

# Do military leaders resist organizational challenges?

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## *Abstract*

*Armed forces in many Western countries have been facing societal change processes for more than twenty years; including value changes, government savings and, more recently, by the unstable security environment. The starting point here is that there is a relationship between processes of societal change and organizational challenges. The purpose of this study is to examine how military leaders manage and respond to different kinds of organizational challenges, focusing on resistance. The empirical material was collected using a grounded theory approach. Informants possessing wide experience of leadership participated in this study. The qualitative analysis describes the coping strategies, acceptance and resistance found among military leaders when dealing with organizational demands. Challenges caused by societal changes are experienced as negative aspects of organizational structure. This may be an explanation for why military leaders cope with them applying both resistance and acceptance. However, our main conclusion is that resistance to change stays within a culture of obedience.*

## Introduction

Military organizations in many western countries have faced transformation processes for more than twenty years; including value changes, government savings and, more recently, the unstable security environment. According to research, processes of normalization, globalization, professionalization, and social and technical acceleration have challenged military organizations in many ways (Moskos et al.,

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2000; Forster, 2006; Rosa, 2013; Norheim-Martinsen, 2016). This article examines how leaders manage and respond to different kinds of organizational challenges, focusing on resistance. Our ambition is to elaborate on a typology of organizational challenges and theories on resistance in organizational settings. There is a theoretical knowledge gap within the military organizational context. Military organizations are seldom associated with the concept of resistance, only in the context of armed conflict. There are a few studies that focus on resistance within the military organization (Levy, 2017; Levy & Michael; 2011), organizational cynicism as a form of resistance in the context of a major organizational, negative, attitude towards management (Bergström, Styre & Thilander, 2014), or misbehaviour on a tactical level (Ruffa, Dandeker & Vennesson, 2013). A few researchers have focused on military leaders resisting societal change (Levy, 2010) but no studies on middle level military leaders' coping strategies displaying resistance to organizational challenges have been made. This lack of knowledge forms the background of this study.

Why is it important to focus on resistance from a leadership perspective? Why are we using the Swedish military organization as a specific context and how can this study contribute? Firstly, Sweden is a western European country which, like many others, has been challenged by transformation processes. One of the most radical changes was the transformed threat perception that followed the end of the Cold War. In the 1990s and 2000s, most European parliaments made political decisions that resulted in the transformation of the capabilities of their armed forces and reduced resources. This situation placed most European military organizations in a state of scarcity. The result of this was organizational change, transforming the Swedish Armed Forces from a system built on conscription to an all-volunteer force in 2010. However, during the 2010s, military budgets increased. With huge recruitment problems, the government decided to reactivate conscription from 2018 putting the organization into a state of post-scarcity. This second major organizational change is placing Sweden in the frontline as compared to other countries who have not yet reactivated conscription.

As a result, on the one hand the military organization is affected by societal processes, and on the other hand this conflicts with the

organization's inherent military logic and structure (Ydén, 2008). Like other military organizations worldwide, the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) is characterized by a bureaucratic, hierarchical and meritocratic structure (Alvinus, Johansson, Larsson, 2016; Castilla & Benard, 2010). Leaders in bureaucratic organizations are the bearers of organizational values. They maintain the hierarchical order within an organization and they can be held responsible if necessary. Resistance from a leadership perspective tends to be a discourse and is unusual to study in the military context. This is due to the fact that the military organization is not only characterised by a bureaucratic, hierarchical and meritocratic structure, it is also characterised by a strong obedience logic (Yden, 2008). In the military context, leadership, obedience and skills go hand in hand, the more obedient you are the more skilled you are. Ydén (2008) describes how this obedience relationship is expressed in the thirteen axioms of military logic – we have selected two of them: *The more punishment a soldier is rewarded with, the greater his motivation and the more positive his attitude will be to his commanding officer. And: Your commanding officer is always right. If, in spite of everything, he is wrong, your commanding officer determines who is right* (Ydén, 2008:121-22).

The combination of pressing societal change processes, the strong obedience culture described above and organizational challenges consequently demands more research attention with special focus on studying resistance among leaders in a military context. We believe that it is necessary to explore this in order to understand possible change processes within the organization, not only in the military organization but also in other organizations characterized by hierarchical and bureaucratic structures. Consequently we choose a qualitative exploratory approach with a small sample.

