

# The entirely necessary reorganisation

An examination of organisational clarity

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Den helt nödvändiga omorganisationen:  
En studie av organisatorisk tydlighet

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### **Abstract**

The study examines how and why structural measures are presented as necessary in the Swedish Armed Forces' adaptation to a changing world. Using Carol Bacchi's framework *What's the Problem Represented to be* (WPR), a discursive analysis is conducted of the Armed Forces' decision on reorganisation in 2025. The analysis shows that the decision constructs organisational problems as structural and this reproduces a governance logic where structure appears to handle uncertainty and achieve military effectiveness. As a result, the solutions are rendered predominantly structural, while alternative problem representations and courses of action are silenced. The study identifies central assumptions and silences that enable this problem representation, including ideas of command and control, clarity, and disposal authority. By making these discourse conditions visible, the study contributes to professional reflection by opening up space for a critical examination of how organisational problems are understood and legitimised within the Swedish Armed Forces.

*Key Words:* organization, problem representation, command and control, military

### **Sammanfattning**

Det här är en kritiskt granskande studie av hur och varför strukturella åtgärder framställs som nödvändiga i den svenska Försvarmaktens anpassning till en förändrad omvärld. Med hjälp av Carol Bacchis ramverk *What's the Problem Represented to be* genomförs en diskursiv analys av Försvarmaktens beslut om omorganisation från 2025. Analysen visar att beslutet konstruerar organisatoriska problem som utgår från organisationens formella strukturer (organisationsträdet), vilket reproducerar en långvarig styrningslogik där struktur framstår som det primära medlet för att hantera osäkerhet och uppnå militär effektivitet. Därigenom görs även lösningarna huvudsakligen strukturella medan alternativa problemformuleringar och handlingsvägar förblir tystade. Studien identifierar centrala antaganden och tystnader som möjliggör denna problemrepresentation, bland annat föreställningar om styrbarhet, tydlighet och rådighet. Genom att synliggöra dessa diskursiva förutsättningar bidrar studien till professionell reflektion genom att öppna upp för en kritisk prövning av hur organisatoriska problem kan förstås och legitimeras inom Försvarmakten.

*Nyckelord:* organisation, problemrepresentation, ledning, militär

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Research Overview</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Method</b>	<b>9</b>
WPR Framework . . . . .	9
Analytical Procedure . . . . .	10
Reflexivity . . . . .	10
Research Ethics . . . . .	11
Use of Artificial Intelligence . . . . .	12
Data Collection . . . . .	12
<b>Results</b>	<b>13</b>
The Structural Measures Directive . . . . .	13
Question 1: What's the problem represented to be? . . . . .	13
Question 2: What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representations? . . . . .	15
Question 3: How have the problem representations come about? . . . . .	17
Question 4: Silences . . . . .	19
Question 5: What effects follow from the problem representations? . . . . .	20
The Subjects . . . . .	21
The object - disposal authority . . . . .	22
Question 6: How and where have the problem representations been produced, disseminated, and contested? . . . . .	23
<b>Discussion</b>	<b>25</b>
Discussion of Results . . . . .	25
Process 7 - Self-Problematization . . . . .	27
Methodological Discussion . . . . .	29
<b>List of Figures</b>	
1    The Three Subjects . . . . .	21

## Introduction

Over the past 30 years the Swedish Armed Forces have made significant changes to the structure of the organisation on at least seven occasions. The motives have changed from cutbacks in the 00s to increased robustness from 2016. In many of the reorganisations the articulated ideal has been simplification and increased clarity, but the means to achieve this have varied from centralisation to decentralisation (Swedish Armed Forces, 2019, pp. 3–6). Decentralisation, in turn, has been linked with positive effects for the development of the national defence capabilities (Swedish National Audit Office, 2021, pp. 45–46).

The Swedish Government (2025, p. 15) notes the threats to Swedish security have increased over the past years and that an armed attack against NATO territories cannot be ruled out. It has, with the support of Parliament, decided on an increased military capability over the coming years (Swedish National Audit Office, 2021, p. 96). The Swedish National Audit Office (2025) notes that the greatly increased funding for the military will place high demands on the armed forces to make efficient use of them. The office noted that the armed forces' organisation may have had restraining effects on growth and the development of capabilities (Swedish National Audit Office, 2021, p. 45). Taken together, the Swedish Armed Forces need to quickly increase military capabilities to give Sweden the best possible position to defend the nation and the alliance, with military means if necessary.

Since the Swedish Armed Forces have reorganised many times with apparently similar purposes—but diametrically different solutions—the question remains what has been constructed as “the problem” in the different reform waves and—more importantly—what has guided the most recent one. This study aims to highlight the underlying assumptions and discourses that indirectly shape what is perceived as right and wrong in the organisation and thus which solutions are conceivable. It is necessary to go beyond the explicit problem descriptions of the decisions to find the mechanisms that implicitly may shape how organisational problems are constructed and which solutions appear reasonable. By studying the recent decision on structural measures, the analysis seeks to uncover underlying assumptions and silences, enabling the professional community to critically examine and reassess its own understanding of the “problems”. The following research question guides the thesis:

How are the problems associated with the Swedish Armed Forces' current

organisation represented in and through the agency's decision of 2025 on structural measures?

