Let us take the word ‘experience’ for example. If I equate the word ‘experience’ with an overarching category, it will be built up with a number of codes pertaining to an individual’s resources in relation to various aspects such as life experience, work experience or experience of demanding conditions. These may further highlight previous experiences, desirable experiences, positive and negative aspects of experience and a lack of prior experience in certain areas. It is important to discern the nuances of experience on several levels.

The smallest component of the analysis is of course the codes, which are based on quotes (data). After analysing the data at its lowest level, the researcher may feel that the category can currently no longer be exemplified or defined in more ways than those described above for the collated interviews. Only time will tell whether more interviews are needed for collation, or whether one can be satisfied with the data thus far discovered. From the written memos it may possibly have been observed and noted that while favourable aspects of experience have been captured, asking questions might be necessary in order to capture negative aspects as well. Declaring the concept of ‘experience’ as an overarching category does not mean the analysis has come to an end. The fun starts when several overarching categories have been established and one can

see the relationships between them and what they say about the core variable itself, which is the ultimate aim of a Grounded Theory analysis.

#### **4.6. Serendipity – happy accident in the data analysis**

Discoveries made in the course of the research process are a fundamental prerequisite for success, whereby clarity of vision is a valuable quality to have, regardless of research area. Such discovery has been summarised in the special term, ‘serendipity’, meaning “happy accident”, as introduced to Sociology by Merton in his book, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1957). Merton, (1957) describes serendipity as an unexpected discovery that ought to be included in the scientific process in order to expand a theory or form new hypotheses. The significance of serendipity in the research process is openness to new and unforeseen results, i.e. openness to the potential of discovering more than was sought after. This unexpected discovery should then undergo scientific study in order to verify results. In a number of research projects, serendipity has caused a paradigm shift, for example when schooling in Human Relations replaced Scientific Management in organisational research. This stemmed from the discovery that humans were social creatures and not machines made for production (Rosengren & Arvidson, 2002).

I would say that my embarking on this thesis can well be attributed to a serendipitous discovery. During our study of leadership and collaboration under demanding conditions, the tsunami catastrophe being a particular focus at the time (see Paper I), it became apparent which challenges were important for leadership and collaboration on different levels. The concept of a ‘link’ also emerged. Links were individuals and roles which could facilitate collaboration. The very first step thus involved performing the initial data analysis, from which important concepts were distilled.

At the time we chose to examine all the collated data within the bounds of the same project, the ‘link’ concept being our point of departure. Upon closer follow-up research and re-analysis of the same data we found two different types of link: planned and spontaneous (Paper II). These have been given great attention, both theoretically and empirically, in the approach of this thesis. In keeping with GT guidelines, we turned to the literature and discovered an established concept for these links, namely ‘boundary spanners’. In this case, the empirical data led us to new theoretical fields, and there was also an

opportunity to continue with the concept of boundary spanners in another demanding context, namely that of the military.

Research on boundary spanners in the field of civilian crisis management and in military contexts was nevertheless sparse. This prompted further study of the concept in both contexts. The selection of informants in the military context was therefore determined by the definitions arising from Paper II regarding planned and spontaneous links, as well as the theoretical concept of boundary spanners. Individuals with liaison tasks were selected to participate in the study. Naturally, the selection was also guided by diverse experience, organisational level, branch of service and also gender. The latter was not easy to fulfil, which may have affected the results. Nevertheless, the following is of great significance for new empirical and theoretical discoveries. In the military context, it was discovered how boundary spanners actually handle their collaboration by employing emotions and emotion management to fulfil organisational tasks, and especially by being flexible in various ways. The concept of a 'link' was thus discovered in the process of ordinary research work and then developed and studied in order to distinguish between different types of link before finally seeing it in action – as an emotional game.

## 5. Summary of Scientific Papers

### 5.1. Paper I

Structure versus Freedom: Leaders' Interaction Strategies during the 2004 Tsunami Disaster.

*Authors:* Alvinus, A., Danielsson, E. & Larsson, G.

*Status:* Published in 2010. International Journal of Emergency Management, Vol. 7, Nos 3/4, p.p. 304-322.

*Author's contribution:* Main author, Aida Alvinus had responsibility for the gathering the data, the analyses, and the writing.

#### 5.1.1. *Background*

When disasters occur, large-scale rescue operations need to be coordinated and managed by independent authorities such as police departments, rescue services and emergency care at multiple levels of government. Rescue operations performed in foreign countries constitute a special case. The typical case in domestic disasters is that rescue teams arrive at the site first, and that higher management staffs are built up successively. When the disaster takes place abroad, a different sequence typically occurs. Firstly, there has to be acceptance at the political level, secondly, orders are given to the central governmental agencies, and thirdly, the field teams can deploy. Research is lacking on strategic and operational leadership in this kind of rescue operation, which primarily aims to assist people from one's own country rather than help the local population in another country, on another continent. Leadership under severe stress, such as during the initial phase of rescue operations in large-scale disasters, has attracted limited attention (Sjöberg, Wallenius, & Larsson, 2006). Most existing studies deal with post-operation support such as psychological debriefings or computer-based fire simulations. Moreover, the available research focuses mainly on military contexts that require direct face-to-face leadership within a smaller well-known group (Larsson, Johansson, Jansson, & Grönlund, 2001). There is a shortage of studies with simultaneous focus on strategic leadership at central levels and operational leadership in the field, where, at both levels, leadership is conducted with a right of command within one's own organization and with the possibility of collaboration only with actors from other organisations. Given this general dearth of leadership research, and of research relevant to rescue organizations that deploy specifically for an organisation in a foreign country in particular, we concluded

that a generative approach would be appropriate in order to enhance the understanding of the issue.

### **5.1.2.      *Aim***

The purpose of this study was to develop a theoretical understanding of leadership during a complex rescue operation following a major disaster (the 2004 tsunami) in a foreign country.