### **A typology of organizational challenges conceptualized as *dark sides***

Organizational research has shown an increased interest in studying organizational challenges from different theoretical perspectives, however the focus has tended to be on studying success factors such as what makes organizations more effective (Vaughan, 1999). However, we live in a time when organizations are vulnerable to rapid social changes that

also take place at an increasingly swift pace, known as social acceleration (Rosa, 2013). This results in high levels of expectations imposed on organizations and individuals to continually increase productivity within reduced time frames. Consequently, there is an increased risk of negative effects on the psychosocial environment for employees and managers alike, since there is little time to synchronize the internal and external processes of organizations. These combined factors increase the risk of negative organizational challenges (Rosa, 2013), negative characteristics such as organizational narcissism and organizational greed and negative consequences such as organizational anorexia (Alvinus, Johansson and Larsson, 2016) or “organizational dark sides” (Linstead, Maréchal, & Griffin, 2014; Vaughan, 1999). Vaughan (1999) has studied why various things go wrong in social organizations. She argues that organizational dark sides can be understood as a “routine nonconformity” (Vaughan as cited by Linstead et al. 2014:171) that has three unfavourable effects: mistakes, misconduct and disasters in the organization. These effects arise in an interaction between environmental factors, the organizations themselves, cognition and choices (Linstead et al. 2014).

The duty of the armed forces is to defend the territory, security and independence of the state. The authority to use violence distinguishes the Armed Forces from other organizations. It is not only its responsibility that makes the organization highly complex, but also its geographical dispersion over multiple regions and an enormous diversity of technically-advanced resources and occupational categories (Ydén, 2008). From a resource-dependence perspective, organizations dependent upon external sources for their resources – such as government agencies – are obliged to adapt to the wishes of an external source, as well as manage this dependence internally (Pfeffer & Salancik 2003: xii-xiii). As early as the 1960s, sociologist Abrahamsson described the military profession (organization we would say) as carrying a culture characterised by a negative worldview. This alarmist instinct was used as a mechanism of survival for the profession – in the process of gaining resources (Abrahamsson, 1972). In the 1990s, political scientists within the field of security studies began to pay attention to, and critically analyse, the previously largely neglected processes of threat construction. In this context, the role of the military as securitising actors (Buzan et al., 1998: 27-28, 57) and producers of threat images (Eriksson, 2004: 90) was recognised.

Other scholars state that “organizational dark sides” has existed as a term for structural organizational dysfunctions within various academic disciplines. They have been categorized under the terms *organizational anorexia*, which derives from the economic sciences, *organizational greed*, which derives from the social sciences and *organizational narcissism*, which has been studied by the psychology discipline (Alvinus et al. 2016). Organizational anorexia pertains to downsizing, resource reduction and safety risks (Brännmark 2012). Theorell (2012) writes that one consequence of organizational anorexia is an imbalance between resources and tasks which can create stress for employees. Greed at the organizational level also bears upon the domains of acquisitiveness and the balance between giving and taking between the employees and the organization. In *Greedy Institutions*, Coser (1974) describes the ways in which individuals fight to maintain a balance between individual freedom and the demands imposed by the various institutions and organizations to which they belong. Narcissism is a human attribute, but a number of researchers have begun to diagnose organizations in the same manner. For example, Grant and McGhee (2013) believe that narcissism derives from individuals with a strong faith in their own superiority over others and develops in an organizational culture that seeks external reward above all else. Organizational narcissism is most evident in the context surrounding the leader, and from there gains a foothold in the organization (Grant & McGhee 2013). A blindness to unethical behaviour often arises in the organization, and subordinates begin to mimic the narcissistic leader’s behaviour and unethical attitude, thereby normalizing this behaviour and perpetuating the unhealthy culture. Outsiders perceive these behaviour patterns as strange. If the media become aware of this unethical behaviour, the result is often organizational collapse as competence and creativity in the form of employees depart (Rosenblatt & Sheaffer 2001).

Alvinus et al. (2016) tie these three organizational dark sides together and apply them to the military organization. The results show that all three characteristics could be identified in existing research. Another study (Alvinus, Ohlsson & Larsson, 2017) shows the presence of the three organizational dark sides within the Armed Forces. The focus of the study was on the ways in which the senior officers managed organizational demands and led to a model for doing so. Researchers have

identified five strategies that leaders employ to manage organizational challenges and characteristics: (1) repairing mistakes at the individual and organizational level, (2) catching up with an ever-increasing pace of work, (3) reproducing prevailing structures, (4) using informal processes as necessary and (5) managing different loyalties, such as the balance between working life and private life (Alvinus, Ohlsson & Larsson 2017).

As we have mentioned before researchers have recognized that postmodern military organizations are going through different societal transformation processes which means military organizational members experience negative organizational challenges. We believe that all organizations have organizational characteristics such as narcissism and greed and organizational challenges such as anorexia to some extent, but military organizations are experiencing challenges to them as consequences of societal demands. The above-named studies describe how military leaders respond to societal and organizational challenges, however none of them have discussed or problematised any resistance strategies which may be linked to the change processes.

