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Decision-Making on Life and Death

A case study on how critical and urgent decision-making is done by the Swedish Police Authority

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Abstract

There is a growing interest in crisis management, due to an increased understanding of the dilemmas that appear when organizations face critical situations. As a result of this, decision-making has also been more highlighted. Previous scholars have suggested that crises are best handled by following structures, while others emphasize the importance of allowing improvisation as well. This study seeks to investigate decision-making further, to discover whether it is structure, improvisation, or a mix between both, that is mostly required to handle decision-making during critical and urgent situations. The paper uses a qualitative research method, and the data has been collected by conducting 16 interviews with senior police officers. Furthermore, an observation was made at the Swedish Police Authority's Regional Leading Central. For analysing our data, a grounded theory method approach has been used. Furthermore, the decision-making theory, together with the sensemaking theory has been applied as our theoretical framework. Our empirical findings present the fundamental importance of having previous experience, to make decisions during critical and urgent situations. Moreover, previous experience also facilitates sensemaking. Further, the empirical findings indicate how both structure and improvisation are essential when making decisions during critical and urgent situations.

Keywords
Decision-Making, Crisis, Experience, Bounded Rationality, Logic of Consequences, Logic of Appropriateness, Sensemaking.

Explanation List

Critical decisions: Decisions made under crises (Bresher, 1993).

Crisis: When critical decisions must be made (Allison, 1971; Bresher, 1993).

Civilians: The individuals who work within the Swedish Police Authority, but have not attended the police school (Polisen, 2016).

NFS (National Laboratory of Forensic Science): An independent expert organization within the Swedish Police Authority. NFC integrates national forensic services and has an overall responsibility for forensics (Polisen, 2018).

Planned event: Refers to a critical situation when the police force needs to organize in a certain structure. The situation is emergent, but also known and planned since before. Planned events can be happenings such as demonstrations or football duels (Polisen, 2016).

RLC (The Regional Leading Central): Is a section in the Operational Unit that handles incoming phone- and radio calls. Errands sent to RLC are given the highest priority (Polisen, 2016).

Swedish Security Police (SÄPO): Monitors and analyses threats towards Sweden and its interests, and protects the National security and citizens' rights and freedom (Säkerhetspolisen, 2018).

Special event: Refers to a highly critical situation when the police force needs to organize in a certain structure, due to emergency. A special event can be happenings such as a terror attacks or school-shootings (Polisen, 2016).

Working outside: Officers who work outside on the field and have a physical presence in all events (Polisen, 2016).

Working inside: Officers who work inside and do not have physical presence in all events, instead, they work from offices (Polisen, 2016).

Fast-response organizations: Organizations who operates under situations that characterizes uncertainty and fast decision-making, and where one mistake can turn into a catastrophe (Faraj et al, 2006).

Introduction

Scholarly interests in crisis management have increased in recent years, partly due to the acknowledgements of particular dilemmas that appear when organizations face critical situations, such as financial crises (Aaebi et al, 2011; Fassin & Gosselin, 2011), ethical crises (Snyder et al, 2006; Sandin, 2009), natural disasters (Majchrzak et al., 2007; Shepherd & Williams, 2014) or terror attacks (Quinn & Worline, 2008). Due to these various dilemmas, organizations must know how to prevent, manage and avoid crises (Boin et al. 2005). Increased attention has thereby been directed towards crisis management and decision-making (Hermann, 1963; Allison, 1971; Janis, 1989; Rosenthal et al.1989; Bresher, 1993). The importance of decision-making in crises are often emphasized due to the dramatic consequences that critical situations may have for organizations, for example in terms of costs, credibility, public safety, and ultimately organizational survival (Boin et al. 2005). But, despite the fact that the conditions for decision-making during crises are tough, complicated and consequential, decisions must still be made (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). However, the question is how decisions can be done, when crisis management seem to unfold in various ways?

Crisis management unfolds in various ways and scholars do not seem to agree on how crises should be managed. Some scholars argue that crises should be managed by following structures and orders, while others emphasize the importance of allowing improvisation as well. Scholars who support structure argue that structure help organizations avoiding future problems when working in turbulent and ambiguous contexts (Hedberg et al, 1976). They claim that high-risk contexts demand more bureaucratic control (Johnson & Vaughn, 2016), and that crises can be facilitated by using a so-called *"top-down"* approach. Such an approach demonstrates that leaders, at the top, take full command of situations and make decisions that others are obligated to follow (Rosenthal et al. 1991). In line with this, control and communication have been stated as much more important during critical situations than the time spent to convince others what to do (Mintzberg, 2001).

The importance of structure during crises is also evident in studies arguing about routines (Inam, 1999) and crisis management plans (Fearn-Banks, 1996). Routines have been suggested for making an abnormal situation more efficient, and for being a fundamental tool during abnormal conditions (Inam, 1999). Crisis management plans, such as formal guidelines and communication plans, have instead been argued to contributing with stability (Fearn-Banks, 1996). There are even crisis management plans that plans a full crisis-process to prevent, prepare, recognize, and recover organizations from various crises (Coombs, 2010). Moreover, while some scholars argue that crisis management plans are a tool for reaching stability, others argue that stability can be achieved by gaining trust within the organization (Majchrzak et al., 2007).

Although previous literature has emphasized the importance of structure, another side of the literature also emphasizes the importance of improvisation (Hutchins, 1991; Rerup, 2001). Allowing improvisation is crucial during ambiguous situations (Ranking et al, 2013). Scholars argue that critical situations do not demand structure in the same way as normal circumstances

do. Organisational roles are therefore often improvised during unexpected situations (Kamoche, 2003) in order to respond to critical situations (Drabek & McEntire, 2002), during time constraints (Maldonado & Vera, 2014). Previous studies have, for instance, shown how emergency response groups had to operate outside the formal structures and authorizations to handle a crisis (Majchrzak et al., 2007). In a similar way, organizational rules, used for safety purposes, were set aside during a risky context, even though they were argued being crucial (Collinson, 1999). Improvisation is important for creating "stability out of chaos", and for acting "in the moment". Moreover, improvisation is defined as the ability to act spontaneously by using creativity, and spontaneity refers to impulsiveness, while creativity relates to actions taken outside the normal routines (Maldonado & Vera, 2014). Furthermore, the term *"bricolage"* (Weick, 1993) can be argued for exemplifying the importance of improvisation, since it can illustrate a situation when someone creates orders based on the conditions and the materials that they have at that specific time (Levi-Strauss, 1966; Harper, 1987).