### **Research Overview**

This study does not examine whether organisational theories are correct, but how such ways of thinking make certain problem representations possible and authoritative. Accordingly, this research overview does not treat organisational theories as competing explanations of why organisations change. Instead, it reconstructs discursive resources that contemporary decision makers may draw upon when formulating organisational problems and solutions. The overview proceeds in two steps: first outlining classical works that have dominated ways of thinking about organisations in general. Second, it examines how such ideas have been taken up and stabilised within military organisations. The discursive landscape that will be depicted in this overview will be used throughout the analysis to identify, explain and justify the findings.

In organisational research, there are several well-established ways of reasoning why organisations change or ought to change. Chandler (1963, pp. 50–51) linked organisational restructuring to strategic choices and environmental demands, while Mintzberg (1979, p. 85; 1993, pp. 126–128) described organisational change as a function of growth and increasing complexity. Lawrence and Lorsch (1967, p. 47) similarly argued that organisational design should reflect what is most rational in relation to the surrounding environment.

Taken together, these classical contributions establish a view of the organisation as a system that can be consciously designed and redesigned in order to achieve desired outcomes; it is a question of understanding the situation and then applying the right organisational changes. This rational-instrumental understanding constitutes a discursive background for contemporary problem representations in which organisational challenges are framed as technical design problems. This perspective has, however, been questioned. March and Olsen's (1972, p. 1) "garbage can model" suggested that some decisions emerged from spontaneous processes rather than from coherent problem-solving, even though they may subsequently be justified in rational terms.

Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 357) introduced an influential way of understanding organisations as entities that adopt formal structures not only for efficiency, but to gain legitimacy in their institutional environment. They argued that such structures may function

largely as ceremonies, while everyday work is organised through informal practices that remain loosely coupled to the decided organisation. Importantly, this decoupling is not a deliberate design feature, but an outcome of practical adaption by organisational members. This implies that informal coordination and pragmatic problem-solving are unlikely to be articulated in formal documents that justify organisational change.

A related perspective was presented by DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 155), who showed how organisations within the same organisational field tend to adopt similar structures in response to legitimacy pressures. Together with Meyer and Rowan, these perspectives highlighted how formal policy texts were shaped by what was institutionally *acceptable* to present as “rational organisations”, while—according to Meyer and Rowan—opening for an outcome where the members of the organisation worked by another logic.

A major influence on public organisations worldwide was the introduction of New Public Management (NPM). Like the perspectives discussed above, these ideas treated organisations as something that could be designed in advance to achieve rationality through clear task division. The result was a public domain that was fragmented into organisations with little formal overlaps between them, requiring active management to coordinate efforts (Brunsson, 2006, p. 254; Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000, p. 254). This framing made it possible to represent organisational problems primarily as problems of insufficient coordination, rather than as problems inherent to the fragmentation itself.

Later the effects of NPM were reviewed and the fragmentation begun to be considered problematic in the public domain. As a response, organisations were once again allowed to be more complex with overlapping responsibilities (Lægreid & Serigstad, 2006, pp. 1402, 1407). This shift made it possible to reframe overlap from an organisational problem into a functional *feature* of complex governance arrangements.

In contrast to both these developments of NPM, other studies suggested that reforms of public organisations may function primarily as symbolic solutions rather than as responses to underlying problems (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017, p. 33). This perspective made it possible to understand organisational change not primarily as a response to operational deficiencies, but as a means of sustaining legitimacy through the presentation of rational reform narratives.

Research on military organisations more broadly suggested that armed forces tended

to follow the general organisational trends in society while simultaneously maintaining profession-specific characteristics. Studies describe how military organisations had adapted bureaucratic structures and refined hierarchies in pursuit of organisational rationality (Segal & Segal, 1983, pp. 152, 154; Roman & Tarr, 1998). Such perspectives normalise the idea that organisational problems can be addressed through structural design and make it plausible to treat civilian organisational models as legitimate sources of reform.

However, which externally found ideas that gain influence is shaped by national military traditions. Moskos (1986, p. 380) described a long-term shift in Western armed forces from an institutional to an occupational model, where personnel increasingly compared themselves with civilian professions rather than vertically with internal military roles. This made it possible to conceptualise organisational functions as specialised domains; governed by professional standards rather than solely by unified command. At the same time, research suggests such external models did not enter military organisations without friction. Organisational *culture* may act as a constraining force, delaying or reshaping reform when external models challenge established military identities (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2019, p. 145).

Doctrinal texts constituted another mechanism through which organisational self understanding is produced and stabilised in a military organisation. Rather than merely describing operational realities, doctrine contributes to defining what counts as appropriate conduct and legitimate priorities (Nymalm, 2025, p. 135). In this sense, doctrine functions as an institutionalised site where organisational identity and expectations are articulated. At the same time, research suggests doctrinal authority did not automatically get accepted (Nisser, 2025, p. 61). This indicates that organisational self-understanding cannot be inferred directly from doctrinal texts alone, but emerges through the everyday professional practices.

In summary, there are three conclusions that may be drawn from this research overview. First, there are a great number of theories and studies on organisational change that may be shaping what contemporary decision-makers count as organisations, problems and rational solutions. Secondly, explicitly normative texts—like doctrines—do not fully determine organisational problem representations or practices. Third, while organisational change in military and public organisations has been widely studied, limited attention has been paid to how such decisions construct organisational problems. By analysing how problems are represented in a current Swedish Armed Forces decision on organisational reform, this study

contributes to understanding why reorganisation has become both necessary and reasonable.

