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Organizational challenges and leaders' coping strategies: a qualitative study of Swedish military staff organization

Abstract: Numerous societal change processes such as globalization, professionalization and social and technical acceleration have challenged military organizations. The aims of this study were to (1) gain a deeper understanding of coping strategies used by the military leaders at the strategic level to manage everyday organizational demands and (2) relate these strategies to multidisciplinary models of organizational challenges. Owing to an insufficiently developed base of research, an inductive approach was used. Interviews were performed with 23 Swedish brigadier generals and colonels. Five coping strategies were found for handling the negative organizational aspects: repair work, catching up, reproducing, using formal and informal strategies and managing loyalties. The theoretical concepts of narcissistic, anorectic and greedy organizations were used as a framework when interpreting the inductively generated coping strategies. It was suggested that the specific connection found between individual-level coping strategies and theoretically framed organizational challenges is new. The results of this study are discussed theoretically and may be valuable in educational settings when evaluating the working conditions and performance of high-level officers.

Keywords: organizational challenges, leadership strategies, organizational narcissism, organizational anorexia, organizational greed, qualitative study

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1 Introduction

Military organizations are bureaucratic, hierarchical (Alvinius 2013) and meritocratic (Castilla and Benard 2010) in their design, which includes not only inherit challenges but also opportunities for the organizational members. Military organizations have survived for hundreds of years and therefore it is assumed that their design makes the organization functional, alive and proper (Andrzejewski 1954). It is seldom that one associates military organizations with dysfunctional organizational aspects, which is the focus of this study. However, military organizations have been challenged by numerous societal changing processes such as globalization, professionalization and social and technical acceleration (Holmberg and Hallenberg 2017; Rosa 2013). These processes may have caused changes in perceptions of time (due to social acceleration). Changes in norms, values, policies, strategies and practices have affected the military organizations at several levels, from the individual to the international political level (Holmberg and Hallenberg 2017; Moskos et al. 2000; Tresch and Leuprecht 2010). Potential challenges to organizations in general and the armed forces in particular may be experienced as negative aspects of organizational structure. There is a lack of knowledge regarding how these societal challenges affect military organizations and how military leaders cope with them.

A potentially important factor when it comes to organizational management of demanding challenges imposed by the political level is leadership at the strategic level. Leaders play an important role in creating organizational tasks, roles and visions, and consequently, leadership positions are crucial for developing organizational life, both functional and dysfunctional (Burton 2002; Caldwell and Canuto-Carranco 2010; Fors Brandebo 2015; Harvey et al. 2006). Alongside influence through the traditional chain of command, a higher level of leadership has been found to have an impact on lower levels through behavioral and emotional contagion processes (Johnson 2008)

and through image influences of favorable or unfavorable role model (Larsson et al. 2005).

At the individual level, a leader's handling of organizational demands can be understood as a special case of coping (Lazarus 1999). Generally speaking, coping serves two main functions: the management of the actual source of stress (problem-focused coping) and the regulation of stressful emotions (emotion-focused coping; Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Both coping processes coexist, but managers tend to focus on problem-focused form of coping (Larsson et al. 1988). Since problem-focused coping efforts by definition focus on problems in a given situation, they tend to be more dependent on contextual conditions than the more generic kinds of emotion-focused coping.

No reasonably recent study (last two decades) was found that focused on problem-focused coping strategies used by military leaders at the strategic level. Given the strong societal demands imposed by the societal level on the military organization and the potentially great importance the strategic leaders place on the problem-focused coping, this was surprising. This gap was a point of departure in the present study. However, in order to avoid a decontextualized individual psychological approach, we also strived to situate the strategic-level leaders' problem-focused coping efforts to a multidisciplinary organizational theoretical framework (explicated in the following).

Thus, the aims of this study were to (1) gain a deeper understanding of coping strategies used by the military leaders at the strategic level to manage everyday organizational demands and (2) relate these strategies to multidisciplinary models of organizational challenges.