Interesting, however, is that recent studies also indicated that organizations, when working in a risky context, might need a balance between flexibility and stability to survive. To exemplify, a mix between structure and improvisation has been presented as successful during a natural disaster, were the right help and resources only could be provided due to the mixture between structure, routines and improvisation (Shepherd and Williams, 2014). Moreover, the mix between structure and improvisation was also identified when the police ranking-system was argued for providing protection, safety and direction. The same study did, on the other hand, also indicate that increased social problems required innovation and new ideas in order for the Police Authority to overcome social challenges (Herrington & Colvin, 2015).

Since crisis management unfolds in various ways, we question how a decision-maker knows what to follow. Previous studies indicate that structure is important in some situations, while others, on the other hand, have emphasized the importance of improvisation for handling crises. A third aspect is that a mixture also seems to be preferable. Since decision-making is an important field within crisis management (Boin et al. 2005), we thereby aim to investigate decision-making further, to discover whether it is structure or improvisation, or a mix between both, that is preferred to handle decision-making during critical and urgent situations. Furthermore, we argue that the crisis management literature needs more empirical support to clarify on what grounds a decision-maker makes decisions during such circumstances. Most previous crisis management studies have used different theoretical literature and a different empirical focus. These studies have also, mostly, focused on unique and non-recurrent crises, that have had dramatical effects on an organization, and/or its members. There are, however, less studies focusing on decision-making in organizations that continuously face crises or critical events (Hällgren, Rouleau & De Rond, 2018). The purpose of this study is thereby to create a better understanding of critical and urgent decision-making, and to contribute with an understanding of how decision-making takes place during critical and urgent circumstances.

In addition, considering the topic of discussion, it becomes highly relevant to study decision-making in a fast-response organization, since these handle critical and urgent decision-making on a daily basis (Hällgren, Rouleau & De Rond, 2018). We argue that an organization that faces

tough, complicated, and consequential decision-making on a daily basis, can contribute with learnings about decision-making, which can be useful for other decision-makers and their future challenges.

The complexity of handling crises during critical and urgent situations thereby leads us to the following research question:

- How does decision-making take place in recurrent critical and urgent situations?

This paper is based on interviews with senior managers in the Swedish Police Authority, a typical fast-response organization that continuously faces critical and urgent situations. Studying how senior police officers handle critical and urgent decision-making on a daily workday offers us an opportunity to understand how decision-making takes place in recurrent and urgent situations, and how decision-making is contextualized within a specific organizational setting.

This study is divided into four different sections. First, decision-making and sensemaking theories within the management research field will be reviewed. Second, the reader will be provided with an understanding of how the study was conducted. Third, the findings will be presented, and finally, the results will be analysed together with theoretical and practical implications.

Decision-making in critical and urgent situations

The decision-making theories presented below will help us understand how decision-making takes place during critical and urgent situations. We will use a sociological approach towards decision-making by applying behavioural theories from famous scholars, such as Herbert Simon (1957) and James March (1994). We argue that an understanding of the decision-makers' behaviours is useful in order to understand decision-making during critical and urgent situations. The two behavioural decision-making theories are the bounded rationality of decision-making, and the rule-based approach: two theories that take distance from previous economic theories of rational decision-making theory (March & Olsen, 1989). The paper will also briefly present the traditional rational decision-making theory, in order to continue with a presentation of the critics. Following up, studies within sensemaking will be presented with the purpose of getting narrower to our research question. Moreover, the studies within sensemaking can be seen as an extension to Simon's (1957) and March's (1994) decision-making theories.

Analytical thinking during critical and urgent situations

Decision-making studies have been developed for years. Traditional theories of decision-making focus on how the decision-makers should have the ability to analyse and identify different alternatives, define goals, and anticipate different outcomes, in order to choose a way of acting. The rational decision-making theory introduces the concept of perfect rationality and suggests that decisions are made based on rational preference-driven choices (March & Simon, 1993), and that decision-makers thereby select an alternative that results in the most optimal outcome. The theory has an analytical and calculative approach where different alternatives and consequences are elaborated before making a decision. Furthermore, the rational decision-making theory assumes that decision-makers have all the time and resources needed to consider the different options, before deciding (March 1994). Moreover, the theory presumes that all alternatives, consequences, preferences, and rules are known, meaning that all required information is available as well.

The rational decision-making theory has survived for many years due to its flexibility. If, for instance, a decision-maker does not manage to make a decision properly, he or she could go back and reinterpret the preferences. However, although the theory has survived a long time, it has been criticized along the way. Opponents of the rational decision-making theory, for example, Herbert Simon (1957) and James March (1994), have suggested a more sociological approach towards decision-making by, for instance, proposing behavioural theories. The bounded rational decision-making theory is a development from the rational decision-making theory, and it is a first attempt to reject economic approaches of decision-making (Kämper, 2000). Both the rational decision-making theory and the bounded rational decision-making theory propose the idea that decisions are made based on the evaluation of different alternatives and consequences. This way of making decisions, by analysing various alternatives and consequences, follows the so-called *"logic of consequences"* (LoC), that argues that an analytical-based approach inspires individual actions. Although both the rational- and bounded rational decision-making theories implement the logic of consequences (LoC), there is a difference concerning the extent to which they do that (March, 1994). The term *"bounded rationality"* considers the cognitive limitations that are included when decisions are made (Simon, 1990), and the principle states that:

> The capacity of the human mind for formulating and solving complex problems is very small compared with the size of the problems whose solution is required for objectively rational behavior in the real world (Simon, 1957, p.198).

Various scholars criticize the rational decision-making theory and argues that it is impossible for a decision-maker to access all required information before making a decision. Besides, even if the decision-maker has access to all information needed, critics question the decision-maker's ability to take all the available information into account (March, 1994). A decision-maker does, according to the bounded decision-making theory, instead become a so-called *"satisfier"*, indicating that he or she seeks satisfying solutions, instead of optimal ones that are argued in the traditional rational decision-making theory. Choosing an option that is satisfying means choosing an option that exceeds and fulfils certain criteria or targets. Moreover, picking a

satisficing option implies that alternatives are compared until a *"good-enough*" decision is reached. The bounded rational decision-making theory, therefore, proposes that people are *"intendedly rational"*. Moreover, since the decision-makers' access to information, amount of time, and amount of resources available, are limited, a decision-maker need to make decisions based on the limited grounds of what is *"good-enough"* (March, 1994). Information have to be searched for, and the search usually does not end until an alternative is selected and satisfaction is reached.