### **Method**

The study applied Carol Bacchi's framework *What's the Problem Represented to be?* (WPR) to show how the Swedish Armed Forces constructed problems in the decision under study. Through the framework—which is more of a practical tool than a theory—the decision was examined through several predefined questions. Together this provided a description of the discursive framing that the decision both represents and is dependent on, and which forms the basis for the decision to appear logically rational. Rather than evaluating the effectiveness of the measures, the study uses them to infer how the organisation represents the problem it intends to address. Bacchi (2025, p. 34) argues this is how a decision itself produces a problem, even if it does not articulate the problem itself or may even attribute a different problem.

### **WPR Framework**

Bacchi's (2012a, p. 21; 2012b, pp. 2–3; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 14) WPR framework focuses on examining how governing acts build what is taken for granted as “the problem”. She argues that differences between right and wrong, and thus the rationalities that underpin governance, are produced through language rather than existing objectively. Policies and decisions should therefore not be seen as replies to already existing problems; rather they *create* the problems they claim to solve. Such constructions appear in texts, policy documents, and institutional arrangements where norms and categories are set out and fixed.

The WPR framework turns these insights into six analytical questions that help the researcher figure out how specific problem representations become possible and how they shape the space for possible action:

1. What is the problem represented to be in the specific policy?
2. What assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”?
3. How did this image of the “problem” come about?
4. What remains unchallenged in this image of the problem? What is silenced?
5. What effects (discursive, subjective, objectifying, lived) are produced by this image of the “problem”?

## 6. How and where has this image of the “problem” been produced, shared, and defended?

(edited list from Bacchi, 2025, p. 24)

Bacchi adds a final step in the process, where the analyst applies these questions to their own study. This reflective element, self-problematisation, will be presented in the Discussion chapter.

This framework is based on a poststructuralist ontology and epistemology, which makes questions about what is assumed to exist and how knowledge about it is produced particularly relevant (Bacchi, 2009, pp. 275–277; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, pp. 4–5). One way to clarify this may be to look at the seemingly simple concept of “structure”, which is often seen as something that exists objectively (ontology) and can be understood through investigation, documentation or measurement (epistemology). In the context of the Swedish Armed Forces, this is particularly evident in the Rules of Procedure (FM ArbO), a document that largely defines the formal structure of the organisation. When new proposals are required to “fit in” with this document, structural solutions are implicitly the only conceivable option. The point is that language *creates* structure as an object, it was not something that existed objectively according to the poststructuralist way of reasoning.

### **Analytical Procedure**

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First the decision was read in full to gain an overview of its structure and main content. Second, the text was re-read to identify and compile all decided actions. Third, an iterative process was undertaken in which themes were extracted from the list of actions. It was at this stage that the three main problem representations—the answer to question one of the WPR framework—were developed.

In the final stage, these problem representations were systematically tested and refined through the application of the remaining WPR questions. During this phase, the emerging interpretations were discussed with a fellow student, the supervisor and ChatGPT 5.1 (see AI section below). Throughout the analysis, a research diary was used to document analytical decisions, revisions and emerging uncertainties.

### **Reflexivity**

Bacchi (2009, pp. 19, 45) points out that researchers who use the WPR framework must be transparent about their reflexivity, as the approach itself is sensitive to the analyst’s

own assumptions. Therefore, the framework includes a step, process 7, which helps to reveal the researcher's influence on the analysis. Reflexivity will therefore be highlighted in the final step of the framework, where the WPR questions will be applied in practice to the study itself. As Jacobsen (2024, p. 168) notes, transparency is central to the assessment of qualitative research, and a few points about my background are relevant in this regard.

I have professional experience in planning roles within both the Swedish Naval Headquarters and the Defence Staff. During the latter service, I worked at the department that carried out the investigation that led to the reorganisation examined in this study. However, I did not participate in the investigation and did not contribute to the decision that forms the empirical basis for this analysis. No part of this study was conducted in cooperation with—or subject to influence from—any part of the Swedish Armed Forces.

### **Research Ethics**

According to ALLEA (2023, p. 5), research ethics is based on the principles of *reliability, honesty, respect, and accountability*. Since *reliability*—which is understood as transparency and traceability—is discussed in depth elsewhere in this chapter, the focus here will be on *honesty* and *respect*. These principles are of particular importance for the type of method used in this study.

The empirical material consisted of an official decision issued by the Swedish Armed Forces. Although the analysis has a critical stance, its purpose was not to evaluate individual actions or question the professionalism of those involved. Rather, it examined how organisational meaning was constructed through language and how particular ways of understanding problems became possible. *Honesty* therefore required clarity about the analytical perspective and its implications, while *respect* meant acknowledging that alternative interpretations of the same material remained legitimate. These considerations are presented in the Discussion section, where the results are problematised.

A poststructuralist investigation introduces further ethical considerations, as it challenges the idea that a single interpretation or “description of reality” can claim to be objectively true. This should not be misunderstood to mean that everything is “true” in the eyes of the beholder and that this study, therefore, is neither more nor less accurate in its findings. The yardstick for quality in this work is how stable and dominant the statements made are in the discourse and how transparent the analysis is to the reader. Edwards and

Mauthner (2012, p. 25) argued that ethics is less about *eliminating* dilemmas in advance and more about *dealing* with ambiguity openly while remaining attentive to the power relations between researchers and the subjects of their research. Since the analysis is part of the discursive field it examines, it also requires an awareness of how criticism may be received. The practical solution to this dilemma lies, here too, in the reflexive step described earlier, as it exposes the *analysis* itself to the reader's scrutiny.