1.1 Literature review on organizational challenges

Researchers on dysfunctional organizational aspects have explored the issue using different interdisciplinary approaches. The following part frames and links organizational, psychological, business administration/financial and sociological views on the dark sides of the organizational behavior. A brief introduction and summary of previous research on the concepts of organizational narcissism (ON), organizational anorexia (OA) and organizational greed (OG) are given in the following, which are used as a framework in the following analysis of our own empirical data.

ON. Narcissism, at the individual level, is characterized by an exaggerated sense of self, lack of self-knowledge, a great need to be the center of attention and a lack of empathy (Freud 1914). However, narcissism is not only a phenomenon found at the individual level. Recent researches have begun to discuss the concept of narcissism in the workplace in organizational and leadership contexts (Amernic and Craig 2010; Brown 1997; Chatterjee and Hambrick 2007).

According to Grant and McGhee (2013), ON occurs in a number of industrial businesses and other private sectors where it has even been blamed for the collapse of organizations. Analyses using ON are usually focused on individuals' behavior, mostly managers and leaders, which contributes to unhealthy, egocentric organizational culture (Grant and McGhee 2013). When such a phenomenon is revealed by the media or by a whistleblower, there are often major consequences for human well-being, creativity, skills loss and ultimately the organization's survival (Rosenblatt and Sheaffer 2001).

Difficulties dealing with narcissism in organizations are often due to employees at all levels who become "blind" to unethical behavior and begin to "mimic" the normed behavior of others, thus perpetuating the unhealthy culture (Gini 1997; Jackall 1988). Some researchers have identified particular aspects of ON (Brown 1997; Tobacyk and Mitchell 1987). The first of these criteria includes *denial*. This describes a process when organizations deny facts about themselves using spokespersons, propaganda campaigns, annual reports and myths. The second is *rationalization*, which happens when organizations develop justifications for their actions, inactions, decisions and responsibilities. The third is *self-aggrandizement*, which occurs when organizations make claims to their uniqueness, commissioning corporate histories and deploying their office layouts and architecture as signs of status, prestige and vanity. The fourth is *attributional egotism*, which describes organizations that attribute failed decisions to external factors while attributing positive results to the organization itself. The fifth is a *sense of entitlement*, an organizational characteristic whereby the organization adopts a culture of entitlement by continuous processes that exploit resources, people and other organizations in order to achieve continued success and prosperity. Lastly, *anxiety* is often found in narcissistic organizations, which leads to social instability and alienation. It is worth pointing out that ON is most visible in the context of leadership, in that it begins with leaders and is established and propagated by them.

OA. This is a relatively new concept in popular science, which was recently used to describe dieting organizations in an attempt to highlight what happens when resources are scarce (Brännmark 2012; Theorell 2002). One consequence of cutting resources and materials is an imbalance

between resources and tasks, resulting in psychological distress among coworkers. Such a consequence at the individual level can result in stress and sick leave, which, in turn, may lead to deficient competency and a further lack of resources. The effects of OA can also lead to long work days, increased workloads, shorter breaks and a growing culture and norm of individuals feeling that they have, quite simply, too much to do (Theorell 2002). One can say that in the long term, a major consequence of resource cuts is physical and psychological damage in organizational members (Theorell 2002).

Anorexic organizations are fraught with restrictions. They are operationalized in several definitions that make up theoretically derived indicators for further empirical analysis. These include reorganization, redeployment, health and safety risks due to cutting of resources and stress-related consequences.

OG. This describes institutions that place internal organizational demands, a sense of belonging and loyalty and demands on availability and commitment. Other requirements are task-related demands, demands on psychological as well as physical endurance and stress management, which are needed for the best of the organization (Coser 1974). Military is one of the greediest organizations since they expect psychological and physiological endurance, stress management and their employees to go as far as sacrificing their lives and their health for the sake of the organization and the nation for "the greater good". According to Vuga and Juvan (2013), the armed forces demand mental and physical perseverance, performance excellence and a strong identification with the organization (Alvinius, Johansson and Larsson 2017; Alvinius 2013; Coser 1974). Theoretically derived indicators are based on the above statement and thus comprise high demands posed by the organization regarding perseverance, engagement, loyalty and the balance between competing greedy organizations.