Furthermore, one of the main reasons for why the rational decision-making theory has been rejected from several scholars is due to the notion of ambiguity. Since choices, in the rational decision-making theory, are characterized by the decision-maker's preferences, the problem with ambiguity in the real world makes it very difficult to support the rational decision-making theory. Critics do therefore argue that the rational decision-making theory, in fact, includes several guesses about, for instance, possible consequences (March, 1991). As stated above, the bounded rational decision-making theory argue that a decision-maker cannot have full access to all information before making a decision. Furthermore, the theory argues that it is difficult to evaluate future happenings even if taking all the available information into account.

Additionally, the reason for why the bounded rational decision-making theory argues that a decision-maker faces information constraints is due to four grounds. First, decision-makers have limited time and capabilities, meaning that they will face problems with receiving and interpreting to many signals. Second, individuals have a limitation of how much information they can store in their memory. Third, individuals have problems with their capability of comprehension, meaning that they might experience difficulties in summarizing the information and see its relevance during a decision-making process. And finally, the last reason for why individuals face information constraints is due to the challenges with communicating information (March, 1994).

Rule-following during critical and urgent situations

While the bounded decision-making theory (LoC) highlights the importance of analysis, in which the decision-maker evaluates decisions based on different alternatives and consequences, the logic of appropriateness (LoA) focuses on rule-based actions. LoA does not consider the importance of processing information since decisions are made based on routines and imitations. The logic has a *"recognition-based"* approach, also called *"rule-based"* approach, since decision-makers are guided by certain rules (March and Simon, 1993). More specifically, actions are taken based on different requirements applied to different situations. The assumption of following a rule-based approach is that the decision-maker is guided by different rules. The rules are seen as normal, rightful, and legitimate (March, 1994) and govern individuals to the appropriate actions since they are deeply institutionalized into an organization (March & Olsen, 1989, 2004). Moreover, the rule-based decision-making theory defines authorization of who has the right to make decisions. Likewise, rules set the framework for how information should be spread out, and how communication should be handled (March, 1994).

Furthermore, the rule-based approach suggests that the decision-maker follows specific rules within a given role, which in turn satisfies their so-called *"identity"* (March, 1994). In other words, by being given a particular role, the decision-makers follow appropriate rules within their identity (March, 1994). As March (1994) illustrates, doctors follow the rules set in a hospital, while teachers follow the rules set in classrooms. However, rules and identities neither guarantees simplicity, nor consistency (Biddle, 1986; Berscheid, 1994). Rules simply tell individuals what an appropriate action is, and they demonstrate who has the authority to do what (March & Olsen, 1975). March (1994) claims that the idea of identity is a conception of *"self",* where the decision-maker follows the rules with the purpose of taking the "right" actions. Kaufman (1960) and Van Maanen (1973) argue that rules give specific directions for different situations, for instance, both for what they call *"heroic identities"* such as patriots, or for *"everyday identities",* such as police officers and accountants. Furthermore, an individual can learn to act in line with a particular identity, for instance: people can learn what it means to be a mother, a student, a teacher or a doctor. Moreover, people can categorize themselves in several identities, based on their nationality, religion, or profession (March, 1994). Rules and identities therefore provide guidelines for how to act, rather than dictating for a particular action (Olsen, 2003).

Moreover, even if individuals follow the rules, their behaviour and decisions are despite the rules not necessarily easy to predict, since rules can be uncertain as well (March, 1994). Although rules define the logic of appropriateness, they cannot be taken as given (March & Olsen, 2004). March (1994) highlights the issue with uncertainty, claiming that situations, identities, and even rules can be a bit ambiguous during some circumstances.

The two prominent theories illustrate actions of imperfect rational actors and are applied to gain an understanding of how cognitive mechanisms guide action. The logics provide insights in how different activities play a vital role in organizations, firms or institutions (Schulz, 2014). Moreover, if applying the two theories in a crisis situations, it would mean that the first one, bounded rational decision-making theory, assumes that decisions are made by analysing different options and consequences. Meanwhile, the rule-based approach, proposes that decisions are made based on specific rules, such as certain norms, habits or routines. The theories can, however, contribute with two different problems for decision-makers in crisis situations. The first one requires information and time in order to reach well-grounded decisions. Considering the high pressure and urgency that characterizes crises, information, and time may be difficult for a decision-maker to gain. The other theory, the rule-based approach, can also provide difficulties when making decisions during crises. Rules and routines can be beneficial while making decisions, but that also requires that there are rules designed for every situation. The problem with these two theories therefore leads us to our third theory, the sensemaking theory.

Sensemaking in Critical and Urgent Situations

Weick's sensemaking theory is a dominant theory when studying crisis management (Hällgren et al., 2018), and several of his studies (Weick, 1988; 1990; 1993; 1996; 2010) have made contributions when it comes to understanding how individuals and organisations respond and

experience various crises (Hällgren et al. 2018). Studies of individual and organizational responses of critical and urgent situations do question the relevance of following organizational rules, norms and routines when responding to critical situations (Weick, 1988; 1990; 1993). While the rule-based approach indicates that decisions are made by following appropriate rules (March, 1994), Weick (1988; 1990; 1993) on the other hand, argues that improvisation and rule-breaking may be needed in order to handle crises.

Sensemaking considers the exchange between interpretations, actions, and the effect of analysing different choices (Weick et al., 2005). When comparing some of Weick's studies (1988; 1990; 1993) questions show up regarding to what extent the rule-based approach (March, 1994) can be emphasized. Various studies by Weick (1988; 1990; 1993) discuss, for example, a chemical leak in Bhopal (Weick, 1988), an airplane accident in Tenerife (Weick, 1990), or a fire accident in Mann Gulch (Weick, 1993), and present how sensemaking is crucial for making the right decisions and for handling emergencies. The study of the airplane accident in Tenerife illustrates an example were one should not always follow what is considered appropriate. In this case, the co-pilot should have spoken up even if questioning someone with more authority may be considered inappropriate. On the other hand, the pilot should have followed the rules and waited for the "green-light" from the beginning. Another finding presented by Weick (1993) is from the accident in Mann Gulch, which demonstrates how smokejumpers acted based on certain cues. The smokejumpers relied on cues that gave them wrong signals about the situation, resulting in collapsed decision-making. The study demonstrates how several smokejumpers died when following appropriate rules. The foreman however, survived by improvising and not following the usual method of operations (Weick, 1993). On the other hand, Weick's (1988) study concerning the catastrophe in Bhopal, India, can be argued for suggesting the opposite. The study illustrates how the lack of rules resulted in more damages, since the involved ones did not know how to act, due to the operating manual not containing enough information regarding how a chemical leak should be handled.