## Resistance theory

Since the 1950s, organizational research has been devoted to studying resistance among subordinate staff, although Taylor (1911) actually dealt with resistance issues much earlier. According to Collinson and Ackroyd (2005), the concept of resistance is a multi-faceted term, usually studied from a management perspective in order to describe the behaviour of subordinates. The concept resistance refers to other terms such as misbehaviour and dissent which can be displayed formally or informally (Huzell, 2005). The concept of resistance is associated with the labour process and from a subordinate perspective mostly in civilian contexts (Collinson & Ackroyd, 2005; Huzell, 2005; Karlsson, 2008). In his book, *Den smidiga mellanchefen – och andra motståndsberättelser* (The clever middle manager and other tales of resistance) Karlsson defines resistance and organizational disobedience as : “*Everything that employees do, think and are that their managers do not want them to do, think and be.*” (Karlsson, 2008:132).

In military organizations, resistance is studied as a form of defence capability. Other studies have focused on military organizational resistance

to social change (Andreski, 1968; Moskos, 1977, Wong, Bliese & McGurk, 2003) or resistance in civil-military relations in the form of struggles with civilian control (Feaver, 1996; Moskos, 1977). On an individual level resistance is described from a bottom-up perspective. According to Levy (2017) there are four strategies among soldiers expressing their resistance when they are dissatisfied with the force's performance. These are loyalty, neglect, ideological exit or voice. Those strategies can be passive or active to some extent. Because of the characteristics of military organizations such as bureaucracy, hierarchy and meritocracy, military leaders tend to be extremely committed and satisfied (Alvinus, Johansson & Larsson, 2017). Studying resistance strategies among military leaders, however, appears to be an unusual approach. We argue that it is necessary in order to understand armed forces as transforming organizations.

Historically speaking, a political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott (1985; 1990) provides different perspectives on resistance when studying societies. He describes hidden strategies and unnoticed tactics used by subordinates or oppressed groups. Scott (1990) terms the actions as "infrapolitics" focusing on domination systems where resistance is conducted offstage as a "hidden transcript". In his earlier work, Scott introduces an idea of "everyday resistance" hidden behind visible historic 'events' such as organized rebellions. Studying the slave societies, Scott (1985) focuses on non-observable cultural resistance as a response to power and domination. His ideas continues to hold a firm position in resistance studies, although the distinctions and links between individual and collective infrapolitics and individual and collective open resistance (insubordination and insurrection) have increasingly been problematized (Mumby et al., 2017).

The idea of hidden transcripts and every day resistance may be valuable studying military organization, characterized by a strong obedience-logic. The reason that there is a lack of sufficient knowledge on the resistance strategies of military leaders may depend on the organization's hierarchical obedience culture in which power is strongly centralised in a top-down perspective (Ydén, 2008). Obedience is expected from the bottom to the top. However, there are studies of leadership resistance in the civilian context (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Karlsson, 2008). Karlsson has studied resistance from middle

managers and concluded that power is seldom centralised but must be understood as relations together with resistance. Karlsson argues that resistance among both employees and managers is motivated by the establishment of dignity and autonomy in their work. This is especially interesting to study in a military organization where military managers are socialised to identify themselves with their organization. Could we expect middle level military leaders to behave like civilian employees and claim dignity and autonomy? If this is the case, resistance may be more widespread in the military organization than previously understood. In addition, this might mean that the best interest of the organization is not always valued higher than the dignity of individual (Alvinus, Johansson, Larsson, 2017), and that the military organization is indeed changing even in its basic characteristics.

## **The organizational context – characteristics of the Swedish Armed Forces**

The Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) is one of the largest central state authorities and it is headed by a Supreme Commander. The central command of the SAF is located in the Headquarters (HQ) in Stockholm, which also houses the Operative Unit supervising missions in Sweden and abroad. The current task of the SAF is to safeguard national security, command national and international operations and support society if its resources are needed.

Even if it is still one of the largest national employers, the SAF has undergone some fundamental changes since 1989 (Bergström, Styrhe & Thilander, 2014; Holmberg 2015). Historically speaking, the armed forces' policy changed from anti-invasion defence to what has become known as an expeditionary defence, in which it increasingly participates in international peacekeeping and peace-enforcement missions (Bergström et al. 2014; Holmberg & Hallenberg 2017). In 1992 the Defence Bill proposed a major downsizing process for the organization. The disbanding of regiments, relocation and mergers of units and the creation of a uniform armed forces, began to be implemented (Bergström et al. 2014). The decreasing numbers of employees was a consequence of the above-mentioned decisions. According to the Swedish National Audit Office (see Bergström et al. 2014), about 6 500 people left their



jobs at the SAF. Bergström et al. (2014) concludes that the reform of the SAF was thus without a clear idea of the organizational future vision. It became a colossus built on shaky foundations. Nowadays a new security situation challenges the SAF once again (Holmberg, 2015), forcing new kind of management and leadership strategies to face the unpredictable future.