As the material analysed consisted of publicly available official documents and contains no personal or sensitive data, and since the study did not involve human participants, informed consent was not required. Nor was formal ethical review approval required under the Swedish Ethical Review Act (SFS 2003:460).

### **Use of Artificial Intelligence**

Artificial intelligence (AI), including large language models (LLM), has been used in this thesis in three ways: (1) as language support through ChatGPT, (2) as a complementary tool for identifying literature through scite.ai, and (3) as a reflexive aid during the analysis work.

For linguistic refinement, ChatGPT 5.2 was used to refine formulations and improve linguistic clarity. For reference retrieval, scite.ai was used to suggest potentially relevant publications and visualise citation relationships so that sufficient breadth could be achieved. All suggested sources were manually assessed for relevance. Finally, selected parts of the analysis were reviewed through ChatGPT 5.1 to challenge the researcher's own assumptions. LLM is deemed beneficial for these purposes, although its use carries certain risks. An evaluation of this method is provided in the Discussion chapter.

### **Data Collection**

The empirical material consisted of a document in which the Swedish Armed Forces decided to reorganise parts of the organisation. Since this was the only data source, a detailed description of the selection is warranted. Within the logic of the WPR framework, the purpose of the analysis is to reveal how a specific policy or decision constructs certain problems while excluding others. However, the framework does not allow the study to capture how the organisation perceives these issues more broadly; instead, it examines the discursive framing embedded in the document itself (Bacchi, 2025, p. 5). If the document has significant institutional authority, it is also reasonable that it influences internal discourse and defines

which representations of problems that are considered legitimate. Although the empirical material consisted of a single document, its high institutional authority and its widespread<sup>1</sup> and formal status justified this selection. Furthermore, the purpose of a WPR analysis is not to generalise across different cases, but to critically examine the discursive construction within a specific policy text.

This concludes the presentation of the main features of the study's method and design. In the results section, each WPR question will be preceded by a brief explanation of what Bacchi meant by that question. The intention is to make it more accessible to readers who are unfamiliar with the method.

## **Results**

The results are structured around the WPR questions, each introduced by a brief explanation of Bacchi's intent with the question. Before this, the source material is presented to provide context for the analysis.

### **The Structural Measures Directive**

In April 2025 the chief of the Swedish Defence Staff decided to change part of the Swedish Armed Forces structure in the areas of command, logistics, education and HR (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d). In this decision organisational units were moved within the agency's chain of command, and a few areas were identified for further inquiry. The decision was situated in a context where the agency had been reviewing and changing its command-and-control structure since before 2019 to make the organisation more effective operationally—an initiative referred to as *Command and Control for a Stronger Defence*<sup>2</sup>.

### **Question 1: What's the problem represented to be?**

Bacchi (2012b, p. 4) argues that problems do not exist objectively, waiting to be discovered and described. Instead, they are constituted through human practices, and policy formulation is one such practice. The first WPR question, therefore, invites the analyst to move beyond surface description and examine how a policy constructs the problem it claims to address. As Bacchi (2025, p. 19) notes, a productive starting point is to look closely at the

<sup>1</sup> The content of the document was described in the internal magazine of the Swedish Armed Forces on two occasions in 2025 (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025a, 2025b)

<sup>2</sup> My translation of the Swedish *Ledning för ett starkare försvar*

proposals put forward in a policy document. What a proposal suggests should change provides an entry point into understanding which problem representations are being produced, and what assumptions underpin them.

The analysis identified three key problem representations:

- **Structural Clarity Problem:** Unclear structure, roles and responsibilities hinder the transformation to wartime command.
- **Fragmented Authority Problem:** Shared and split authority between management levels and functions leads to sub-optimisation in the development of warfare capabilities.
- **Financial Governance Problem:** The economic governance model does not sufficiently support the development of warfare capabilities.

The first problem representation is characterized by the need to avoid ambiguity and unclear conditions. This is expressed through reasoning about the need for organisational similarity independent of the circumstances as “similarity in war and peace organisation is desired” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, Appendix 1 p. 4). The aim is to ensure clarity and simplicity in wartime by having “appropriate and simple forms of transition [to war organisation]” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, Appendix 1 p. 4). The problem representation is reinforced by the description of the current situation as having “unclear command and control conditions in the war organisation” and “a more or less unknown set of requirements in the event of heightened alert” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, Appendix 1 p. 2). The *Structural Clarity Problem* representation makes structural harmonisation the main solution, which suggests a view of the organisation as a mechanical construct that can be rebuilt to create better military effect.

The second problem concerns the distribution of power within the organisation, for example between the Armed Forces Headquarters, functional areas and the service chiefs. This is expressed through solutions such as “The service chiefs’ authority over activities that are prerequisites for their ability to take on their assigned responsibilities is strengthened” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, Appendix 1 p. 5) and “the service chiefs will assume responsibility for basic officer training” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, Appendix 1 p. 6). In this representation of the problem, the division of responsibilities appears to be a technical design question rather than a matter of culture and practice. This renders governance a

question of control rather than of collaboration and professionalism. The organisation's perceived problems are thus constructed as a structural flaw and not a deficiency in collaboration.

The final problem area concerns the financial model and its relationship to governance which is articulated in the text as “The so-called workshop model will be phased out ..., a new economic model will be produced” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, Appendix 1 p. 5) and “the requirements have changed from a focus on (economic) rationality ... to a focus on robustness, appropriateness and effect ...” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, Appendix 1 p. 2). Although the document does not mention the economy in detail, a problem is constructed by the fact that what is said occurs in the context of a structural document for reorganisation. This makes economic governance a subset of effectiveness and capability, thereby placing the economy at the centre of governance and enabling financial governance to be a measure of effectiveness and capability.