Weick's three studies (1988; 1990; 1993), presented above, illustrate the differences of how crises can be handled, and how the way they are handled depends on the decision-makers' interpretation of the situation. These differences can furthermore be related to the term "*enactment*", which is the logical ground for strategic behaviour (Weick et al., 2005). Enactment creates actions since an individual act depending on how the he or she in question interprets and makes sense of the situation. With other words, action is taken depending on how an individual make sense of a situation. Moreover, the expression of enactment can be presented in Weick's studies presented above, since all three examples indicate how various interpretations forces the actors into making different decisions, resulting in actions being taken in various ways. Furthermore, enactment consist of actions that take both social actors and the surroundings into consideration to build a co-creation of activities during change.

Methodology

The Swedish Police Authority

The Swedish Police Authority has an essential role in the Swedish judiciary, and their main assignments are to reduce the level of crimes and ensure public order and safety (Justitiedepartementet, 2015). The authority currently has 28 500 employees and is led by the National Police Commissioner Anders Thornberg, who was selected by the Swedish Government. The Swedish Police Authority consists of approximately 100 local police districts, 30 broader police districts, and seven police regions (Polisen, 2017). The seven regions are: Bergslagen, Mitt, Nord, Stockholm, Syd, Väst, and Öst. The Swedish Police Authority does also comprise one department called *"National Operations"* (NOA), and another department called *"National Forensic Centre"* (NFC). The Department of National Operations (NOA) works with directing and supervising various police activities to make sure that all resources are used correctly, both within Sweden and outside national borders. The Department of National Forensic Centre (NFC) is responsible for all the forensic activities that the police handles. Besides special departments, there are also several specialized units, such as the intervention force and the seal police (Justitiedepartementet, 2015). Moreover, as a last addition, the Swedish Police Authority does also have five main National Departments working within human resources, communication, information technology, finance, and legal affairs. The five National Department provide administrative and operational support to the authority (Polisen, 2017).

The reorganization

A few years ago, more precisely in 27th May 2014, a decision was made to reorganize the Swedish Police Authority. The purpose of the reorganization was to overcome organizational hinder by getting better control, improving flexibility, and increasing the cost-effectiveness (Regeringskansliet, 2013). The previous 21 Police Authorities and the National Police became one authority together with the National Laboratory of Forensic Science (NFS). Moreover, the Swedish Security Police (SÄPO) became an authority of their own. The reorganization within the Swedish Police Authority characterizes one of the most significant organisational changes within the Swedish state in recent years. Furthermore, it also characterizes one of the biggest changes within the Swedish Police Authority since 1965 (Justitiedepartementet, 2015). Due to the reorganization, several laws had to be rewritten to clarify how tasks should be divided between the Swedish Police Authority and the Swedish Security Police (Riksdagen, 2014). Moreover, the number of police officers who have resigned from their job after the reorganization has been five times higher, compared to the previous five years (SvD, 2017a). Due to this pressure, an increased number of civilians are now recruited for the Swedish Police Authority (SvD, 2017b).

Design of the Study

We argue that the best way of answering our research question is to apply a case study, in order to increase our contextual understanding (Flyvberg, 2006) about how decision-making in critical and urgent situations takes place. Most previous crisis management scholars have done studies on archival data, and only a few have conducted the material through interviews and

observations (Hällgren et.al, 2018). We therefore argue that doing interviews and an observation was a way for us to collect data to design this study, both in order to answer our research question, but also to contribute with new empirical material to the crisis management literature in a different way than what usually has been used.

To collect data for this study, interviews with a semi-structured approach were conducted with the purpose of understanding the respondents' points of view and the various reasoning's behind their arguments (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In addition to the interviews, an observation was done since we, in accordance with Silverman (2013), consider it to be an essential tool for studying a social phenomenon, and getting a more in-depth understanding for the processes of decision-making. Furthermore, when we positioned ourselves as researchers in the specific setting, we received a more in-depth knowledge, which in line with Flyvbjerg (2006) cannot be gained only through interviews. The observation also allowed us to discover specific patterns, which Jorgensen (1989) claims cannot be discovered only through interviews. Moreover, since interviews sometimes can be biased due to the respondents answering questions in a way they believe they should (Czarniawska, 2014), an observation became highly relevant to gain insights in what the participants did on a daily basis, and whether that matches the answers we got from the interviews.

Data collection

In total, 16 interviewees were conducted with experienced senior managers facing critical and urgent scenarios in their daily work. The respondents were chosen since they all work/ or have been working during critical and urgent situations. The interviews were conducted at four out of seven different police regions in Sweden. These four regions that were selected were the police regions Väst, Öst, Mitt and Stockholm. We sent out emails to almost all seven regions in which we presented our desire to include them in the study. Police region Väst, Öst, Mitt and Stockholm were thereafter selected because they responded to our request quickly, and since those regions were easy for us to travel to.

Below is a short description of the 16 respondents that have been interviewed in this study:

Respondent	Profession	Duties
A	**Regional Head of Operations**	Acts as a minute operating project leader in events, such as riots and murders. Works during planned events, with planning and giving details to the subordinated executives.
B	**Duty Officer at RLC**	Supervisor over the working staff out on field. Makes decisions regarding critical and abnormal situations happening on daily basis.
C	**Desk Officer for the operational planning division.**	Works with emergency preparedness.
D	**Chief of Staff on the Operations division**	Acts as Head of Staff during special or planned events.

E	**Head of the Intervention Force**	Head of the Operations for the intervention force.
F	**Duty Officer at RLC**	Supervisor over the working staff out on field. Makes decisions regarding critical and abnormal situations happening on daily basis.
G	**Police Commissioner**	Currently works as a process leader to prevent crimes.
H	**Regional Coordinator for the Regional Initiative Concept**	Coordinates and controls different resources during critical situations.
I	**Chief Superintendent and Commanding Officer**	Operates as a strategic decision-maker during crises and is often appointed as Commander in Chief when crises occur.
J	**Superintendent and Regional Head of Operations**	Head of the Outer commanders. Acts as a minute operating project leader during events, such as riots and murders, or when regional groups, such as the intervention force or bomb groups, are needed. Works during planned events and gives directions to the subordinated executives.
K	**Regional Management Officer (RLC)**	Head of Office and is currently helping the Swedish Government.
L	**Duty Officer**	Supervisor over the working staff out on field. Makes decisions regarding critical and abnormal situations happening on daily basis.
M	**Superintendent**	The person in charge over the officers working out on field.
N	**Superintendent and and Operation Conductors**	Head of the Outer commanders. Works with planning, leading and coordinating operations.
O	**Head of Local Police District and Head of Department- SPT (Special police enforcement)**	Chief of staff in the Local Police District.
P	**Head of Unit- Service**	Is currently in charge over the station but have been working as an Expert Negotiator during crises.