## Method

### Selection of informants

In accordance with the guidelines for generating theory on an empirical basis (Grounded Theory) as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the selection of informants was carried out with the aim of gathering the greatest possible variety of experiences. Attempts were made to find interviewees including both men and women with a variety of advisor experience in the military context. Such a selection may be described as a convenience sample inasmuch as it is not random but instead utilises chosen contacts to make the selection of informants (Essaiasson et al., 2007; Morse, 2007). The empirical material consists of 10 in-depth interviews, three of these were with women. The informants possessed wide experience in a number of leadership positions, as well as participation in international operations. Informants came from the army, navy and air force branches. The informants' ages varied from 40 to 50 years at the time interviews were made.

### Data collection

The interviews were conducted between January and May 2017. Five of them were conducted at the Swedish Defence University, five were conducted by telephone. The reason that some of the interviews were conducted by telephone was the hectic work situation of informants and geographical distance. The interviews lasted 45-90 minutes. All of the interviews were conducted by the first and the second author, but all interviews were analysed by all three authors in order to achieve interrater reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The methodological approach was qualitative and inductive according to the Grounded Theory method (Glaser, 2011, 2015; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), which means that

theories are formulated towards the end of the research and as a result of data analysis. The interviews conducted for this study adhere to an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions, followed-up with individually tailored questions such as “tell me more”, “in what way”, “can you give me an example” etc. The themes chosen were as follows:

### **Background questions**

- Age, rank, work experience in recent years.
- Leadership experience.

### **Views on the Armed Forces as an organization**

- How do you view the Armed Forces as an organization?

### **Personal perceptions of organizational challenges and leadership strategies**

- What challenges you most in everyday life?
- What challenges the organization? How are these challenges manifested?
- How have these challenges changed over time?
- How are all these challenges managed?
- Differences at the tactical, operational and strategic levels?
- Differences in how employees manage them?

### **How do you respond to the following aspects?**

- Downsizing (organizational anorexia).
- Higher levels of demand (organizational greed).
- Organizational self-centeredness, re-organization (organizational narcissism).

### **Anything else to add?**

## **Data analysis and presentation**

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full, after which they were analysed strictly in accordance with Grounded Theory application (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 2011, 2015). The first step in this analysis consisted of what is known as open coding, which involves identifying units of meaning or codes in each individual interview. These

could, for example, include special lines of thought, feelings or actions related to the interview's sphere of enquiry. An example of a code is given below:

I then instructed officer cadets that there is no way of saying “no, we can't deliver what you are expecting” in our vocabulary, and I dare say that that applies to all categories of officers.

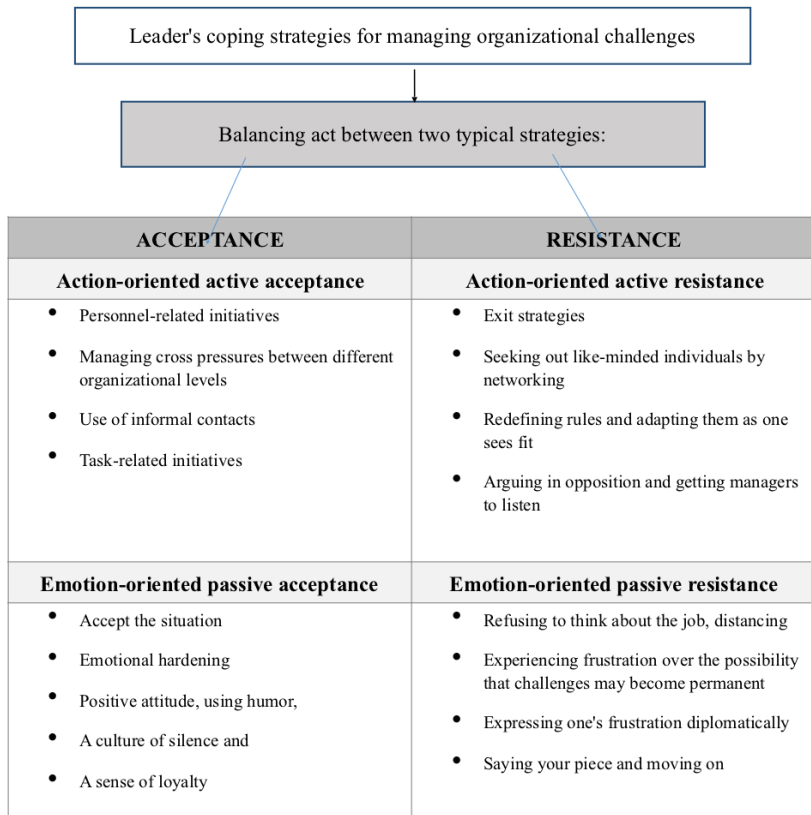
This quote was coded as “*Instructed to accept the situation*”. Step two in the analysis consisted of evaluating and categorizing the codes according to similar content. From the above example, the code “*Instructed to accept the situation*” was then sorted into the category “*Passive acceptance – emotion-oriented*”, which in the third step was sorted into the overarching category “*Acceptance*”. The fourth and final step involved a comparison between overarching categories, categories and codes, generating a core variable “*Balancing act between acceptance and resistance to organizational challenges*” which is presented in the Results section below, followed by all the overarching categories, categories, codes and illustrative interview excerpts. We feel this order of presentation provides most clarity as to these respective parts in relation to the model as a whole.