Together, these three representations construct a narrative of the organisation's problems as formal, controllable and technical. This renders governance a question of structure, responsibility allocation and modelling.

## **Question 2: What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representations?**

In the second question Bacchi (2025, p. 21) asks the researcher to consider how the problem representations identified in the first step are made possible. The idea is that any problem representation relies on certain assumptions to make sense. These assumptions may consist of established ways of thinking that have not been consciously revised or scrutinised and therefore appear as taken-for-granted knowledge.

The *Structural Clarity Problem*—where lack of clarity hinders the shift to a wartime organisation—is based on the assumptions that ambiguities can be designed out in advance, that clarity creates controllability, that disorder is dangerous, and that military organisations become effective through unambiguity. To the extent that the solution is based on merging war and peace organisations into similar organisations, an assumption must be accepted that peace and war activities are so similar that one and the same organisation can be used without unacceptable compromises. Reality is constructed as if ambiguity and uncertainty can be mitigated through planning and inquiry, which turns *current* interpretations of the demands and environment of war into truths. This establishes a governance logic in which planning

and harmonisation appear to be the most legitimate ways of creating warfare capability while uncertainty and ambiguity are merely recognised as risks that must be controlled through structural design. These ideas are well in line with classic works on bureaucratic organisations (Weber, 1978, p. 973).

The *Fragmented Responsibility Problem*—the move of authority from the staff to commanders in the line organisation—rests on the view that humans are rational only in relation to their own, or their units' interests, and therefore need central control to stop them from sub-optimizing in relation to the greater good. The effect of this assumption is that the organisation must be constructed as a unified hierarchy where coordination is achieved by placing decision-making authority with a superior commander. This makes governance a matter of command and control rather than negotiation and unity of effort. This discourse produces an ideal of the overseeing commander as the bearer of truth about the overall situation and consequently the locus of decision-making. Although the decision can be seen as a case of *decentralisation*—with a shift of authority from the Armed Forces Headquarters to the service chiefs—the logic remains that power must be held by a central actor, which limits the scope for further decentralisation. Classical studies on administrative organisations recognize these themes as functions of authority, coordination, responsibility and expertise. The problem representations, thus, are consistent with previous studies on administrative organisations (Simon, 1997, p. 177).

The *Financial Governance Problem* appears plausible because it is based on at least two underlying assumptions. First, the economic models are a central mechanism for governing complex organisations and therefore have a significant impact on military effectiveness. Secondly, economic models offer a way of creating order and clarity which allows truths to be constructed of the organisations as understandable and manageable. Together, this means that the economic profession's view of governance is given great authority. What is seen as "correct" economic governance is accepted as a given and therefore does not need to be described in detail in the decision. This may help explain why the structural change to the formal organisation is described in detail in the document, while the changes to the economic model are expressed in only general vague terms. Similar dynamics are described by Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 345), who show how formal management systems gain legitimacy and governing power even when their practical effects remain uncertain.

When assumptions are seen together with the problem representations, it constructs a reality where the organisation is allowed to be interpreted as something mechanical that can be redesigned to change the organisational outcomes. Ideas of planning, structure, and economics therefore become natural solutions. The fourth question will introduce what needs to be silent for the problem representations to be upheld, but before that the analysis will turn to the question of why the Swedish Armed Forces may hold both the problem representations and the assumptions presented here.

### **Question 3: How have the problem representations come about?**

Building on the results of question two, the third question focuses on describing how the problem representation has become possible. In contrast to the previous question, the aim here is to introduce a historical perspective. The task is not to establish causal links between past events and the present representation, but rather to identify the discourses, practices and institutional developments that have created the conditions for today's way of thinking (Bacchi, 2025, p. 22). The question therefore highlights the contingent nature of problem representations by showing how they emerge from specific historical trajectories rather than from objective necessity. Three themes will be presented in this section that exemplify how history has influenced today's discourse.

First, in relation to the *Structural Clarity Problem*, a closely related concept is bureaucracy. Holmberg and Alvinus (2019, p. 134) describe how the traits of military organisations include predictability, structure, and rules, and how this in turn influences the organisation's actions. The discourse concerning the structure of military organisations has been created and maintained over a long period of time and spread throughout the world. One such mechanism is *institutional isomorphism*—through which organisations seek legitimacy by becoming increasingly similar to one another—especially in organisations that perceive their goals to be ambiguous (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 155). In this context, it is expected that the characteristics of the Swedish Armed Forces resemble those of other countries, just as other countries resemble the Swedish Armed Forces (Farrell, 2002, pp. 84–85). This historically rooted bureaucratic discourse has in modern times been supplemented by more administrative and economic governance logics. A key example is the introduction of the business management system “Prio”. The system introduced several concepts that still exist today and have in effect influenced the organisation's behaviour and

which are present in the problem representations (Ledberg et al., 2022, pp. 908–909). The legacy of bureaucracy makes it possible to frame organisational problems as lack of structure, coordination and rule-based control.