During the interviews, the aim was to let the respondents speak freely. This was done by having interview-questions with an open-ended approach and by not misguiding the interviewees into restricted answers (Kvale, 1996; Silverman, 2011). Although we had prepared written questions, they were only used as guidelines. When conducting the interviews, the respondents were asked to identify other potential colleagues that could participate; a method also known as *"snow-balling"* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The technique gave us access to some respondents, but we kept in mind the risk that the respondents may suggest possible interviewees that emphasize their own statements (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). We, thereby, did our best and tried to choose various respondents with different positions to increase the trustworthiness. However, one should have in mind that all respondents that were interviewed have worked in the Swedish Police Authority between 10-40 years and have a similar

professional background. Most of them have also done some years in the Swedish Defence, before deciding to become police officers. Worth mentioning is also that fifteen of the respondents were men, and one a woman.

Furthermore, Kvale (2006) argues that a power asymmetry may exist, and explains how we as researchers can gain a power position during interviews since we get access to the respondents' personal thoughts. In order to respect the respondents' personal information, we decided to protect their real identities and the material we got from them. The respondents are therefore anonymous and are instead given a name between the letter A to P. We also wanted to make the interviewees feel as calm as possible during the situation we had put them in, and they were therefore not forced to answer all questions if they did not want to. To not distract the respondents and to get the most honest answers, the locations were also chosen by the interviewees, as suggested by Kvale (1996). Moreover, the interviews were arranged face to face due to the importance of interpreting the respondents' facial expressions, body language, and attitudes, argues by Silverman (2013).

Moreover, one observation was also done, as mentioned earlier, to see how urgent and critical situations were handled in action and to see the environment in which the respondents operate on a daily basis. The observation was made at the Operational Division at RLC in Police Region Väst, where we got to observe decision-making in action. By being present in the operator room, we could listen to the alarms sent to RLC and how the Duty Officer took decisions. The observations gave us an opportunity to encounter the everyday work-life of relevant actors (Watson, 2011). Furthermore, the observation increased our understanding of the challenges and complexities that follows with being a decision-maker. Moreover, it contributed to a better understanding of the interaction between different actors (Silverman, 2011), and how the communication was fundamental in such setting. Worth mentioning is also the fact that field notes were taken during the observation, which Silverman (2013) and Czarniawska (2014) argue is important in order to not miss out on relevant information. However, it is also important to mention that field notes were not taken under inappropriate circumstances, such as during informal conversations or critical situations.

In addition to the interviews and the observation, data has been collected from the Swedish Police Authority's official website. We also attended a meeting with two officers in the beginning of this study. The meeting was held at the Operational Division in Police Region Väst, with the aim of giving us a better understanding of the organization. During our session, the officers demonstrated the organizational structure and explained common shortenings used within the authority. The meeting was very helpful since our respondents used many shortenings during the interviews. Furthermore, information was collected from other Swedish authorities, for instance the Swedish Government and the Department of Justice. News articles have been included since they highlight the challenges that the Swedish Police Authority have had in recent years. Worth mentioning is that the articles we included are very consistent with the information we received from our respondents.

Data analysis
Due to the purpose of receiving a more profound understanding of the organisational setting and its complexities, a grounded theory approach was selected for the data analysis (Martin & Turner, 1986). A grounded theory approach was used to conduct qualitative material without having formulated a theory before. Besides, the method was used to systematically analyse and compare the different material in order to find different codes and categories used for generating a theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). With that in mind, we therefore conducted and compared all the data (Charmaz, 2002) before focusing on theoretical frameworks, due to the reason that we did not want to misguide our findings (Czarniawska, 2014).

Furthermore, the collected field material was analysed in three different ways. The first step was to transcribe all the interviews. The transcriptions were done continuously and could easily be done since all the interviews were recorded. The second step was to code the material and search for recurrent concepts. This step was done with the purpose of identifying recurring themes in the data, using what Martin and Turner (1986) calls *"concepts cards"*. At the end, we came up with 31 various concepts of important themes. Different concepts such as: *crisis, rules, roles, hierarchy* and *credibility* were used as themes. Finally, when the codes were gathered, we categorized all the concepts once again into different sections, with the purpose of finding a pattern. Later, the various codes were matched with suitable quotes that set the foundation for our empirical findings. Moreover, we also compared the material and findings with our observation, in order to see whether the data from the interviews could match the material from our observations. By comparing back and forth, we could later on find a suitable theoretical framework to use in our study (Czarniawska, 2014).

Limitations
Some limitations had to be done to conduct this paper. Due to the restrictions considering the time and scope, the extent of the research is limited: for instance, the fact that only one observation was done (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Despite this, we argue that our observation still can provide in-depth knowledge that can be generalized to similar fast-response organizations that face critical and urgent scenarios. But, we do also argue that our study can be applicable for other organizations as well when it comes to providing learnings about how complex decisions are made. Furthermore, we had to have some limitations when deciding what regions to visit for the collection of material. The Swedish Police Authority operates in seven different regions, but in this study, we only present material from four of them, and more precisely from five different cities. This might, hence, affect the results since possible answers perhaps could be different in regions where we did not conduct interviews.

Empirical findings
With the aim of finding a solution, the police officers consider different alternatives and their possible consequences before making a final decision. During decision-making, the respondents highlight the importance of elaborating potential options, threats, and possibilities. Different alternatives are investigated, and their pros and cons are compared to find the most optimal path to take. This analytical way of thinking has its roots in the old German military

methodology, were a broader reflection of contextual conditions and settings are evaluated before taking action. However, this analytical approach is not always possible to use during crises, since a more comprehensive evaluation of different options requires time. During emergencies, all alternatives and consequences cannot be taken into consideration, due to time constraints.

> I would say that the best decisions are made when you think analytically. That's when you evaluate different options against each other. That's when you ask others for advice and when you are calm. But unfortunately, that's not how reality looks. When you are sitting at home, at 11 pm, and the Duty Officer calls you and says that four people have been killed in Rinkeby, there is no time for analyses.

Even if the respondents claim that an analytical decision-making approach is crucial, they do also state that in-depth analyses cannot be done under critical circumstances. During emergencies, the respondents argue that a more detailed comparison between different alternatives and consequences are excluded, due to time constraints. However, a decision must still be made. During such circumstances, the respondents, therefore, argue that they make decisions based on the situation and the information they have at that time. As the quote above states “there is no time for analyses when people been killed.” In sum, critical and urgent situations cannot wait.