## Results

The analysis of the interviews shows that leadership strategies for managing organizational challenges may be understood as a balancing act between a) acceptance, on the one hand, and b) resistance, on the other. These categories can, in turn, be described as action-oriented active or emotion-oriented passive. Relating to organizational challenges through action-oriented acceptance means actively accepting the challenges that the organization is facing. Steps are taken to get the staff onside in various types of decisions, communicating the message even though the individual may not necessarily agree with it, and working to facilitate various types of organizational change processes. Emotion-oriented passive acceptance involves individuals conforming to what is happening in the organization and, simply put, “accepting the situation”. The organizational socialization process has taught individuals to cope emotionally with the challenges that exist within the organization.

The aforementioned strategies are also layered with resistance strategies, both action-oriented active and emotion-oriented passive. The former entail that, as an individual, you can no longer cope with organizational challenges of various kinds and so opt to leave the organization and seek new work. Organizing with various minority groups within the organization is another example of resistance. Emotion-oriented passive resistance can exemplify the distancing strategies used to cope with frustrations associated with organizational challenges. The same informants could bear witness to all of these strategies, chosen in different situations and circumstances. This is thus a common occurrence, but it is also worth noting that strategies interpreted as some form of acceptance

Table 1: Leader's coping strategies



dominated the responses. These categorical terms will be defined below in greater detail with appurtenant codes and quotations. A theoretical elaboration of the results is presented in the discussion section.

## Acceptance

Acceptance means that the leaders in the organization studied confirm and conform to challenges identified within the organization. Members of the organization find various means of relating to the challenges actively and/or passively.

The overarching category of acceptance comprises two categories: a) action-oriented active acceptance and b) emotion-oriented passive acceptance. Action-oriented active acceptance consists of the following codes: 1) personnel-related initiatives, 2) managing cross pressures between different organizational levels, 3) use of informal contacts, 4) task-related initiatives.

**Personnel-related initiatives** relate to the various ways in which leaders express consideration downward in the hierarchy. According to one informant, unity and personal initiatives for the well-being of all offer a means of persevering through the difficulties that exist in organizations, such as downsizing, extensive demands in terms of availability and an increased workload.

In the instances where you might have a planning conference or planning day we always try to hold it in a good location, so that we enhance the social fellowship within the group, like on the job, quite simply to build a good team, so that people see the advantages of working in a place where they have their secure government job as a foundation, but where it's also really fun to work, so that they don't just see their everyday lives as having an awful lot to do.

**Managing cross pressures between different organizational levels** entails managing the flow of information between senior executives and their subordinates. Communicating decisions and explaining why certain decisions had to be made regardless of whether or not the employees like them is an important function. One informant at the middle-management level explained:

I'm fairly positive about myself and have a tendency to look at what I can do here and now, which can of course be frustrating for employees in that I don't see things from their perspective, but I can't help it, but there's no need to place any focus or expend any effort on it. So I try to be clear in my communication: "we get what we get", and when the employees demand to express their opinions upward to headquarters, we say, "yes we have done so at such and such a time"; we are always reporting downward continuously, updating, yes, putting all our cards on the table in some way.

**The use of informal contacts** is a strategy for managing organizational challenges. Informants occasionally experience organizational inertia, and goals must sometimes be achieved within short timeframes. This results in leaders opting to use informal contacts with a view to "greasing the enterprise's inertia". One informant with a special forces background describes his use of contacts:

It's because I personally have a broad contact network, that's what I would say. First and foremost, I strive not to let my employees have to mess with those aspects, but rather I take personal responsibility and resolve them. I have my lines of communication that I know things have to pass along, but usually they are very slow, so I usually make contacts under the table in those cases, thereby speeding up various preparations, given that I know where the various people sit and we have a personal relationship and, as I perceive it, trust in each other.