2 Method

2.1 Characteristics of the Swedish Armed Forces – strategic leadership level

The Swedish Armed Forces is one of the largest authorities in Sweden and is headed by a Supreme Commander. This authority is subject to the Swedish parliament and the Swedish government. The central command of the Swedish Armed Forces is located in the headquarters (HQ), which also houses the supervising missions of

the Operative Unit in Sweden and abroad. The HQ is the highest level of command in the Swedish Armed Forces. Its predominant task is to command operations, and it is also involved in matters such as military strategy, the development of the Swedish Armed Forces and in acting as a channel of communication with the government. Army, naval and airborne units, as well as schools and centers, train the various units, which are then deployed nationally or internationally.

2.2 Informants

Inspired by 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. Two military contacts at the Swedish Defence University were asked to suggest interviewees, including both men and women with a variety of experience in the Swedish Armed Forces. Such a selection may be described as a convenience sample because it is not random and instead utilizes chosen contacts to make the selection of informants (Essaiasson et al. 2007; Morse 2007).

The empirical material is based on 23 interviews, two of which were performed with women. The main reason for only two female informants is because of the imbalance in the number of women in senior positions in the Swedish Armed Forces. The organization is still traditionally male dominated (Alvinius et al. 2016a). The informants had a wide experience of a number of leadership positions, as well as participation in international operations. They had ranks as colonels or brigadier generals, and they represented army and naval units, the HQ and the Swedish Defence University. The informants' ages varied from 47 to 61 years. In all, 10 individuals came from the army and 13 informants had a naval background. Airborne units were not represented in this study.

2.3 Data collection

The data collection approach was inductive and explorative. The interviews conducted for this study adhered to an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions, followed-up with individually tailored questions such as "tell me more", "in what way" and "can you give me an example". The themes chosen were as follows: (1) background questions focused on personal information, education and national and international staff experience; (2) present staff work in terms of (a) experience of various

aspects of stress at work and challenging situations, (b) experience of ways to handle the stress and demanding situations, (c) experience of leadership, communication and ways to influence the decision-making process; (3) work life/private life balance and (4) the image of the HQ as perceived by the units.

The individual interviews were held by the authors in the spring and summer of 2014 and in the spring of 2015 at the informants' place of employment. Three interviews were conducted over the telephone, and three interviews took place at the Swedish Defence University. The reason for three of the interviews being conducted over the telephone was because of the hectic work situation of one informant and the long geographical distance in two cases. The interviews lasted for ~45 to 90 minutes, and all were recorded with the interviewees' consent. All interviews were conducted and later analyzed by the authors.

2.4 Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. The first phase of the data analysis was inductive. It consisted of four steps, the first of which was known as open coding, which involved identifying units of meaning or codes in each individual interview (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 2011). 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 as follows:

> One thing I can think of is the boss and how his relationships with his special advisors, that he has [...]. There may be some other advisers but in the team you studied there were three, legal adviser, political adviser and gender adviser. It's interesting to study them because I have a feeling that they're very close to the boss's ear so to speak, and sometimes maybe it goes beyond their own advisor role and affects the staff's work, with their own personal views, but then it is not staff prepared in the same manner. The fact that they have more talk time than the general staff members have and then, they have this focused attention and maybe it could be wrong, he (the boss) can become wrongly informed, the Chief of Staff, if he has a strong political adviser or strong legal adviser that talks a lot and that can really sell his message, then there is a risk that an advisor like that can run over the rest of the staff.