> We received a call at 7 pm about someone threatening to bomb the Central Station, claiming they’ve placed a bomb in a luggage box at the City Terminal. The call came from the Central Station, so the caller was standing there. I got this call around 6.35 pm. I had 25 minutes left. How do I continue? I didn’t dare to say if this was a joke or not. Usually, we evacuate a risk area of 300 meters. In this case, we talk about the whole Central Station, the terminal, and everything. We can't shut down everything within 25 minutes. It's not possible! But, I still called the Superintendent and told him: "You maybe have to evacuate the Central Station, you have to do what you can. Give me 15 minutes, and I will investigate this further. Start small by planning an emergency plan on how to evacuate, but do not hype it with any emergency red lights or sirens. I will get back to you in 15 minutes. Save as many as you can”.

The quote above illustrates an example where one police officer faced a decision-making situation during critical circumstances. The respondent above is a Commander in Chief, which means that he is in charge of all strategic decisions in Police Region Stockholm. The case above illustrates a problematic and complicated situation where a more in-depth analytical investigation was desired, but the critical circumstances did not allow that. In this case, the decision-maker had two options: he could ignore the caller and not do anything at all, or he could evacuate the Central Station, which would be a complicated process. Deciding not to do something could have resulted in catastrophic consequences, considering the number of people in the Central Station, if the caller was telling the truth. On the other hand, evacuating the whole

Central Station, and afterwards receiving the information that it was unnecessary might not be considered an optimal solution either. The quote above illustrates how the decision-maker tries to prepare for the worst scenario - an exploding bomb in the middle of the Central Station. And, although he did not make a final decision, he called his colleague and informed him about the situation, so that he could prepare. Moreover, the situation above demonstrates an example of tough and complex decision-making.

Furthermore, the quote demonstrates different authorities and the various allocations between roles. The quote confirms that it is the Commander in Chief who makes the final decisions, while the Superintendent makes the decisions out on the field. More precisely, if the Commander in Chief decide to evacuate the Central Station, it is the Superintendent who decides *how* to do that. This allocation of right does also come from the German military methodology, suggesting that decisions should be made as "close as possible" with the involved participants. In this case, that means that the Commander in Chief decides whether to evacuate the Central Station or not, but he cannot determine how that should be done since he is not present in the Station. More suited people can do that, for instance, the Superintendent who works out on the field. Furthermore, the Swedish Police Authority has a hierarchical organizational structure, forming the basis for what decision-making looks like, and setting guidelines for responsibility and rules. The strict organizational structure demonstrates who is responsible for what, and who has the right to give orders. The hierarchy also indicates that officers only are allowed to make decisions within the division and framework they operate within. Different rights are allocated, depending on what role the officers possess. When being assigned a particular position, the role includes restrictions as well as expectations regarding ways to act. Additionally, when an officer lacks authorization to make a decision, the decision is sent to other divisions.

> A Superintendent might say: "We have to keep the boulevard free from protesters, but how should we do that?". Well, that's up to the Head of Departments or group-leaders. Should we have dogs, should we have horses or should we have rabbits?

A police officer, working outside, takes orders from the Commander in Chief. This does, however, not mean that the police officers, working outside, are excluded from making their own decisions if they enter a crime scene. Police officers in the outer field are authorized to make decisions, but these must fall within the framework of what an officer in a higher position has been commanding. How the officers choose to act to obey this order is up to them, as long as they operate within the framework of what is considered appropriate. As the quote above illustrates, if a group-leader is told to keep the boulevard free from protesters, he must obey this order. But, how the group-leader decides to follow this order is up to him. Furthermore, how the group-leader then chooses to command his team is also up to him.

> I received a call where they wanted me to go to a health centre. We were there in a minute. We walked into the clinic, and everyone was screaming. There was blood everywhere. We walked through the corridors and walked around a corner. Behind the corner was a man stabbing a woman who already had lost too much blood. Two

small children were standing there, pushed up against a wall. The first thing that appeared to my mind was, "now we shoot." But suddenly he dropped his knife, and we faced a "stando," so I decided to kick him down instead. That was quick decision-making. We could have killed him. Unfortunately, the woman died later on.

The situation above demonstrates how a solution that may have been optimal in one situation became non-optimal when the circumstances changed. What was first seen as the "right" move, namely to shoot the offender, drastically changed when the offender dropped his knife. The story was told with the intention of highlighting the difficulties of working in various settings. Even this situation demonstrates an example of tough and complex decision-making. In this case, the police officers did not even know what they should expect or see when entering the room.

It can't go completely wrong. But it can't be 100 percent right either. Our work is not like that. We work in *"grey-zones"*.

What however characterized critical and urgent situations is that decision-makers, during a decision-making process, mainly work with the information they have in hand. This problematization symbolizes the *"grey-zone"* that the police officers claim that they work in. A decision can be perceived as correct based on the information a decision-maker has at the moment, but it can also turn completely wrong whenever new information is gathered. When working in a grey-zone, alternatives and consequences can be unclear, and it is therefore impossible for a police officer to predict future outcomes with hundred percent guarantee.

70/30 or 80/20. It's fine if it's 70 percent right and 30 percent not, as long as you don't misconduct.

It is highly unlikely that all decisions are optimal since various alternatives and possible consequences are not always 100 percent clear. Sometimes, it is enough if 70 percent of the decision-making is done the right way, and 30 percent is done quite well. Since the police officers work in so-called *"grey zones"*, the decisions made with non- optimal outcomes are still accepted as long as they follow the given rules. If an officer makes a decision, that results in a non-optimal outcome; it would still be accepted by the others in the police force due to the understanding they have that it can happen to everyone. As the officers indicate, everybody knows how difficult it is to predict future outcomes and elaborate various alternatives. One example that was commonly explained to us was the challenges that the officers face during disappearances. It is always difficult to know if someone is missing because he or she wants to, or if something has happened to them beyond their control. In both cases, a decision has to be made regarding if the police should start to search or not. If an officer decides to put down the case and a missing person is found dead later, one can, of course, argue if the decision to drop the case was optimal. But, at the same time, investigations cannot be done for infinity either, and some missing persons do not even want to be found. Moreover, the difficulties of deciding are increasing even more during critical and urgent decision-making. There is, therefore, acceptance among the officers for the decisions that might not always turn out to be the most

optimal ones. Everyone knows the complexities around it, and there is, therefore, an acceptance, as long as the officer that makes the decision does not misconduct.

> We had to do things outside the rules in order to solve the situation. That's a crisis, when you go outside the frameworks.

During some critical and urgent situations, the officers need to take actions that perhaps do not go in line with what the protocol says. The officer stating the quote above argued that a crisis is when thinking outside the framework. However, decision-making should still always be carried out within the structure for what is legal and allowed. However, a situation can get out of hand resulting in no other choice than to leave the rules aside. Due to this reason, some situations must be handled with improvisation and the officers, therefore, have to be flexible. The example below illustrated a scenario during a crisis when the Police Authority faced challenges with their communication, requiring them to ignore the rules to solve the situation.