The second historical perspective has a bearing on the *Structural Clarity Problem* and the *Economic Governance Problem* and comes from the spread of New Public Management (NPM). NPM aimed to increase rationality and control by giving public authorities clearly defined remits. Broad and vague tasks were seen as creating ambiguity in both purpose and responsibility (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000, pp. 727–728). Although NPM has in many contexts been replaced by whole-of-government approaches (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007, p. 1059), Stewart and Connolly (2021, p. 585) argue that key elements, particularly in economic governance, remain. This means that the idea that complexity can be managed through streamlining, standardisation and clear division of duties continues to characterise the debate in public governance. This contributes to a problem representation in which ambiguity is treated as a failure of design rather than as an inherent feature of the military context and operations.

The third historical view adds to the *Fragmented Responsibility Problem* and relates to the line organisation. While the two previous perspectives originated further back historically, this has been under significant changes the last decades. The decentralisation reforms of the late 2010s were preceded by a period of centralisation throughout the 2000s (Swedish Armed Forces, 2019, pp. 3–6). It is worth noting that the Swedish Armed Forces (2019, Appendix 6) has constructed another problem representation with similarities to the *Fragmented Responsibility Problem* when they stated that commanders did not have disposal authority over all the resources needed to create warfare capability. The idea of disposal authority, however, is older in a defence context and was used in the Swedish National Audit Office (2021) review of the strengthening of the army's combat forces. The audit office states that commanders with responsibility for results lack control (disposal authority) over the resources, which had ultimately contributed to the government's objectives not being achieved. In all, disposal authority accounts for the part of today's problem representations that are linked to the reallocation of authority from function-managers to commanders in the line. Taken together, this makes it possible to construct coordination problems primarily as problems of misplaced authority, rather than in terms of knowledge distribution or trust. In

this way, the critique of disposal authority produces an organisational view in which shared authority appears as problematic.

In summary these examples show that today's structural and technocratic governance rationale is not new but at least partly a continuation of a long-standing bureaucratic tradition in which planning and standardisation are at the core of how efficiency is understood. A more recent discourse is that of economic governance, which was possibly reinforced by the introduction of the administrative business system "Prio". Therefore, the decision does not show a totally new way of thinking about the organisation rather it stabilises a governance logic in which planning, formal structure, and hierarchical control are treated as primary solutions. At the same time, it gives authority to the ideas of de-centralisation that gained prominence over the past decade. The next section will present what the current problem representations and the history did not present as viable ideas.

#### **Question 4: Silences**

Bacchi (2025, p. 22) describes the purpose of this question as identifying what is left unproblematised through the problem representation already outlined. One way of doing this, Bacchi suggests, is to compare the representation with critical literature on the topic or with perspectives from other cultural or institutional contexts. In this analysis, the previous research chapter will therefore serve as an important point of reference. In addition, the analysis approaches the question by considering which perspectives may be silenced through the language of the proposal and through the presuppositions about what is regarded as true, relevant or real. This enables an examination of the limits of the problem representation; what it brings into focus, and what it makes more difficult to consider.

The first silence regards the problem representations' relation to a dynamic environment. In the representation it is presupposed that effectiveness in peace and wartime can be secured through advance planning and structural design, which are thereby privileged as means to handle uncertainty. The decision explicitly describes a need to design for "current and future situations" (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, Appendix 1 p. 2), while limiting this to the formal structure. Therefore, the silence is not an absence of concern for a changing future, but an exclusion of the types of problems that Weick and Sutcliffe (2007, pp. 66–68) point to when they note that plans limit the spectrum of phenomena that can be observed by predefining what counts as relevant.

The second silence concerns what the organisation actually looks like—the informal organisation within the formal. This silence is constructed mainly from the *Fragmented Responsibility Problem* when it constructs a divided authority as a source of suboptimization; a construction that presupposes that organisational behaviour follows formal structures and lines of command. Research on organisations has shown that decision making often takes place in informal networks that are only loosely coupled to the organisation chart (Mintzberg, 1993, pp. 19–23). By equating organisational outcomes with formal structures, the decision makes informal cooperation irrelevant. The silence is, therefore, not about whether an informal organisation exists, but how it can be recognised as a legitimate object for governance.

Together, these two silences rest on an ontological assumption that both the external environment and the organisation itself exist as knowable objects that can be changed through structural design. The organisation is constructed as equivalent to its representation in formal documents and knowledge of it can be obtained through these formal documents. This makes it possible to govern through structural intervention in documents. At the same time, it silences perspectives based on alternative ontological understandings of the organisation where the organisation could be understood as something that is created in practice and negotiated continually through formal and informal relations.

### **Question 5: What effects follow from the problem representations?**

In the fifth question, Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, p. 37) and Bacchi (2025, pp. 7, 22) emphasise that the analysis should examine the effects *produced* by the problem representation. These effects are grouped into four categories: *discursive*, *subjectification*, *objectification* and *lived effects*. The *discursive effects* partly synthesise insights from the previous WPR questions, while the next two categories introduce new analytical units: subjects and objects. *Subjects* are theoretical models of actors implied by the problem representation, whereas *objects* are related categories or concepts. *Lived effects*, finally, illustrate how these discursive dynamics may manifest in the everyday experiences of real people. Among the possible objectifications identified, one was deemed particularly significant and is therefore presented, while the others are omitted.