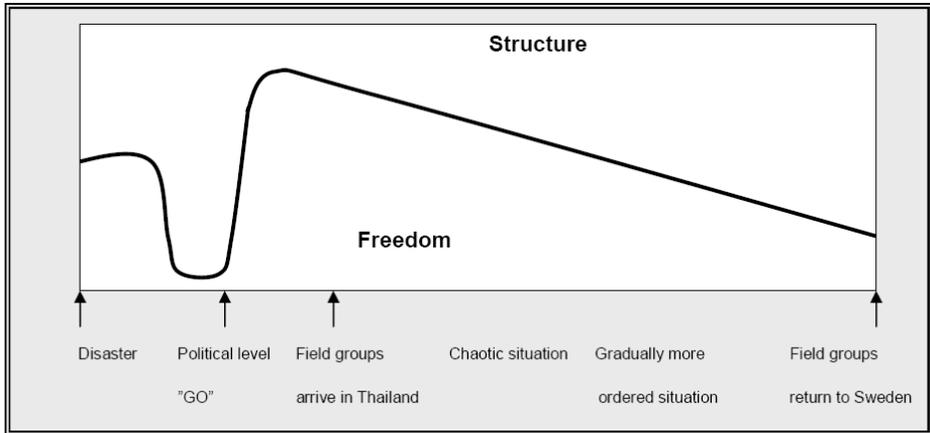
### **5.1.3.      *Method***

Following the guidelines of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the selection of participants was guided by a desire to find informants with a wide variety of experiences and occupational roles during the rescue operation. The organisations involved in this study are the Swedish Rescue Services Agency, SRSA, the Swedish Armed Forces and the National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden. Seventeen informants were interviewed on leadership in the emergency handling of the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia. The analysis followed a Grounded Theory approach.

### **5.1.4.      *Results***

A theoretical conceptualisation was developed which includes three superior categories: antecedent conditions, situational constraints and core aspects of leadership. The leadership of the rescue mission appeared to be contingent on conditions within each of the involved organisations which existed before the disaster. Important aspects consisted of three different types of resources: individual, organisational and material. The interpretation of informants' stories shows that these had an influence on the authorities' actions during the crisis and affected the outcome. This superior category consists of three different types of situational constraints: infrastructural/environmental aspects, professional duties and individual aspects. Within the last-mentioned superior category a core variable was identified: a balance between the need for structure and the need for freedom. Leaders who strive to create structure at the expense of freedom of action are less inclined to delegate and more likely to wear themselves out. Conversely, those who strive to create great freedom of action bypass many links in the organisational chain, thus 'short-circuiting' the organisation as a whole. The present case shows that managing contradictory needs for structure and freedom of action becomes easier when link functions and roles arise in the formal hierarchy during an emergency situation. Following

from this, we propose that boundary spanners or links–liaison functions and individuals are of great significance when restraining factors such as geographical distance, scope of disaster and lack of disaster experience are present.



*Figure 3:* Need for structure and freedom among central level leaders

Leadership was studied in three Swedish Government organisations. Each of those three organisations had headquarters in Sweden and the management of a rescue operation in the field in Thailand. A formal right of command existed within each organisation, while in the case of collaboration between them the formal right of command was missing. Leadership within and between organisations occurred directly (face-to-face) and indirectly (by subordinate leaders/managers).

## 5.2. Paper II

The Inadequacy of an Ordinary Organisation: Organisational Adaption to Crisis through Planned and Spontaneous Links.

*Authors:* Alvinus, A., Danielsson, E. & Larsson, G.

*Status:* Published in 2010, International Journal of Organisational Behaviour, pp. 87-102.

*Author's contribution:* Main author, Aida Alvinus had responsibility for the gathering the data, the analyses, and the writing.

### 5.2.1. Background

Emergency response organisations usually face the challenge of having a bureaucratic structure characterised by precision, discipline, reliability and predictability on the one hand (Andrzejewski, 1954), and meeting extreme situations where predefined directives and routines simply cannot cover all possibly emerging contingencies on the other (Ben Ari, 2005; Kapucu, 2006). The greater the uncertainty, the more difficult it is to routinize activity by preplanning (Morgan, 1986). However, this kind of organisation must still operate efficiently in demanding conditions where much is at stake. Organisational theory appears to lack consensus on the adequacy of the bureaucratic organisational form in times of crisis. Critics claim that because of a rigid structure, organisations with a strict vertical hierarchy of authority do not function well in non-routine situations where creativity and flexibility are required (Kendra & Wachtendorf, 2003). Within a basically bureaucratic organisational structure, one aspect of a mission command concept relates to how situations are solved when the hierarchical chart is not clear as to who does what, when, how and where. Lanzara (1983) has pointed to the potential value of individuals with the required specific competencies who also have skills in collaboration and communication within and between organisations. Webb, (1991) refers to individuals with these kinds of competencies as boundary spanners. By providing linkages which do not exist on organisational charts, boundary spanners facilitate the sharing and exchange of information and link their organization with the external environment (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Burt, 1992; Grunig, 1992; Williams, 2002). The concept of boundary spanners thus seems to deserve further exploration when analysing emergency response organisations (Alvinus, Danielsson, & Larsson, 2010a; Bacharach, Bamberger, & McKinney, 2000; Perrone, Zaheer, & McEvily, 2003). For this reason, we felt that a more generative approach was legitimate.

### **5.2.2.      *Aim***

The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the concept of links (boundary spanners) within the framework of emergency response agencies during severely demanding operations.

### **5.2.3.      *Method***

This study is based on interview data from three crisis events. The selection of events was made using two criteria: the first being magnitude (the handling of the crisis to have involved at least three or more organisations in several local communities and/or a region) and the second being variety. Consequently, in accordance with the guidelines of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967), we chose one natural disaster, one man-made accident and one event arising from antagonistic human actions. The empirical data are based on fifty in-depth interviews from three crisis events. The organisations involved in this study were the Swedish Rescue Services Agency, the Swedish Armed Forces, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, a regional public prosecution office, an emergency treatment unit, a prison establishment, a local rescue service organisation and a regional police department. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed according to the constant comparative method of Glaser & Strauss (1967) and clustering, a process of moving to higher levels of abstraction.