This quote was coded as "advisors that influence the chief of staff". The second step in the analysis consisted of evaluating and categorizing the codes according to similarity in the content. From the abovementioned example, the code was then sorted into the category "influencing factors", which in the third step was sorted into the overarching category "using informal strategies". The fourth

and final step involved a comparison between overarching categories, categories and codes, generating a core variable "leader's coping strategies" consisting of five identified strategies: (1) repair work, (2) catching up, (3) reproducing, (4) using informal strategies and (5) managing loyalties.

The second phase of the analysis was theory driven. The five inductively generated coping strategies mentioned earlier were related to the framework provided by the concepts on ON, OA and OG in order to identify their expressions in the military context.

3 Results

3.1 The emerging model

According to the data analysis, the informants are experiencing organizational challenges due to the societal and political superstructure with a perceived imbalance between assigned tasks and resources. These challenges lead to negative intraorganizational characteristics such as ON, OA and OG. These, in turn, create a need for leaders at the strategic level to cope with these demands. The inductive analysis resulted in an identification of five such coping strategies, which, together, form the core variable *leader's coping strategies* (Fig. 1). The Results section focuses on these leadership issues. The antecedent parts of the model, that is the societal and political framing at large and the intra-organizational frames in themselves, are commented on in the Discussion section.

3.2 Leader's coping strategies

The core variable Leader's coping strategies is built up of five categories presented in the following. They are (1) repair work, (2) catching up, (3) reproducing, (4) using informal strategies and (5) managing loyalties. Within each of these coping strategies, the analysis has yielded outcomes that we have interpreted as being relevant to handle each of the three organizational challenges ON, OA and OG.

- *Repair work.* Repair work refers to mending and repairing strategies that military commanders at higher organizational levels use in order to manage and deal with the damages created by the negative side of the organization. Illustrations understood within the frameworks of ON, anorexia and greed are presented in the following.
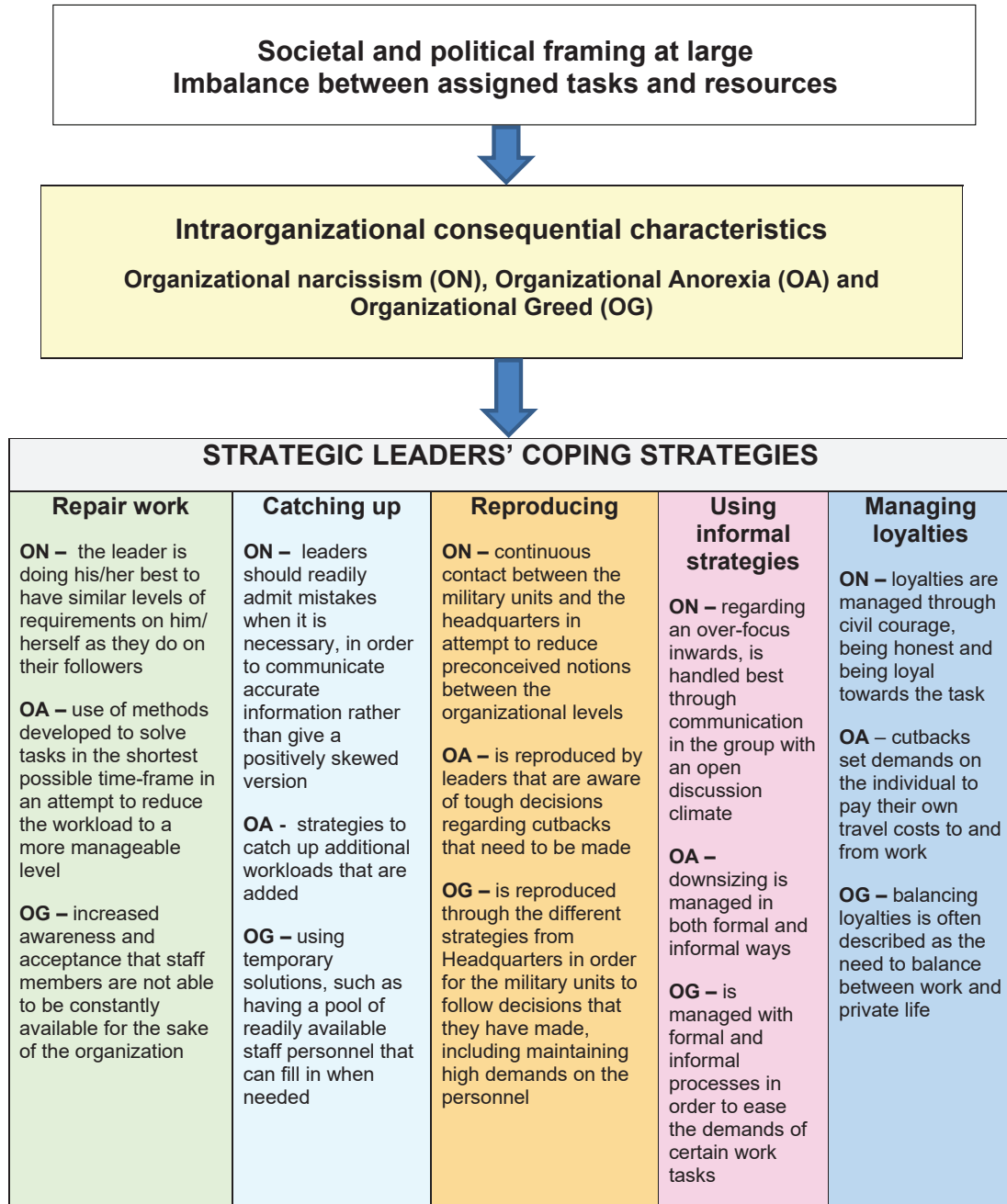
Societal and political framing at large Imbalance between assigned tasks and resources