An example of a *discursive effect* is the positioning of the Swedish Armed Forces' Rules of Procedure (FM ArbO) as the primary instrument for implementing change. Being a

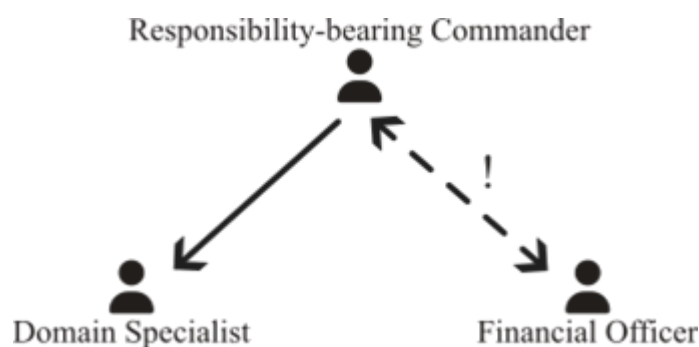
document that by design contain structures, delegations and mandates, this frames the organisational problems as issues that must be resolved through these measures. As a result, solutions that cannot be articulated within this framework become difficult to formulate as legitimate responses, which in turn affects what can be considered a problem.

### ***The Subjects***

Three central subjects have been identified as critical for the analysis and will be described in detail: (1) the responsibility-bearing commander, (2) the domain specialist, and (3) the financial officer (Figure 1).

### **Figure 1**

*The Three Subjects*



It should be noted that these subjects do not refer to any specific person but are thought models that are consequences of the problem representation that has been constructed.

The *responsibility-bearing commander* is expected to view the bigger picture, weigh up the options and create order *through* structure. This subject is formed when formal power is reallocated from function managers (domain specialists) to service chiefs and this shift is supported by the discourse on how a lack of coordination has led to sub-optimisation (see question three). The following extract from the decision exemplifies how the subject is created: “within the framework of assigned tasks, mission recipients may consider additional organisational and/or management-and-obedience-related measures” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, Appendix 1 p. 9). The expected effect of this subjectification is that commanders in the line who act in accordance with the problem representations presented here are considered legitimate, whereas diversion from these ideas is rendered less so.

The *domain specialists* are part of the organisational units that in accordance with the decision will be reallocated to the service chiefs, such as the military training units. They are seen as actors who risk sub-optimisation if they are not coordinated. Their discursive role is as potential sources of disruption, while being important enough not to be phased out completely. The domain specialists are constituted as governable through the line organisation and led by the responsibility-bearing commander.

*Financial officers* are the actors who run the financial governance model. Since the decision is vague about the content or requirements of the economic governance model it can be assumed that financial officers are given a problem-formulation mandate in the financial governance model, thereby positioning economic rationality as a legitimate basis for defining military effectiveness.

Taken together, the three subjects produce two distinct effects. First, to the extent that the relationship between the responsibility-bearing commander and the financial officer is left undefined, a power tension is constituted between two forms of authority, as both subjects are positioned as capable of determining what constitutes military benefit. Both, however, are expected to operate within a problem representation in which structure functions as the primary solution. Secondly, the relationship between the domain specialists and the responsibility bearing commander suggests that the former ought to seek the latter's approval to be able to have influence.

### ***The object - disposal authority***

*Disposal authority* is the one object that will be mentioned here, and it is constructed in the decision's objective to achieve "increased disposal authority over activities that create conditions, primarily for the service chiefs with regard to their responsibilities" (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, Appendix 1 p. 5). In this framing, disposal authority is presented as a concrete and governable property embedded in organisational structures (see question three for a historical perspective on the concept). This objectification rests on a logic in which the responsibility-bearing commander is constituted as the actor who ought to control the factors assumed to determine the organisations outcomes. Chandler's (1963, p. 14) account of vertical integration describes a comparable rationality, in which effectiveness is linked to the concentration of control over an entire production chain. Similarly, the focus on the line organisation in the decision positions commanders as nodal points through which

organisational control is expected to flow.

A discursive effect of this objectification is that solutions based on shared responsibility or trust-based coordination are rendered less intelligible as legitimate forms of governance. A lived effect, paradoxically, may be that individual commanders experience their responsibility as structurally *insufficient*, as significant factors influencing outcomes may remain beyond their formal control. In this sense, other organisational actors are constituted primarily as objects of control rather than as autonomous contributors to the organisation's goals.

**Question 6: How and where have the problem representations been produced, disseminated, and contested?**

This question builds on the results of question three, where the sources of problem representation were identified. Here, the analysis examines how these representations are reproduced, defended and—in some instances—challenged within the discourses. Particular attention is directed towards *subjugated knowledges*—marginalised perspectives that operate in the shadows of the dominant governing rationality and that may serve as starting points for thinking differently (Bacchi, 2025, p. 23).

The results from question three showed that the decision could be seen as a reflection of ideas from both broader military history and the last 30 years of government changes from NPM to the recent focus on the disposal authority. Another approach is to examine which reproductions are enabled by the current discourse. One example is the project group for *New Navy* that is set up by the Chief of the Navy with the task of: “[analysing] the current structure of the Navy aiming to clarify what needs to be done for the Navy to meet today’s demands and future expectations” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025c, p. 2). This is later clarified by specifying that the group should “propose a naval structure including locations report on the need for any changes in responsibilities, command-and-control methods, and processes” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025c, Appendix 1).

The issue is described in a similar way in these two decisions, with the Chief of the Navy’s decision coming only months after that of the Chief of Defence Staff’s, and both reproducing the already established governance rationale: change is constructed as a matter of formal structure and process, not culture and practice. The Chief of the Navy seems to act in accordance with the subject the responsibility-bearing commander.