### **5.2.4.      *Results***

The core variable that emerged in the analysis was labelled 'link', further built on by two superior categories: Planned and Spontaneous Links. The link as identified in the data refers to individuals facilitating collaboration, communication, decision-making and interaction at any level within an organisation or between organisations during rescue operations. The links connect organisations and individuals both vertically and horizontally. Links act vertically between various hierarchical levels within an organisation or between the management of the authorities and the political level. The horizontal communication process is described as acting between different organisations, or between individuals at the same level within the same organisation/agency. A Planned Link is related to an individual's organisational role and is most often approved and accepted by superiors. Planned Links refer to individuals with collaboration tasks within their responsibility and mandate, such as liaison officers or negotiators. This linking function may have appeared successful in a

previous event, which led to the establishment of this kind of link in the organisation. Planned Links can be decision-makers who are able to act outside the framework of the organisation because he or she possesses organisational acceptance and has a wide experience of managing disasters or unexpected events. Individuals with planned link functions in crisis situations belong to the ordinary chain of command during regular day work and may have a managerial position during ordinary working conditions. Spontaneous Links appear to arise when required by the extreme situation. This could happen when areas of responsibility, authority, competences, experiences and resources fail. Spontaneous Links often emerge in the field and enjoy the immediate trust of people close by, for example Planned Links. A typical Spontaneous Link can be a volunteer language translator during a disaster. To make the collaboration process possible, Spontaneous Links rapidly need to gain trust, but they also run the risk of being rejected if they are not a part of an involved organisation. The need for Spontaneous Links disappears when the crisis is over. What we learned from this study is that links contribute in diverse ways to effective operation by enabling exchange between individuals and groups. When functioning at their best, these links provide the rigid structure of bureaucratically organised emerging-response agencies, with the creativity and flexibility required. In short, the two kinds of links contribute to organisational adaption to environmental conditions.

<b>Link</b>	
<b>Planned Links</b>	<b>Spontaneous Links</b>
<p><b>Predefined position and task</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Liaison officer</li> <li>b) Representative role</li> <li>c) Coordinator</li> <li>d) Negotiator</li> <li>e) Information officer</li> <li>f) Observer</li> <li>g) Translator (organisational differences)</li> </ul>	<p><b>No predefined position and task</b></p> <p>May belong to another organisation Appears on the site / field</p> <p>Coordination Collaboration Support</p> <p><b>Purposes</b></p> <p>Getting the picture on the site Sense-making Estimating the allocation of resources on the site Other competencies such as translation of another language</p>
<p><b>Aspects of trust</b></p> <p>Network of contacts Organisational acceptance, trust is related to a position not only to individuals</p>	<p><b>Aspects of trust</b></p> <p>Swift trust Willingness to work across organisational boundaries depends on organisational reputation</p>
<p><b>Negative aspect of Planned Links</b></p> <p>Too many links mean too many different apprehensions</p>	<p><b>Negative aspect of Spontaneous Links</b></p> <p>Running the risk of being rejected</p>

*Figure 4: Major Characteristics of Planned and Spontaneous Links*

### 5.3. Paper III

Emotional smoothness and confidence building: Boundary spanners in a civil-military collaboration context.

*Authors:* Alvinus, A., Kylin, C., Starrin, B. & Larsson, G.

*Status:* Accepted for publication, Journal of Work, Organisation and Emotion.

*Author's contribution:* Main author, Aida Alvinus had responsibility for the gathering the data, the analyses, and the writing.

#### 5.3.1. *Background*

This study illuminates a deeper understanding of the processes of confidence building and emotional management among boundary spanners from organisations with a bureaucratic structure in a multinational civil-military operational context. Military officers engaging in collaborative efforts during international missions are, from an organisational point of view, to be found on all hierarchical levels – high, intermediate and low. Regardless of level, hierarchy governs the basic organisational structure and applies to the Swedish armed forces (the empirical basis of the study), allied forces and almost all other organisations with which one may enter collaboration (Andrzejewski, 1954; Moskos, Williams, & Segal, 2000) Hierarchy thus appears to be the globally dominant structure, one of its characteristics being that it survives by incorporating elements that are not traditionally found in a classically bureaucratic structure (Alvinus et al., 2010 alb, Burkle & Hayden, 2001; Fountain, 2001; Graber, 2003). In the military context, liaison officers and military observers are examples of such elements, frequently operating with a high degree of independence between the boundaries of their own organisation and its environs. They prevent and solve conflicts, gather valuable information, liaise and more (see also Ancona & Caldwell, 1988; Lomsky-Feder, Gazit, & Ben-Ari, 2008; Willem, Buelens, & Scarbrough, 2006; Williams, 2002). One likely significant aspect of the work carried out by boundary spanners described above is their management of their own and their collaborators' emotional reactions. As far as we can ascertain, this remains largely unexplored in the military context.

### **5.3.2. *Aim***

The purpose of this enquiry is to examine the processes of confidence-building and emotional management tactics among boundary spanners in a multinational, military peace enforcement context.