Intraorganizational consequential characteristics Organizational narcissism (ON), Organizational Anorexia (OA) and Organizational Greed (OG)

STRATEGIC LEADERS' COPING STRATEGIES

Repair work	Catching up	Reproducing	Using informal strategies	Managing loyalties
ON – the leader is doing his/her best to have similar levels of requirements on him/ herself as they do on their followers **OA –** use of methods developed to solve tasks in the shortest possible time-frame in an attempt to reduce the workload to a more manageable level **OG –** increased awareness and acceptance that staff members are not able to be constantly available for the sake of the organization	**ON –** leaders should readily admit mistakes when it is necessary, in order to communicate accurate information rather than give a positively skewed version **OA -** strategies to catch up additional workloads that are added **OG –** using temporary solutions, such as having a pool of readily available staff personnel that can fill in when needed	**ON –** continuous contact between the military units and the headquarters in attempt to reduce preconceived notions between the organizational levels **OA –** is reproduced by leaders that are aware of tough decisions regarding cutbacks that need to be made **OG –** is reproduced through the different strategies from Headquarters in order for the military units to follow decisions that they have made, including maintaining high demands on the personnel	**ON –** regarding an over-focus inwards, is handled best through communication in the group with an open discussion climate **OA –** downsizing is managed in both formal and informal ways **OG –** is managed with formal and informal processes in order to ease the demands of certain work tasks	**ON –** loyalties are managed through civil courage, being honest and being loyal towards the task **OA –** cutbacks set demands on the individual to pay their own travel costs to and from work **OG –** balancing loyalties is often described as the need to balance between work and private life

Fig. 1: Strategic leaders' coping strategies related to organizational challenges.

ON is characterized by aspects where individuals in leadership positions put their own needs first. However, awareness of these needs makes informants reflect on them. Narcissism in the organizational setting can be handled through the leader doing his/her best to have similar levels of requirements on him/herself as they do on their followers:

> *I personally think that a person can't have higher demands on those that they lead than they do on him/herself. I think that the way one leads should be transparent.*

OA is characterized by deficiencies of various types of resources, both material and personnel related. The consequences of OA, austerity and pressure are dealt with by methods developed for solving tasks in the shortest possible time frame, in an attempt to reduce the workload to a more manageable level.