> Every night, there were 400-500 police officers who started their shift sitting like staring birds, having absolutely no idea what to do. No one had informed them. So, we had to start from the beginning: Who is the group manager? You! And, you can take this group. Are you a group manager? No. It doesn't matter, here you go! Do you have a driving license for heavy vehicles? No. Drive anyway!

The quote above indicates that crises can force decision-makers to make decisions that are out of the ordinary, such as allowing someone without the authority to be a manager. This goes in line with previous statements about going outside the frameworks for handling crises. Sometimes such oversteps are needed to solve the situation. This may, for instance, be problematic since it can adventure the whole operation.

> It wouldn't be convincing if you as a Commander in Chief didn't have some practice. You can learn things in theory and get an education, but that's not enough.

Credibility is essential when making decisions. Furthermore, the respondent emphasized the importance of having practical experience. The practical experience is something gained from spending years in duty, and not something an individual can obtain by attending the police school or any other school. As the respondent explains, it is of great importance to acquire knowledge from various events since it can affect the leader's credibility. To be credible, the years of duty are of great significance. It is thereby essential that a leader has practical knowledge because that is fundamental to gain trust from other colleagues, which in turn is an advantage for avoiding disputes. The respondent above argues that a leader who lacks credibility would not be trustworthy when, for instance, commanding or making decisions. Moreover, this would of course also complicate his or her work as an officer.

> I know examples where old military officers changed career paths and started to work at the Police Authority instead. In the Swedish Defence, they did have a chief

> position. But then they began to work as police officers, with the expectation that "I'll probably be a leader soon." However, within the Police Authority, you first have to do your years of struggle, before you can receive higher positions.

The need to spend years in duty affects the ones aiming to become leaders, mainly if they aim to become leaders fast. The respondent above explained that it causes problems when new potential leaders enter the organization, as in this case the officers from the Swedish defence. Potential candidates might join the organization with the aim of "rising" quickly, but that is not possible within the Swedish Police Authority. This can result in talented potential leaders not going to the Swedish Police Authority, but to other organizations instead. To become a leader of the Police Authority, knowledge from other similar organizations, such as the Swedish defence, is not valued in the same way, in comparison to the experience from the organization itself. It is appreciated, but still not as highly valued as knowledge from the Swedish Police Authority. The two last quotes, therefore, highlight that credibility is received by having practice, and the requested practice should be gained from the Swedish Police Authority.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore how decision-making is done during critical and urgent situations. Drawing upon interviews with senior police officers, we have identified the fundamental importance of having experience for making decisions during critical and urgent situations. Furthermore, the study contributes to an understanding of how some situations are best handled by following structures, while others emphasize the importance of allowing improvisation as well. We will below start by explaining what experience is, in order to continue with describing why it is important. With the purpose of answering why experience is important, three reasons, categorized into three different sections, will be illustrated. The first section will present how experience is important for containing and following structures during decision-making; the second section will present how experience is important for the ability to improvise during decision-making; and the third section will present how experience is important both for maintaining structures and for improvising during decision-making. All sections focus on decision-making during critical and urgent situations.

What is experience?

In accordance with our empirical findings, experience is important since it is comparable to having beneficial knowledge. A police officer gains practical knowledge from spending years in duty and by encountering similar events. The knowledge gained from previous experience can be used for making decisions during critical and urgent situations since the decision-maker can recall previous happenings and learnings.

Why is experience important?

The table below illustrates why experience is essential for maintaining structure, improvising, and mixing the two of them, during critical and urgent decision-making.

	Following structure	**Ability to improvise**	**Balancing rules and improvisation**
Experience is important to….	...Know the rules, norms and routines.	...Make “*good-enough”* decisions depending on the situations.	...Handling “grey-zones”.
Experience is important to….	...Gain credibility.	...Be flexible.	...Know when to rely more on structure or improvisation, or a mixture.

Firstly, experience is important for containing and following structures during decision-making. The Swedish Police Authority has a clear hierarchical organizational structure with several divisions. The police officers are given specific authorization, and the organizational structure and formal rules set the framework for how decision-making should be done. Due to knowledge gained from previous experience, the officers know how to act appropriately, which is beneficial in ambiguous and turbulent contexts (Hedberg et al., 1976). In line with this, March (1994) also argues that decision-makers make decisions by acting in accordance with what is considered being appropriate. This, by following specific rules, norms, and routines. In addition, they act in conformity with their so-called *“police- identity”*. The more years the officers spend in duty, the more normal, legitimized and institutionalized becomes the rules, norms, and routines they follow (March & Olsen, 1989; 2004). The rules, norms, and routines become the “right” way to think, and the “right” way to act (March, 1994). If the officers encounter a situation where they lack the authorization to make a decision, they pass on the responsibility to someone else, and this can easily be done since the hierarchical organizational structure defines who the other decision-maker should be.

In addition, the hierarchical organizational structure also emphasizes the relationship between structure and credibility. Officers with experience from more years in duty are often more preferred as decision-makers since they are expected to have more knowledge. Our findings do, for instance, indicate that knowledge from similar organizations, such as the Swedish defense, is not as valued, compared to experience from the Swedish Police Authority. Our findings, therefore, indicate that an identity can be learned (March, 1994), but it has to be learned from the “right” authority. Moreover, the first section therefore illustrates how experience can be gained by working “inside” the organization.

Secondly, previous experience is important for the ability to improvise during critical and urgent decision-making. The officers highlight how it is impossible to elaborate different alternatives and consequences during critical and urgent decision-making. Thus, they must make decisions based on what is *“good-enough”*, which goes in line with the bounded rational decision-making theory and the logic of consequences (March, 1994), arguing that *“satisfying”* decisions, and not optimal ones, sometimes have to be made during crises. Moreover, the term

"*bricolage*" (Weick, 1993) can relate to the officers' statement that critical and urgent situations must be handled, despite the conditions. Furthermore, since the officers claim that they work during time constraints (Frandsen & Johanssen, 2017) and with insufficient information, the ordinary routines and structure cannot always be followed step by step (March, 1994), and improvisation is thereby needed. Furthermore, by using the knowledge gained from previous experience, the officers manage to improvise and select one "*satisfying*" option. Previous experience improves the officers' improvisation and flexibility, which in turn facilitate their selection of alternatives during critical and urgent decision-making.