**Task-related initiatives** pertain to strategies intended to encourage employees to "go for" certain tasks, to be motivated to perform them. Materiel maintenance is one example. Historically speaking this has not been a problem, however the current, heavier workload and diminished timeframes for performing maintenance work in particular have resulted in employees not having enough time and finding the work unpleasant. Here is how one manager deals with this:

I have instituted a special prize for the technicians, and it is given not to technicians but rather by the technicians to someone else who has, during the past year done, not favours for the technicians, but rather worked for better maintenance. And the reason why I instituted this

and pushed through its implementation was, like, not to give out some prize, but rather to show that the technicians are there and that someone has been skilful in their craft, and so forth. So, to promote the technical side in some way, so that people will understand and think a little, “yes, maintenance is important”.

The emotion-oriented passive acceptance category consists of the following codes: 1) accept the situation, 2) emotional hardening, 3) positive attitude, using humour, 4) a culture of silence and 5) a sense of loyalty.

**Accepting the situation** is a strategy that quite simply entails being reconciled to the challenges that exist in the organization. According to numerous informants, this has to do with being trained specifically in accepting the situation:

Yes, from a professional standpoint I do instruct officer cadets that there is no way to say “no, we can’t deliver what you are expecting” in our vocabulary, and I dare say that this applies to all categories of officers.

**Emotional hardening** is another coping strategy intended to promote acceptance of organizational challenges. Quite simply, it means that the individual does not take on emotional stresses for the sake of the organization.

I think that I may have felt more affected individually, before, but now, I try not to take on, like, the problems of the entire Armed Forces. You do get a little hardened too.

**A positive attitude and the use of humour** make the difficulties in the organization easier to handle. A positive viewpoint makes it easier to cope with various types of challenges. It “lightens” the mood and enables the person to look at the organization comically. One informant talks about humour as an important tool:

I have so many different things I have to attend to with my staff; the same individuals with me need to be at two or three meetings simultaneously sometimes, and it doesn’t work well, so naturally we try to clone our employees... we have tried several times and it’s not working... Yes, there is a touch of morbid humour in this; we snicker at it a little and you just

have to make the best of the situation.

**The culture of silence** means that certain difficulties are not discussed. A heavy load of tasks is imposed from higher organizational levels, and the middle managers dare not speak out. One informant believes that it is important to clarify that the culture of silence exists, and how challenges are accepted through it:

That's true, but it is also true that, as a manager, you have to just say "yes, but this does not fit into our operation" and you can sort of deal with it. But not everyone does so /.../ So the possibilities in terms of our becoming like a normal workplace, it's just that it imposes more demands on us to actually become a good, comfortable workplace; there are after all a whole lot of things that can't be handed over and that are still pressing, and there is no one who puts a stop to it.

**A sense of loyalty to your duties, enterprise and organization** offers a strategy for accepting any challenges. Loyalty is prized, and employees are socialised into the corporate culture. One informant points to loyalty as a common denominator for all employees:

Everyone who enters the Armed Forces is moulded into a system where you do what you can with what you have, and everyone wants to deal successfully with tasks and everyone is extremely loyal in terms of getting the job done, and I would assert that this applies to the entire Armed Forces.

## Resistance

In parallel with acceptance, there are also resistance strategies. Resistance can also be practised actively or experienced more emotionally. Resistance has to do with actively attempting to alter or rectify organizational challenges. This may occur at the individual level, or at other levels within the enterprise.

The overarching category of resistance consists of two categories a) action-oriented active resistance and b) emotion-oriented passive resistance. Action-oriented active resistance consists of the following codes: 1) exit strategies, 2) seeking out like-minded individuals by



networking, 3) redefining rules and adapting them as the individual sees fit and 4) arguing in opposition and getting managers to listen.

**Exit strategies** are an active form of resistance and involve trying to withdraw from membership of the organization. The choice is made to seek other employment, usually in the civilian sector. One female manager expressed her desire to leave the Armed Forces because of the organizational challenges that exist.

Well I have thought about quitting if I find something else, but I haven't succeeded in getting anything. But have I thought about it? Yes, absolutely; I have actively applied for jobs and been to interviews.

**Seeking out like-minded individuals** (networking) is a resistance strategy that has to do with grouping into networks with like-minded individuals to talk about yourself and to gain an understanding of your own personal situation. In this case it concerns women's networks, as women are still in the minority in the Armed Forces. The respondent also states that even though the network is for women to be able to vent and to take up uncomfortable issues that concern the military organization, it is regarded with a certain skepsis and negativity by the surroundings. The existence of the network is ridiculed and it is regarded as a deviation from the norm. The following is quoted:

Well, this thing with girls and women in the Armed Forces, you find some that you can pal around with, preferably a bit on the outside as well, to get energy; you see yourself in someone and listen to someone and chat, it's incredibly valuable, it strengthens you.