### **5.3.3. *Method***

In order to gain as wide a variety of experiences as possible, the selection of informants for this study was made in accordance with the guidelines for Grounded Theory developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967). The empirical material is based on 21 interviews, of which 19 were with military officers from the Swedish armed forces, their positions being military observers, liaison officers, contingent commanders, and military attachés. All but one of the informants were men. Of the two civilian informants, one had a police background and had been working as a liaison officer on a number of international missions; the other was first secretary to the Swedish embassy, envoy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The informants had wide experience of a number of international operations ranging over a time period from 1960 to 2008, and from the following countries: Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chad, Congo, Cyprus, East Timor, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Kosovo, Lebanon, Liberia, Macedonia, Mozambique, Pakistan, Peru, and Sudan. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed in full, after which they were analysed in accordance with Grounded Theory application (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

### **5.3.4. *Results***

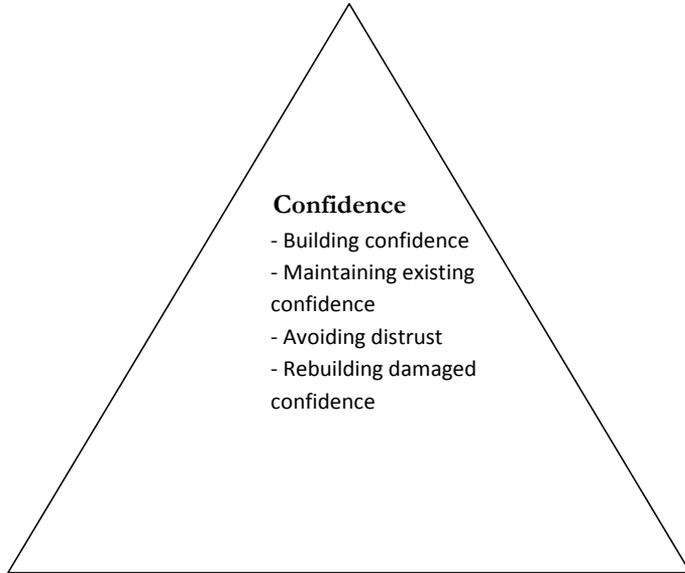
A Grounded Theory analysis of interview data yielded a model according to which the most central aspects of civil-military collaboration are confidence-building, maintaining existing confidence, avoiding distrust and rebuilding damaged confidence. The study shows that boundary spanners strategically utilise a variety of emotional management strategies in order to fulfil the demands laid upon them by their collaborating counterparts in the hostile environment and by their own organisation. Three interrelated dimensions of smoothness were identified: cultural, structural and smoothness in risky situations. By acting 'smoothly,' an adaption to the dynamic environment can be achieved. Our study shows that boundary spanners utilise emotional management in order to fulfil the demands partly laid upon them by their collaborators in the hostile environment and partly by their own bureaucratic organisation. By acting 'smoothly' at an individual level, the bureaucratic

organisation is thus adapted to its dynamic environment. It has been suggested that bureaucratic organisations could be regarded as a method of emotional management by suppressing emotions with a regulatory framework, division of responsibility, etc (Fineman, 1993/2006; Miller, Hoggett, & Mayo, 2006; Wettergren, 2010).

Based on the interview analysis, the concept of smoothness will be further explored below in relation to cultural, structural, and risk situation aspects. However, it is important to keep in mind that the three different types of smoothness are interrelated and that the outcome in terms of confidence and avoidance of distrust depends on the quality of these smoothness dimensions.

### Smoothness in risky situations

- Sensing a threatening atmosphere
- Having a calming effect



### Cultural smoothness

- Cultural codes
- Social strategies
- Symbolic gestures
- Food culture, hygiene and hospitality

### Structural smoothness

- Age and formal rank
- Signaling emotions through clothing, appearance and, equipment
- Emotional management through competence
- Work methods and negotiation techniques
- The interpreter as a liaison tool

*Figure 5. The process of creating confidence in collaboration*

## 5.4. Paper IV

The Inadequacy of Bureaucratic Organizations – organizational adaption through Boundary Spanning in a Civil-Military Context.

*Author:* Aida Alvinus

*Status:* Published in 2012 in *Res Militaris – European Journal of Military Studies*.

*Author's contribution:* Aida Alvinus had responsibility for the gathering the data, the analyses, and the writing.

### 5.4.1. Background

Governmental authorities, such as The Armed Forces, are examples of bureaucratic organisations characterised by hierarchical structure, rationality, stability, rules, clear boundaries, responsibility and authority (Andrzejewski, 1954; Burkle and Hayden, 2001; Weber, 1978/1904). Organisational theory appears to lack consensus on the adequacy of the hierarchical bureaucratic organisational form in contexts characterised by insecurity. Critics claim that because of a rigid structure, organisations with a strict vertical hierarchy of authority do not function well in non-routine situations where creativity and flexibility are required (Kendra & Wachtendorf 2003; Alvinus et al, 2010ab). According to du Gay (2000, 2005) bureaucracy is not a hard and fast trans-historical model, as many critics put forward. Rather it is a “many-sided, evolving, diversified organizational device” (du Gay, 2005, s. 3). Du Gay states that when criticizing bureaucracy, one has “to be quite precise about which bureaucratic ethics, capacities and comportments one is seeking to criticize” in relation to a specific purpose. A bureaucracy can be “something of an expert”, du Gay referring here to the public administration in Britain “that in the aftermath of the Second World War, under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, succeeded in establishing the National Health Service” (Ibid., p. 4). Hierarchy as an organisational form (bureaucracy) has an ability to realize the rapid increase in compactness and concentration that most people have experienced when important shared duties have been completed. Hierarchy thus appears to be the globally dominant structure, one of its characteristics being that it survives by incorporating elements that are not traditionally found in a classically bureaucratic structure (Alvinus et al., 2010 alb, Burkle & Hayden, 2001; Fountain, 2001; Graber, 2003). In the military context, liaison officers and military observers are examples of such elements, frequently operating with a high degree of independence between the boundaries of their

own organisation and its environment. They prevent and solve conflicts, gather valuable information, liaise and more. The organisational term is boundary spanners. Boundary Spanners are unique because they are positioned and operate in the no-mans-land between the organisation and the environment, particularly when the organisation is absorbing uncertainty from the latter, a circumstance which should also apply to crisis management and military contexts. Additionally, Ancona & Caldwell (1988) point out that the special combination of high interdependency, high uncertainty and multiple forms of interdependence with multiple groups calls for boundary spanning activities. Given the stark similarity of the above conditions with that of military operations and disaster management, it may well be that boundary spanning is a key enabler to achieve successful results.