> *It is important to use the correct methodology, PUT (Planning Under Time Pressure – our remark) allows you to plan according to the amount of time you are given, 3 hours or 10 days. It is even more important that the shorter time you have, the more*

necessary it is to use it, I mean you can even use the methodology for a half hour time frame actually.

OG is characterized by excessive internal organizational demands on the individual by the organization, sense of belonging and loyalty and demands on availability and commitment. These demands were often perceived by the informants as steadily increasing over time. An example is demands on constant availability, which is gained at the price of an individual's freedom. OG is managed through a leader's increased awareness that all staff are not able to deliver or be constantly available all the time for the sake of the organization.

> *You can be very ambitious and still have a very good understanding for each other at the same time. You have to have a good understanding that not everyone can perform at the same ability, but some people have difficulty accepting that not everyone can do as much, this I have seen and I have probably thought similarly before also. You aren't really a good boss with that mindset [...]. You must have an understanding that not everyone can deliver in the same manner.*

- *Catching up.* Catching up differs from repair work in the manner that it is a continuous process that is reactive in nature in an attempt to dampen the stress load felt daily. An individual's attempt to "catch up" to all the fast-changing processes and demands have, according to Rosa (2013), become a typical occurrence in organizational life. Several of the leaders in the interviews have reported using "catching up" strategies in order to meet accelerated organizational demands.

ON is dealt with through "catching up" in several different ways. One way reported was leaders readily admitting mistakes when it was necessary to communicate accurate information rather than a positively skewed version.

> *The power of speaking the truth, that is number one, to deliver what you think and believe leaders need to know about the organization, not what you think the leaders want to hear, that is what we previously called good "staff etiquette", it is extremely important that a leader dares to stand up.*

OA is also dealt with through being aware of all the additional tasks that are assigned to staff at the political level. In the following, an informant describes the stress that is caused when several tasks arrive on top of each other, often redundant, and how he/she tries to handle it:

> *First and foremost, everyone becomes quite stressed because there are already several tasks to start with at the beginning of the year, but, that can change many times, however, it never changes that the tasks are taken away, only that new ones are added. It can be additional exercises, or that we need to save money and need to postpone something else. There are several of these types*

of circumstances that were not planned at the beginning, so it is to do it all parallel with the projects originally planned otherwise we would not meet the goals.

With the help of "catching up" strategies, OG can be dealt with by using several temporary solutions, such as having a pool of readily available personnel who can fill in when the organization needs it, often with a short notice:

> *We have had the advantage of being able to pick and choose those that we want here and a way for us to do that, so to speak, is to contract our work. By doing that we can access staff in short notice for a particular amount of time.*

- *Reproducing.* Reproducing is a strategy that focuses on acceptance of decisions and further reproduction of the negative sides of an organization. It is not always possible to either "catch up" with all the changes or to "repair" them. Sometimes, the only feasible alternative is to adapt to the prevailing conditions and convey messages down the chain of command. Consequently, ON, OA and OG are continued and become part of the organizational culture.

ON is reproduced due to the lack of contact and understanding between the military units and HQ. This in turn leads to the presence of preconceived notions between the organizational levels.

> *I chalk much of it up to ignorance, when someone is critical and negative they always want to have an external enemy in order to blame and for us it's the headquarters, I've been on the other side of the situation as well and heard all of the talk about headquarters, but I do not see it as a problem, I see it more as an opportunity/[...]/one example happened two weeks ago when we invited a unit to us and there was a guy who said, "I've been working 26 years in the Armed Forces and I have never been to the headquarters/over time these small jokes about each other eventually becomes of a truth.*

OA is reproduced by leaders who are aware of the need to make tough decisions regarding cutbacks:

> *If you have a position like I do, you don't create only friends in the Armed Forces because I am included and make many decisions that are quite negative to deliver to other colleagues, re-structuring, decisions about reduction of staff, so there are definitely many negative sides to it.*

OG is reproduced through the different strategies from HQ in order for the military units to follow decisions that they have made, including maintaining high demands on personnel:

> *Now I, along with others, are trying very hard to create a closer relationship with the Marine staff, in an attempt to increase trust for the Headquarters. We want them to feel that if they*

have questions, they should be able to ask them [...]. I mean it's not always that they will get the answer they are hoping for but they should feel that Headquarters are looking after them and are going to lead them. They shouldn't have to guess about what they are supposed to do, they should have a clear direction that points towards the Armed Forces' general goals for what is important.

- *Using informal strategies.* These leadership strategies are about the need to follow rules or improvise. This balancing act by leaders is similar to the previous strategy on an individual's adaptation to organizational demands and pressure at the political level. The use of informal strategies in an organization enables leaders to handle the demands that narcissism, anorexia and greed place on them.

ON regarding an overfocus inwards is handled best through communication in the group using open discussion:

We usually try to get together over our morning cup of coffee to talk through things with them (the subordinates – our comment) and we also have a nicer, more formal coffee break together once a week [...]. It is these types of informal forums that we can gauge each other better and come to some agreement.

OA and downsizing are also managed in both formal and informal ways:

I think that system or organizational changes, in those situations informal processes can make a positive impact but it is very dependent on the system. We were supposed to save money in our agency and one of the suggestions we had then, at that time we had four sections and we were considering closing a section or two and so I met XX (Minister of Defence) and I said to him "you have possibly seen our suggestion to close one or two of the sections" and then he said "yes, let's just say I wouldn't prevent you guys from having a more cost-effective organization but I want us to both understand that we are not going to just close those sections".

OG is managed by establishing/setting up formal and informal processes in order to ease the demands of certain work tasks:

It is one thing to talk about informal processes but it is more relevant to discuss how frequently they are used, an old good principle is to follow the chain of command in the Armed Forces and to take things to one's boss in order for it to go further, but depending on what a person is working with, the informal channels are used in order to discuss things.

Managing loyalties. The fifth and final identified coping strategy is about the ability to handle different loyalties. These loyalties can be about the individual's attachment and commitment to the organizational tasks, toward the organization as an employer, toward the employees, toward oneself and, naturally, toward one's own family. When loyalties clash, different strategies are often used to balance them. These are described in the following and illustrated with quotes:

ON and loyalties are managed through civil courage, being honest and being loyal toward the task:

For me, loyalty is to dare to speak up and having civil courage, then you are loyal to your job, your company and its overall mission. What I'm trying to say is that I am not loyal towards a specific person but I'm loyal to the given task that we have received and I think there are different views on that.

OA and cutbacks place demands on the individual to pay their own travel costs to and from work:

My family lives in XX and I have a mean employer that demands that I need to pay for my own travel back and forth to my family, yes you heard right, the Armed Forces. If you are so stupid as to live in XX, then you have to suit yourself! So when I leave for home tomorrow evening then I will travel on a cheap train ticket all the way home to XX that I have paid for myself.

OG and balancing loyalties are often described as the need to have a balance between work and private life:

I work way too much and my family thinks that too, I am married and have two children that are 12 and 13, I have become better at saying "No, now I'm going to prioritize my family". You get really affected by it because you are really tired when you come home so I try to prioritize my children when they have a school break or when I have vacation and then I try to be focused on them 110 percent.

4 Discussion

The aims of this study were to (1) gain a deeper understanding of coping strategies used by the military leaders at the strategic level to manage everyday organizational demands and (2) relate these strategies to multidisciplinary models of organizational challenges.

The five coping strategies found among high-level military commanders for handling organizational demands show resemblances to previous research on how leaders in organizations such as the military, the police and the rescue services handle day-to-day stressors (in contrast to operational stressors; e.g., Larsson et al. 2016, 1988).