**Redefining rules and adapting them as you see fit** has to do with resistance to the configuration of working hours. Working hours consist of a given timeframe, but the option of taking flex-time is also available. Employees do not always report their actual working hours but adapt them to their own needs. One informant talks about career time, a phenomenon that benefits your own career:

Career time, as it is aptly known, is the hours that you put in above and beyond your regular working hours and log in some way, and I would say that it is unbelievably common among ambitious individuals. /.../

It's about being loyal to your employer, that's why you do it, I assume. And it's certainly a cultural thing as well, and at the same time as you're doing it you can certainly enter it in your flex-time, but in some way you create, maybe you produce more than someone else who just puts in eight hours, and if you're compared with someone who puts in their eight hours then it looks like you're doing more, that sort of thing.

**Arguing in opposition and getting managers to listen** is a resistance strategy that includes communication with strategic managers. It has to do with shedding light on the stresses that exist and getting managers to make some sort of change, such as allocating more resources. Two informants describe this very type of resistance strategy:

I find that you encounter resistance to your suggestion when you one, you can maybe change internally through an employer decision or management decision, it does not have to be any outside resources that are linked. But as I see it, it seems a bit like it doesn't always have to mean that you have to get more resources, that you have to reorganize yourself, but rather that you have to do what you can with what you have, then you get the counterarguments against you.

It's usually about getting a higher manager, that is someone who is my superior, to understand what the problem is, you can't just come in and say "No, but this isn't working", "Why isn't it working?", you have to have a ton of proof for why it isn't working, so it's partly about getting managers, who may be bad at listening actually, it's about getting them to listen and understand.

The emotion-oriented passive resistance category consists of the following codes: 1) refusing to think about the job, distancing, 2) experiencing frustration over the possibility that challenges may become permanent, 3) expressing your frustration diplomatically and 4) saying your piece and moving on.

**Refusing to think about the job, or distancing**, is a coping strategy that is associated with stress management. Refusing to think about the job is a means of distancing oneself and reducing the emotional stresses that organizational challenges entail. Even if a clear identification exists between the organization and its members, a strong sense of loyalty

(Alvinus, Johansson & Larsson, 2017) and acceptance occasionally, in individual cases, there is a need for relief in the form of distancing:

I believe that if you're disengaged then you won't have to think about the job all the time.

**Experiencing frustration over the possibility that challenges may become permanent** is an emotional manifestation of organizational stresses. There is a fear that things will never be smooth and calm, which leads to this frustration. One informant describes the increased workload and the associated feelings of resistance:

Most tasks can be overcome if you just consider them in a distinct time period, but the problems arise if you are working in the process the whole time and ultimately view it as a sort of normalization.

**Expressing your frustration diplomatically** is a resistance strategy and outcome identified in the data. Another informant reports experiencing frustration about certain work activities, but chooses to be more diplomatic in expressing this:

But then it's just the same type of frustration if we take a look with our manager at headquarters when we talk with him or her, then that individual perceives that we are frustrated, then perhaps we don't express ourselves in the same way as certain managers who make the plans for materiel, and that we manage, it gets a bit more diplomatic.

**To speak your piece and move on** is the final resistance strategy identified. It has to do with expressing frustration by speaking with others, but it also includes an element of acceptance, as you choose to move on.

When I get irritated with things, I go to the mess and complain, then I move on.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how leaders manage different kinds of organizational challenges. The Armed Forces' organization is a part of society and, as such, is compelled to observe the norms of civil society, even as internal demands to maintain its hierarchical, meritocratic and bureaucratic structure are present (Alvinus et al. 2017). The demands

of the civilian society and other change processes in society contribute, at times, to organizational tensions and strained relations with the political leadership (Ydén, 2008). This may explain the results of this study. The coping strategies, acceptance and resistance, found among military leaders for managing organizational demands show similarities with previous research on how organizational members, on the one hand, and leaders, on the other, manage day-to-day difficulties (Alvinus, Johansson & Larsson, 2017; Bergström et al. 2014; Larsson, Berglund & Ohlsson, 2016; Scott, 1990). Despite the similarities, the strategies identified are somewhat different and new for military organizations and constitute a new theoretical finding. Below, this is concretised based on the study's primary results concerning acceptance and resistance.

The study's results on acceptance can be understood in Hirschman's (2006) terms of exit and silent exit. Exit, in turn, means a loyal acceptance of a phenomenon that Hirschman discusses further in terms of cost. Silent exit is a form of acceptance and is the most common way to passively express dissatisfaction. In this study, both active and passive acceptance strategies were identified and the latter took place on an emotional level. Hirschman is based on a bottom-up perspective, while Agevall and Olofsson, who wrote a preface to the Swedish edition of Hirschman's book (2006), call for a development of the top-down perspective to understand how an organization's leadership can affect the opportunities to both exit and protest (Hirschman, 2006: 32). We believe this study can contribute a piece of the puzzle. Since we have studied military leaders at an upper middle level, tendencies are to be emotionally passive while activity is directed towards subordinates and superiors. Through its mandate and leadership position in the organization, the organization's obedience logic influences by consolidation and reproducing it onwards. This means that individuals not only maintain their own but also affect the emotional state of others, which is in line with Hochschild's emotional labour theory (2012). This in turn means that emotional expressions are ruled by the employer and the organization by allowing and encouraging certain expressions but suppressing others. In the military organization, the obedience logic is the governing emotional regime (see Reddy, 2001) and, in Karlsson's terms of resistance, aim to achieve dignity and autonomy. In the military organization dignity and autonomy are with

the collective and organization and not the individual. This is confirmed in previous studies of organizational commitment among strategic managers in military organizations (Alvinus, Johansson & Larsson, 2017).