#### ***5.4.2. Aim***

Pahlavi & Ali, (2012) emphasize the need to study organizational adaptation in a military context. This study is based on informants' experiences and thoughts of situations during collaboration in a civil military context and aims to gain a deeper understanding of military organizations' adaptation to complex environments. The question raised is: How can bureaucratic, hierarchically structured organizations that are said to function optimally in a predictable world function in a demanding and dynamic environment characterised by life and death situations?

#### ***5.4.3. Method***

In order to gain as wide a variety of experiences as possible, the selection of informants for this study was made in accordance with the guidelines for Grounded Theory, developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967). The empirical material is based on 21 interviews, 19 of which were with military officers from the Swedish Armed Forces, their positions being military observers, liaison officers, contingent commanders, and military attachés. All but one of the informants were men. Of the two civilian informants, one had a police background and had been working as a liaison officer on a number of international missions; the other was First Secretary to the Swedish Ambassador, envoy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The informants had wide experience of a number of international operations ranging over a time period from 1960 to 2008, and from the following countries: Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chad, Congo, Cyprus, East Timor, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Kosovo, Lebanon, Liberia, Macedonia, Mozambique, Pakistan, Peru, and Sudan. The

interviews were conducted in the period February-July 2008. One interview took place in the informant's home, several took place at Swedish Armed Forces' premises, two were conducted by telephone, and the remainder at the informants' respective places of work. The interviews, each lasting between 50-210 minutes, were all conducted by the main author. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed in full, after which they were analysed in accordance with Grounded Theory application (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

#### **5.4.4. Results**

Military organisations' adaption to unpredictable environments can be empirically shown to be a balancing act between improvisation and flexibility on the one hand and the pursuit of structure and adherence to established hierarchical order on the other. Which of these is emphasised entirely depends on the situation and the characteristics of the individual and the environment. Flexibility is defined as the departure by organisational members (here individuals in liaison positions) from various rules, if required by the situation. One example may involve bypassing chain of command. Structuring is a form of adaption that prompts individuals to follow policies and refer to regulations when necessary – calling on rank, grade and age are typical examples of such measures. The pursuit of structure involves re-creating bureaucratic organisation in the long term. In contrast, following chain of command in one instance and breaking it another is a way for bureaucratic organisations to adapt through individual actions. Adaption may also be dysfunctional and have negative consequences. Too much structure or too much improvisation may partly have negative consequences for the organisation and partly result in a less accurate threat scenario. This hypothesis is empirically exemplified in the text and in the theoretical model as an inverted U.

Irrespective of its functionality or dysfunctionality, adaption is generally affected by background circumstances, which may be organisational, individual or typical of the environment. Organisational and individual characteristics describe what type of liaison task individuals must tackle in the field, as well as how experienced and prepared they are as delegates. 'Typical of the environment' describes the type of geographic and sociocultural environment that individuals find themselves in, and the type of actors they will meet. Additionally, there are specific prerequisites that may facilitate the process of adaption, namely the occurrence of links (boundary spanners) and of temporary organisations in which the exchange of information can take place between the

members of the bureaucratic organisation and other collaborators. Thus it is in the interaction between organisational members and in the environment of the temporary arena that adaptation takes place. The success of the adaptation depends on how well prepared, trained and experienced the individuals are, what their assignment is, and how complex a situation and environment they meet in the civil-military context. The relationship between all of these concepts is illustrated in Figure 1.

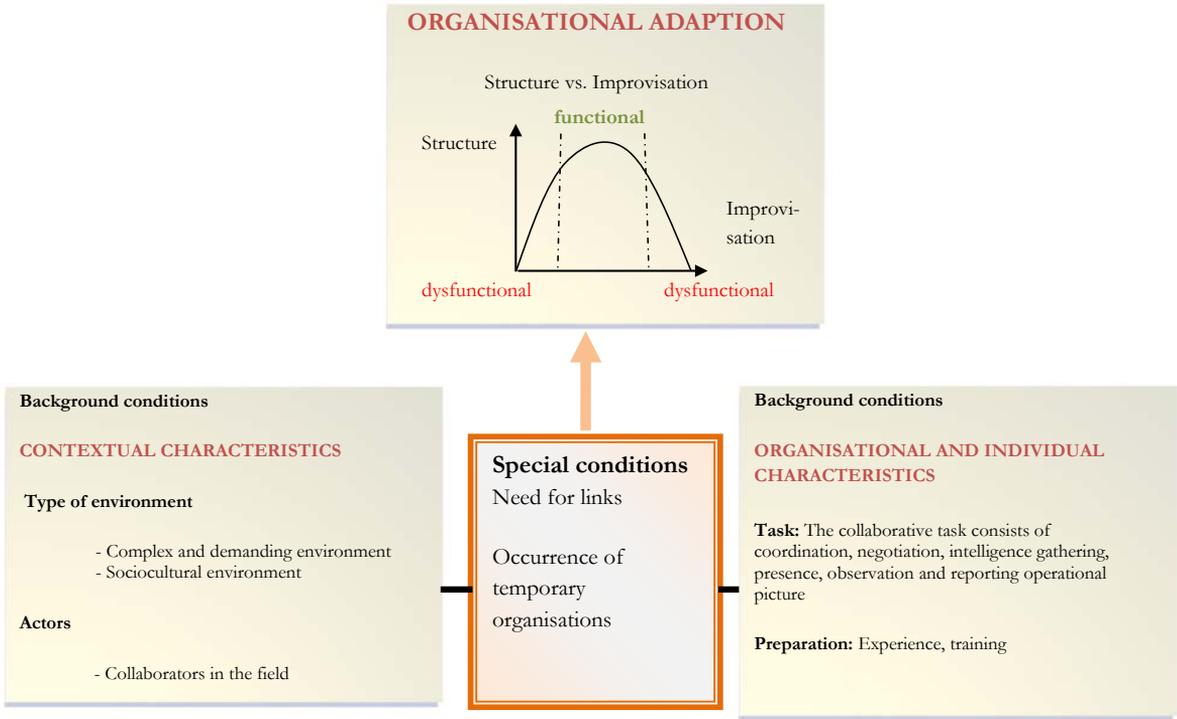


Figure 6: Adaption of military bureaucratic organisations

## **6. Discussion**

*In this section I would like to start by presenting the over-arching aim of the thesis, followed by some general conclusions and a sociological analysis of the theories and empirical data contained within it. The most important conclusion of this thesis rests on the significance of the individual to uniformed organisations' adaption to demanding conditions in the environment. It is consequently from the perspective of these individuals, the boundary spanners that I would like to discuss and understand the adaption process of bureaucratic uniformed organisations. Further, I intend to pinpoint the contribution of this thesis to sociology of disaster and military sociology, concluding with a discussion of the empirical contribution, methodological issues, practical implications and suggestions for future research.*