Drawing upon interviews with senior police officers, several situations exemplify the importance of improvisation. One situation, demonstrated at a health centre, illustrates how an officer's first decision, to shoot the offender, drastically changed when the offender dropped his knife. Another example illustrates how an officer, due to the critical circumstances, was forced to distribute tasks to other officers with no authority: indicating that roles sometimes need to be improvised for responding to a critical situation (Drabek & McEntire, 2002). The two situations illustrate how no situation is another alike, and it is thereby important that a decision-maker can be flexible, spontaneous (Maldonado & Vera, 2014), and able to improvise (Ranking et al., 2013), to make decisions during critical and urgent situations. And this, according to our empirical findings, can only be gained from previous experience; from being present "when it happens". Moreover, the second section therefore illustrates how experience is gained from practical learnings out on field.

Thirdly, experience is important for both maintaining structure and improvising during decision-making. The mixture between structure and improvisation becomes especially evident during ambiguous situations, which by the respondents, also is referred to as *"grey-zones"*. Ambiguous situations illustrate no obvious way to act (March, 1994). The officers cannot during such circumstances rely on structure to the fullest, since that would require them to have rules designed for every situation they encounter. Full improvisation is not something preferable either since critical and urgent situations are risky and uncertain. Our findings, therefore, indicate that a balance between following structures and improvising sometimes is preferable to make decisions during critical and urgent situations. The mentioned way of managing crises goes in line with similar scholars arguing that a balance exists (Shepherd and Williams, 2014; Herrington & Colvin, 2015). Moreover, this problematization between following, following to some extent, or not following rules has also been presented in previous studies by, for instance, Weick (1988; 1990; 1993). Weick's studies demonstrate how the level of rule-following depends on the situation (Weick, 1988; 1990; 1993). Not following rules was, for instance, beneficial in the Mann Gulch- example (Weick, 1993), but not during the Bhopal catastrophe (Weick, 1988), indicating once again, the problematization between structure and improvisation.

By having experience, the officers know how to balance between structure and improvisation, and can, therefore, make decisions based on the situation. However, balancing between improvisation and structure is not only needed because rules and situations are ambiguous. Sometimes a situation can be so severe that rules have to be overstepped to solve the situation.

Furthermore, the empirical findings also state that roles need to be improvised during unexpected events (Kamoche, 2003) in order to respond to the situation (Drabek & McEntire, 2002).

Drawing upon interviews with senior police officers, the mix between structure and improvisation was, for instance, evident when one officer commanded a group leader to keep the protesters away from the boulevard. The situation illustrates structure, since both police officers acted within their given authorization. The case also illustrates improvisation, since the group leader could improvise as long as he stayed within his given authorization. The group leader did not get directions on how to stop the protesters; that was something he had to come up with himself. Similar findings could also be found in the situation demonstrated at the Central Station. The situation illustrates how the Commander in Chief ordered the Superintendent to start planning a solution for emptying the building. However, how the Superintendent did that was also up to him. Moreover, since the Superintendent had experience, he knew how to improvise and solve the situation. The example illustrates how both structure and improvisation were evident for decision-making during critical and urgent situations. To clarify, experience is therefore fundamental for the police officers to handle the mixture between structure and improvisation during critical and urgent decision-making. And lastly, the experience referred to in this section can, therefore, be gained both by working inside and outside the field.

How to use experience

To sum up, our findings state that decision-making during critical and urgent situations unfolds in three different ways; (1) sometimes the decision-makers make decisions by mainly focusing on structure, (2) sometimes they rely more on improvisation, and (3) sometimes they mix them both. What does this tell us then? Decision-making unfolds differently, depending on the situation and how it is interpreted. Decisions are thereby made based on how the officers make sense of a situation, also known as enactment (Weick, 1988). Enactment can therefore be seen as the first step for decision-making during critical and urgent situations, since the first thing a decision-maker has to do before deciding is to make sense of a situation. Moreover, if the officers have gained knowledge from previous experience, they are more likely to make sense of the situation properly, and are thereby more suited to make decisions. Our findings, therefore, indicate that previous experience is fundamental for sensemaking and for deciding whether it is structure, improvisation, or a mix between both that is mostly required to make decisions during critical and urgent situations.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to explore how decision-making takes place in recurrent critical and urgent situations. Drawing upon 16 interviews with senior police officers we have identified different ways in which experience is important during critical and urgent situations. Drawing back to our empirical findings, experience is important in three different ways. First, experience is important for containing and following structures during decision-making. Second, individual experience is important for the ability to improvise during critical and urgent

decision-making. And third, experience is important both for maintaining structures and for improvising during critical and urgent decision-making.

What determines how a situation should be handled depends on the decision-makers' ability to make sense of the situation. Experience facilitates decision-making during critical and urgent situations since it provides the decision-maker with useful knowledge to interpret a situation, and for deciding whether structure and/or improvisation is needed. Moreover, this means that there is no clear answer to when structure is more preferred than improvisation, and vice versa. It simply depends on how the decision-maker makes sense of the situation.

Moreover, the paper contributes to previous studies in at least three different ways. The previous literature has missed out on what grounds decisions can be made during critical and urgent situations. Our first contribution is thereby that we now can claim that decision-making during critical and urgent situations is facilitated by recalling knowledge and learnings gained from previous experiences. Secondly, despite the increasing interest in crisis management, scholars have overall paid little attention to how decision-making takes place in fast-response organizations that recurrently face critical and urgent situations. The study, therefore, contributes with empirical support to this field. And thirdly, by connecting our study on decision-making with the idea of enactment (Weick, 1988), we contribute to new understandings on how the interaction between structure and improvisation can be interlinked with sensemaking.

The importance of experience when making urgent and critical decisions, may also have practical implications for the management of the Swedish Police Authority and other organizations that continuously are exposed to critical and urgent situations. First, it can have implications on how managers, which often also act as decision-makers, are promoted and how training for promotion is organized. Since our study highlights the importance of experience, it becomes essential to keep the experienced individuals in the organization. Second, the importance of experience, concerning years of duty, may also make the organization vulnerable to change. The Swedish Police Authority, for example, was reorganized in 2014 and has today broadened their search for new employees, meaning that they also increased the number of civilians. Since our findings indicate that experience is fundamental to handle critical and urgent situations, such an organizational change may have implications for how the organization handles crises in the future.

Based on our findings that experience facilitates decision-making during critical and urgent situations, suggestions for future research concerns looking deeper into the topic. Firstly, since our study was conducted by focusing on senior police officers, it would be interesting if future research could investigate decision-making by interviewing officers with less experience to see what they ground their critical and urgent decision-making on. Secondly, it would also be interesting to investigate other fast-response organizations, such as the ambulance or the fire brigade, to see whether there are differences regarding critical and urgent decision-making.

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