Organizational challenges and societal change processes challenge the military organization, in particular the obedience logic. In the military context obedience is considered to be the foundation stone and a precondition for organizational membership. It creates discipline, efficiency (Ydén, 2008) and predictability in the leadership-subordinate relationship (Weber, 1948), where everyone knows their place, mandate and powers. Social change such as demands for gender equality, normalisation (SAF becomes like any other state authority and less exclusive), increased social and technical acceleration (Rosa, 2013) challenge the organization's obedience logic, which is easily expressed in the following axiom (Ydén, 2008: 122): *"If the map or regs do not match the reality, it is the map and regulations that apply. Reality must adapt."* This attitude towards external demands and changes contributes to increased resistance among employees and leaders of the military organization. Not only in the relationship between employee and leader, but in the relationship between military organizational affiliation and society's change processes that occur at an ever-faster pace (Rosa, 2013). Using Scott's theoretical approach (1990), the military organization, the hierarchical order and the culture of obedience forms subordinate groups under domination. This hierarchical power relation is "acceptable" in public which means that soldiers and middle-level leaders are oppressed and they accept their domination (or culture of obedience), but in Scott's view they are always questioning their domination offstage, using different forms of "everyday resistance" strategies and individual infrapolitics (Scott, 1985, compare Mumby et al. 2017).

As the study shows, resistance is actively and emotionally passive. In light of the organization's hierarchical structure with an inherent obedience logic, emotional distancing is not only a stress management strategy (Larsson, Berglund & Ohlsson, 2016), it is also emotional resistance to the organization's constant demands for accessibility, both physical and mental (Alvinus, Johansson & Larsson, 2017; Coser, 1974). Even female networks within the military organization are a subgroup

deviating from the organization's original obedience logic. The network serves its purpose for women to speak and highlight different types of problems (see, for example, the #Metoo movement in the Armed Forces #givaktochbitihop in Dagens Nyheter, 2017). From an organizational perspective, this is resistance because in female groups where men are not members, positive feelings are allowed, but it also gives expression to dissatisfaction and resistance. An avenue for further research would be to explore the links between individual and collective infrapolitics (Mumby et al. 2017) within the military organization, and whether and why some instances of resistance move from the hidden arena to the public. It is likely that social media and blogs spur the transfer of resistance in this direction - making this distinction matter less (Courpasson, 2017).

The study of leaders' resistance strategies in the military organization, characterised by the strong obedience logic, may contribute to Karlsson's (2008) definition of resistance which reads as follows: "everything that employees do, think and are that their superiors do not want them to do, think and be". Resistance in this case is about expressing feelings that you are not permitted to feel as they violate the organization's inherent structures.

Finally, from an organizational point of view, military organizations are greedy institutions. According to Coser (1974), military organizations are among the most greedy as they demand that their members to be prepared to sacrifice their lives and health if necessary, in addition to imposing high levels of demands as concerns competence, perseverance and loyalty (see also Vuga & Juvan, 2013). Nevertheless, even if they can be termed as greedy, we are still not associating military organizations with difficulties and challenges such as scarcity and self-centeredness as stated in Alvinus, Johansson and Larsson (2016). However, by identifying resistance strategies among leaders, we believe that the military organization may be less greedy towards organizational members in the same sense as Coser (1974) states. However, this statement needs to be validated quantitatively.

Consequences caused by transformation processes may challenge the greediness of organizations, and lead to changes in perceptions of time (due to social acceleration), new types of norms and values, policies, strategies and practices. Potential challenges, caused by transformational

processes, to organizations in general and the armed forces in particular may be experienced as negative aspects of organizational structure. This may be an explanation as to why military leaders cope with them using both resistance and acceptance (in terms of everyday resistance). The existence of resistance strategies within a culture of obedience is one of our main conclusions.

Suggestions for future studies may include operationalising and validating the theoretical model quantitatively. We also suggest a qualitative triangulation combining methods, such as discourse analysis and phenomenology. These could be used in order to close the theoretical and methodological knowledge gaps on leader and follower resistance (as well as acceptance) strategies. Another suggestion for further research could be to study the same purpose as this study but from a gender perspective.

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