### **6.1. The purpose**

The overarching purpose of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of how boundary spanners are bridging boundaries between uniformed bureaucratic organisations and their environment characterised by demanding conditions such as accidents and disasters, and during international missions with clear and hazy threat scenarios. The following research questions have been formulated:

- How can uniformed bureaucratic organisations designed to manage crises adapt to demanding conditions in their environment through boundary spanners?
- What obstacles and opportunities exist for boundary spanners to act in the borderland between the organisation and its demanding environment?

### **6.2. Can uniformed organisations be called bureaucracies?**

By way of introduction I will examine the issue of whether bureaucratic organisations exist in reality, prior to answering the aim of this thesis. It is important at this stage to ask whether or not the organisations under study are indeed bureaucratic, and whether they really can adapt.

Weber describes bureaucracy as an ideal type which does not exist in reality. Certain bureaucratic characteristics are evident in reality, but never the ideal type. That said, understanding reality is meant to come by employing ideal type concepts, such as bureaucracy in this case. To achieve such understanding, empirical studies should take their point of departure in ideal types and state how close to reality the ideal type is (Weber, 1948). The question then, in

relation to the study of this thesis – uniformed organisations – is whether or not these can be seen as bureaucratic?

Against the above background I would argue that uniformed organisations such as the military, the police and the rescue or healthcare services are in fact different kinds of bureaucracies. The uniform worn by employees signals power/authority, belonging to a specific organisation, hierarchical status and thereby special competence (Soeters, 2000). These types of institution are ‘greedy’, in the sense that they demand a lot from their employees. The specific work tasks require a great deal from each employee, their aim being to serve society and see to its best interests, meaning that personal interests are put aside for the sake of the task, which is often performed under demanding conditions (Soeters, 2000; Weibull, 2003). Within uniformed organisations there are two types of tasking logic: hot and cold (Soeters, 2000, Weibull, 2003). Cold logic encompasses ordinary activities in much the same way as other bureaucratic structures – on a rational basis. Activities are process-oriented rather than goal-oriented, punctuated by meetings, negotiations, financial decisions and contacts with the environment such as the media and politicians (Weibull, 2003). Most activities are of a routine nature. Hot tasks are those actually executed in the field – the tasks one is educated and skilled in performing such as armed combat or rescue work. In this demanding environment it can be assumed that bureaucratic and hierarchical structure is dissolved, making way for a simpler kind of organisation, namely flexibility, self-determination, non-linear leadership and local solutions (Weibull, 2003; Kendra & Wachtendorf, 2003; Alvinus, Danielsson, & Larsson, 2010ab). In addition, more emotional elements are accepted, such as courage and management of fear and uncertainty (Weibull, 2003; Alvinus, Kylin, Starrin & Larsson, forthcoming). This ties in with the discussion of hard and soft power (Nye, 2008) in that uniformed organisations employ hard power in their ordinary activities, while soft power is utilised under demanding conditions, as highlighted in all four scientific articles forming the basis of this thesis. How this links in more theoretically will be presented in the section discussing individual perspectives in bureaucratic organisations.

In conclusion of the above it can be said that uniformed organisations are partly bureaucratic with a hierarchical order, for everyday functionality. In this everyday activity they are most like Weber’s ideal type. In the fulfilment of tasks, however, this bureaucratic and hierarchical order is dissolved, although it is through the fulfilment of tasks that the future existence of the bureaucratic

and hierarchical structure is secured. By virtue of their ability to transform from a bureaucracy to a more flexible form under demanding conditions, I would argue that these organisations are adaptable bureaucracies – the adaptation lying in being able to use hard and soft power in combination with conscious contextual intelligence (Nye, 2008).

### **6.3. Are uniformed organisations adapting to demanding conditions?**

We started out by asking whether uniformed organisations can be seen as bureaucratic. Considering the form of the organisations under study, the answer is yes – they are to a great degree. Here, however, the question is whether or not they can adapt to the demands of their environment. The insights gleaned from the empirical data would prompt us to argue that uniformed organisations, whose task is to manage “war, crisis and chaos” operate in an organic, unstable environment but in a very specific way, which is contingent on their mission.

From a contingency perspective, there is no ultimate way of adapting to the environment; everything depends on the situation and the ability to adapt. Against the background of the selected theories and empirical results, I would maintain that uniformed organisations can adapt their bureaucratic structures to the demands of the situation. They do this by extending their decision-making powers far beyond the limits of the organisation, with individuals assuming responsibility for task execution, thereby both re-creating the bureaucratic structure and absorbing influences from the environment. The essence of this theoretical discussion is therefore that uniformed organisations are largely bureaucratic but also have the ability to adapt to demanding conditions.