Despite these similarities, the identified strategies are somewhat different and unique for this organizational

setting and thus constitute a new finding. However, it should be noted that the conceptual boundaries between the five problem-focused coping strategies are weak and there are overlaps between them. It should also be noted that our interpretation of the degree to which an aspect of a given coping strategy can be seen as an indicator of ON, OA and OG varies in conceptual prototypicality. Our claims are based on interpretations of the informants' self-reports rather than an objective comparison of the data with an organization's theoretical checklist. As such, the present methodological approach is in line with previous organizational research according to Bryman and Bell (2015). Thus, the coping strategies and their suggested organizational theoretical framework need to be further studied.

Another new aspect in this case is that it was possible to connect individual leaders' coping strategies to each of the organizational phenomena such as narcissism, anorexia and greed. In this respect, the connection between the individual and organizational levels is more specific than that addressed in previous organization-oriented writings on task-oriented military leadership (Greenleaf and Spears 2002; Larsson et al. 2005; Soeters 2000; Weibull 2003). It is also more contextually situated than in previous individual-oriented research on problem-focused coping (Larsson et al. 2016; Lazarus and Folkman 1984).

According to the data analysis, we can conclude that the way the informants coped with organizational challenges can be understood in two ways. These leaders not only try to cope themselves but also aim to help the coping of others, i.e., their subordinates. This could be described as a kind of organizational-level coping rather than individual-level coping, since it has a wider base of interest in an organization and is related to the tasks and role expectations set for leaders in general.

According to the suggested model, societal and political pressure creates an imbalance between assigned tasks and resources, which in turn leads to negative intraorganizational characteristics. Societal changes such as globalization (Forster 2006; Holmberg and Hallenberg 2017) and social acceleration (Rosa 2013) have affected all organizations in general and military organizations in particular. It is reasonable to expect that military organizations deal with societal challenges differently because of their special position in society (Holmberg and Hallenberg 2017) and that they develop elements of negative organizational behavior such as narcissism, anorexia or greed (Alvinius et al. 2016b). This phenomenon has been addressed by Moskos et al.

(2000) in the early 2000s. Researchers recognized that postmodern military organizations' exclusivity has been questioned. According to Holmberg (2015), military organizations are going through a process of normalization that includes transformation in accordance to civilian organizations and societies at large. Civilian norms, such as gender equality, rights of homosexuals, parental leave and economic management, are just a few changes that have been incorporated within military organizations. We believe that all organizations have characteristics such as narcissism, anorexia and greed to some extent, but military organizations are experiencing them as consequences of societal demands. Thus, the coping strategies of leaders at the strategic level may be different in other kinds of organizations than the ones identified in this study.

Methodologically, it should be mentioned that this investigation is a case study and as such does not permit generalizations. However, this was not the goal of this qualitative study. In the general terms of Glaser and Strauss (1967), "Partial testing of theory, when necessary, is left to more rigorous approaches (sometimes qualitative but usually quantitative). These come later in the scientific enterprise" (p. 103). It should be emphasized that the concepts derived from the data may be of a sensitizing, rather than a definitive, character to use the words of Blumer (1954). It should also be noted that the study relies on self-reported data only. It may be inaccurate, and a broader range of data would have been desirable. Although the interview data are based on a limited number of informants, this form of information is important as it contributes to our understanding of the leadership challenges and the relationship between problems that may arise with negative organizational aspects in a military context.

We have one main suggestion for future research. The generalizability of the present findings needs to be evaluated, both the leadership coping strategies and the suggested organization theory framing them.

Regarding practical implications, the model may be practical when it comes to selection, retention and leadership development of high-level military officers. Knowledge of how military leaders associate with the organization could be useful for interventions aimed at developing talent and enhancing employee performance as well as counteracting turnover intentions. For the organization, working with core values might be fruitful for developing mentoring programs (reducing the feeling of loneliness) and considering how to foster emotional bonds between the individual and the organization.

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