Empirical evidence confirming the above stems from the four scientific articles included in this thesis. Paper I (Alvinus et. al 2010a), which discusses the Swedish contribution to managing the 2004 tsunami disaster, draws two conclusions. Firstly, a balance of structure and freedom is desirable both at central command level and in the field, where operations are taking place and the environment is initially characterised by chaos. In this situation, flexibility was shown to be the most essential characteristic for the fulfilment of the organisation’s task. This is also confirmed by several other studies, such as Kendra & Wachtendorf (2003), who specifically point out the importance of improvisation in disaster management. Secondly, the ‘discovery’ of different

individual roles is recognised as greatly important to operations management. We called these roles 'links', which, from a purely theoretical standpoint, can be understood as boundary spanners. Their function at both central and field level facilitated cooperation and communication between authorities, saved time, and served to enhance the formation of a better operational picture from Thailand all the way up to central command. This second conclusion became a leading line of enquiry in Paper II (Alvnius et. al. 2010b).

This paper (Alvnius et. al. 2010b), also concerning the context of civilian catastrophe, examines the role of the boundary spanner in depth. After looking at three different catastrophe/disaster initiatives, we could ascertain two different types of links: planned and spontaneous. Planned links are most akin to boundary spanners, whereas spontaneous links (although a type of boundary spanner) do not belong to the operations organisation but bring their skills from the environment – meaning they are to be found on the scene of the accident/disaster. The organisation's ability to recognise these spontaneous links and organise them in an effective way is what determines whether the organisation can absorb influences from its environment and thus increase its efficiency. If they fail to do this and blindly follow policy, the result is bureaucratic lethargy, which is widely recognised and criticised by modern organisational researchers (please refer to the discussion of bureaucratic ineptitude in the management of Hurricane Katrina and the tsunami in articles (Takeda & Helms, 2006ab). Adaption largely has to do with each individual's ability to be flexible and absorb influences from the outside in order to fulfil their tasks. In this the organisation's adaption to the specific context is characterised by difficulties. Even if terms such as boundary-free organisations and post-bureaucracies tend to highlight organisations' ability to adapt and traverse boundaries, the role of the individual is still very important in this, something that resonates with Göran Ahrne's concept of the organisational centaur: half human, half organisation (Ahrne, 1993). I will more closely consider the abilities of the individual in relation to solving tasks and facilitating the adaption of the organisation in the next section.

#### **6.4. The individual is important to organisational adaption**

Individuals, whether they are members of an organisation or not, and boundary spanners in particular, are meaningful to the adaption of uniformed organisations to demanding conditions. It is individual actions that determine whether organisational adaption is successful or not. This applies not only to

individuals out in the field, but also to those within organisations who have boundary spanning tasks. There is continuous interplay between an individual's freedom of action, and acting in accordance with the organisation's guidelines and the situation. Wearing a uniform is an organisational act, choosing a 'hard' or 'soft' approach is an individual choice and can depend entirely on the demands of the situation. Nevertheless, it is still the individual who performs the adaptation. In this way, the concept of *organisational centaurs* (Ahrne, 1994) not only has meaning but also content.

One aspect that should not be overlooked is that the empirical studies in this thesis are entirely based on the actors' perspective. This means that the individuals themselves and their own understanding of organisational adaptation are in focus. Organisational research has often overlooked the role of people, viewing the organisation as an actor, instead of the individual. As Johansson (1997) states, a consequence of this view is that the actual actor, the individual, is neglected. This 'oversight' and lack of focus on the individual has also led to a failure to grasp the details of the organisation's forms of interactions and their content (Johansson, 1997). By focusing on organisational adaptation from the perspective of the actor, this thesis contributes more to highlighting the role of the individual in organisational research.

Now that we have asserted the role of the individual, the question remains how the organisational adaptation process can be understood from a sociological theoretical perspective.

### **6.5. Can the theory of bureaucracy explain organisational adaptation?**

We have already established that uniformed organisations exhibit many similarities to the bureaucratic and hierarchical structure according to Max Weber's definition (Weber, 1978/1904). Criticism of this kind of organisation and its adaptation to the environment has been great in recent organisational research, in what is known as systems theory and contingency. My assumption is that uniformed organisations with hierarchical and bureaucratic structures do have an ability to adapt to demanding conditions, as is their remit. Empirical studies of various demanding contexts demonstrate precisely how this can happen, with both favourable and unfavourable outcomes. Theories about bureaucracy and rationality must therefore be supplemented with conclusions that organisations of this structural type also work well in dynamic environments when necessary, not just stable ones, as maintained by the classic

authors. Moreover, the individual is not someone who merely operates within his role and mandate but also has the opportunity to act outside of its framework, if the situation dictates. Such a balance between structure and improvisation is illustrated in all four studies herein, thus highlighting the idea of individuals as mere cogs in the cogwheels of bureaucracy as a fallacy. Paper III, which concerns different types of skills and smoothness, particularly demonstrates this. Much of this can be explained by the concept of soft and hard power, which is often studied at national and international organisational level (Nye, 2004). The results of this third study can also be seen as an additional element in this theoretical development, inasmuch as confidence-building occurs through different types of smoothness. This may be seen as a way of operationalising soft and hard power. As a result of the influence gained by operating in the organisation's environment organisational members can act as the extended arm of their leaders out in the field. Leaders at different levels may be remote, both organisationally and geographically. Boundary spanners, have the opportunity, with responsibility, to employ informal strategies such as improvisation and soft power to solve the organisational task. Rationality is perhaps not always obvious – with improvisation a lot depends on the feel of things, and networking becomes a successful strategy. A network based on familiarity with people has been evident in all of the studies in this thesis. Such a network facilitates the creation of a shadow structure – a structure that exists alongside the formal, rational and hierarchical bureaucracy. A personal network is useful when things have to be dealt with quickly and formal routes are not functioning as well as they might. Consequently, a bureaucratic uniformed organisation does not suffer from Robinson Crusoe syndrome, i.e. the belief in being the only one on the island; it integrates formally and informally with the environment through boundary spanners. Much of what has just been said confirms aspects of systems theory and contingency perspectives.

#### **6.6. Can systems theory and contingency explain organisational adaption?**

Further development of the two theoretical context-oriented perspectives within organisational research is required. Just like bureaucratic theory development, systems theory has also been greatly criticised for ignoring individual focus, power and conflicts while contingency is questioned in relation to actual organisational adaption. Is adaption equal to effectiveness? The empirical studies in this thesis can therefore be seen as a contribution to the previously mentioned contextual perspective in a number of ways. One is

that the individual's actions are in focus and contribute to a holistic view. Another is that the positive and negative aspects of adaption are taken up, particularly in Paper IV. Once again it is about the individual's ability to manage the balance between structure and improvisation, which in certain cases can have a negative outcome. Everything depends on the circumstances. Adaption in itself has a positive ring to it but individual actions can be negative. This is especially apparent when the bias is for too much structure or too much improvisation. The chief contribution to theoretical development then is the individual's role in the interaction between organisation and environment and how things turn out when adaption actually takes place.

Another contribution is the creation of semi-organised fields, a concept that may be attributed to Ahrne & Papakostas (2002) and has been problematised by Roine Johansson (2009) in his study of spontaneous volunteers at disaster scenes, where he does not define such scenes as semi-structured fields but wishes to define them as temporary meeting places. I would like to further develop this concept in two ways. Firstly, I would maintain that accident and disaster scenes are semi-organised fields in the sense used by Göran Ahrne. Organisations which manage crises and disasters do this as their main activity. Their employees are trained, given practice of and educated to handle these kinds of events. They are trained to deal with 'simpler' routine accidents but are also prepared for the more difficult ones, should they occur. They know that they WILL, they just do not know WHEN. In many cases, they can predict who else they will be collaborating with, what resources will be put in and how to go about the task. So there is much to indicate that accident and disaster scenes are indeed semi-structured fields. My second contribution is different in that it concerns the creation of semi-structured fields by boundary spanners. In military contexts where threat and risk must be prevented and managed BEFORE something happens, there are opportunities to create 'impartial' semi-structured fields that are characterised by neutrality and where the collaborators can meet on equal terms. This is an important conclusion. The question remains, however, as to the terms of adaption in the meeting between different individuals – the members of the organisation and representatives from the field where other organisations are included. What happens in the actual meeting between individuals? All of my studies contribute to this issue but Paper III is important from a sociological perspective, namely sociology of emotion.

## **6.7. Bridging theories makes way for understanding organisational adaption**

Studies of organisational adaption assume a sociological perspective that takes its point of departure from functionalism, as represented by Talcott Parson and Robert Merton. The crux of functionalism is to study various aspects of society such as values, customs and institutions. Parson and Merton maintained that society consists of a number of social institutions that ensure and preserve societal continuity. The leap from functionalism to systems and contingency theory is not a large one, as the latter have their origins in functionalism itself. One might say this thesis is partly functionalistic, with the actors' perspective as a base. I have presented the theories and their most well-known critics but rather than compounding the criticism, I make several contributions to the theories.

A shift occurs in Paper III, with the accounts of emotional labour theories. The results here are still functionalistic but are explained with a critical sociological theory. Hosiold's research (Hochschild, 1983/2003) represents conflict sociology, just like gender research. Differences in society are highlighted and problematised and the prevailing invisible and visible conflicts illustrated. Hochschild nevertheless also embraces symbolic interactionism, which in itself is an offshoot of functionalism. In this way she unites functionalism with its diametric opposite, namely conflict sociology.

This thesis also acknowledges the actor's perspective. Since interviews are at the fundament of this work, the perceptions and experiences of the individuals have been the natural basis of study, and the empirical evidence is clearly formed from an actor's perspective. One can draw conclusions in relation to the indirect structural issue of organisational adaption from the commentary of the individuals. This is important, as the role of the individual has been added to the theories where the individual has been overlooked. If one chooses to formulate a question in relation to the study of organisational adaption, this may presume studying institutional processes, capabilities and obstacles experienced by organisations in their adaption, for example, political decisions, economic models and so forth. It is not at all certain that the individual would be studied from a sociological perspective. My conclusion is that this thesis has brought together the actor and structure perspectives: structural questions have been answered from an actor's perspective.

Majken Schultz (1990) mentions three important points of departure in regard to studying organisations and specifically, organisational cultures. She talks about functionalism, rationalism and symbolism and explains how to study various research questions based on these three theoretical starting points. I would maintain that this thesis has united all three parts, largely thanks to the inductive approach and the extensive empirical basis. By 'unite' I mean seeing gaps in each perspective and filling these with new knowledge based on empirical data.

### **6.8. A contribution to Contemporary Sociology**

Sociology of disaster is a special area of research in which the USA, but also Germany and Italy are at the forefront. The largest research hub by far is the Disaster Research Center in Delaware (DRC), where the focus of sociology of disaster is not only on local issues but also on large catastrophes which affect several countries. The introduction to this thesis presented a chapter by researchers from DRC, Kreps and Lovegren Bosworth (2008), in which they call for more research on organisational adaption surrounding crises and catastrophes. It is my hope that this thesis has contributed to the field by highlighting the role of the individual in the process of adaption. A unification of sociology of disaster and sociology of emotion should also be seen as a contribution.

Military sociology studies the military profession in terms of social groups that are united by the difficult task of using violence, the specific military culture and the foundation of values that prevails within these organisations. There are numerous military sociologists studying civil-military relations, gender and other multi-faceted aspects such as veteran culture, for example. The latest contributor to the research has been Weibull (2012), who has brought military sociology and sociology of emotion together in an exciting way by highlighting the significance of emotions among soldiers on international peacekeeping missions. The present thesis also contributes an emotions perspective in terms of confidence-building at an individual level, with the use of various emotion strategies to achieve this.

My hope is that thesis has also contributed to joining disaster of sociology and military sociology through a common denominator, namely the demanding context characterised by crisis, war and chaos. The factors of organisational adaption are the same, whichever of the demanding contexts I have studied.

There is as much need for flexibility in disaster scenarios (Kreps and Lovegren Bosworth 2008) as in the military context (Larsson, Harem, Sjöberg, Alvinus, & Bakken, 2007) although in the latter this is called mission command.

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