An indirect defence of the discourse appeals to military logic and is expressed when the decision under study takes a distance from the rational thinking of recent years “the requirements have changed from a focus on (economic) rationality in ‘a permanent state of peace’ to a focus on robustness, expediency, and effectiveness based on the main tasks of the Armed Forces” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2025d, p. 2). This gives a retro view where old solutions become viable again. Weick states that this is not rare in bureaucratic organisations and describes it as “seeing what they have seen before and linking these memories in a sequential train of associations. In a potentially dangerous reversal people in bureaucracies tend to imagine the past and remember the future” (Weick, 2006, p. 448). This rhetorical shift serves as a defence for the prevailing discourse. By referring to “military logic” and past continuity the governance model is legitimised as natural and based on experience, making questioning more difficult.

Within the organisation, faint yet clear signs of alternative discourses are present. Leadership Inquiry 19 creates an internal shift by bringing up some of the silences that were presented in question four (Swedish Armed Forces, 2019, Appendix 6). Similarly, the Sergeant Major of the Swedish Armed Forces note on risk appetite: “I am not criticising individuals, managers, leaders, or employees. What I am criticising are processes, rules, and rigidities in the organisation” (Fagerstedt, 2025). His statement can be seen as a careful step towards a cultural and behavioural logic rather than a structural; thus an example of subjugated knowledges.

Outside the formal arenas, in forums such as the Swedish military debate site *Militär Debatt* (2025), more direct challenges appear, although many of them still operate within the same governance logic, where the solution to perceived structural problems remains new structures. These subjugated knowledges operate at the margins and point to different subject positions. They may remain marginal because, as far as can be observed, they are not incorporated into official policy documents or formal steering instruments. Building on the subject positions discussed in relation to question five, the figure of the responsibility-bearing commander may be reproduced across the organisational levels, thereby contributing to the diffusion and stabilisation of these problem representations. The Swedish Chief of Navy’s project *New Navy* may serve as an illustrative example of this process.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the problem representations in the Swedish Armed Forces' decision on structural measures. The analysis identified three main problem representations: (1) structural clarity, (2) fragmented authority, and (3) financial governance. Together, these representations construct a governing rationality in which structure, hierarchy, and economic rationality are made the primary means of achieving—and defining—control and efficiency. Governance is constructed as a technical and measurable activity, thus exempting views that see governance as a social or interpretive practice. These representations rely on specific assumptions and silences to be reasonable. The following discussion will explore the implications of these findings.

The scientific contribution lies in highlighting the governing rationalities that shape how organisational problems are constructed within the Swedish Armed Forces, a dimension that has received limited attention in studies of contemporary military reorganisation. This study therefore contributes not by explaining organisational change, but by analysing how organisational change becomes thinkable and justifiable in a specific contemporary military context. These findings contribute to the academic understanding of leadership and control by showing how governance in military contexts is constituted through language and institutional practice.

In line with poststructuralist ideals, the study itself becomes part of the discourse it describes, offering the potential to change how the organisation understands its own governance. Whether such a change occurs depends on how the results are received by professionals within the organisation. However, the main non-scientific contribution is likely to be the assumptions and silences that have been identified and can be used to evaluate beliefs on organisations.

### Discussion of Results

The results of this study can be understood as part of a broader discourse on how military organisations view themselves and their environment in relation to organisational issues. The themes and categories that emerged from the analysis indicate language and knowledge practices that play a historically continuous role in the views of organisation and leadership, consistent with bureaucratic and administrative traditions described in organisational research. This pattern—recurring reforms with different structural designs but

with similar stated purposes—can be read as an indicator of a stable problem representation in which organisational difficulties are consistently framed as problems of structure, coordination and control. At the time of the study, the representations of problems described are not being seriously challenged in formal decision-making arenas, even though other perspectives (subjugated knowledges) certainly exist.

The analytical categories—the problem representations—reflect the long-standing ways in which the Swedish Armed Forces conceptualises organisation. They are rooted in an understanding of order and coordination as products of design and where efficiency and control are achieved through allocation of power and measurement of results. The categories are not neutral but rather carry with them specific ideas about causality and agency. To speak of “clear structure” or “disposal authority” is to refer to a world where cohesion and direction are the result of clear hierarchies and well-defined roles. This way of understanding the organisation offers stability and predictability, but it can also limit how change can be imagined. When control and clarity are positioned as prerequisites for efficiency, more dynamic or interpretive ways of organising risk being constructed as illogical or wrong.

From a poststructuralist perspective, these patterns reveal the close connection between knowledge and governance. It is about what becomes possible to think, believe and say in the organisation, and the underlying idea is that it is the problem representations that create this framework. This is because what counts as a problem is decisive, as it determines what counts as a solution—that is, what will be done in practice. The results can be interpreted as indicating that the Swedish Armed Forces’ formal language of governance relies on a belief in structure and hierarchy as prerequisites for capability, which is supported by the fact that the organisation’s decisions and actions concern structures and hierarchy. This is not necessarily wrong; it simply reflects a historically situated way of producing meaning on organisation. Alternatively, the dominance of structural language may reflect organisational accountability requirements as a government agency rather than deeply held beliefs about how effectiveness is produced.

Other interpretative frameworks, such as organisational understandings that emphasise adaptation—culture or relational leadership—may coexist in the organisation, but they are likely to be less present as formally articulated solutions. However, this highlights the limitations of the study in terms of sample selection. It is not possible to generalise the results

to the entire agency, which can be explained by the fact that the organisation could very well have produced other problem constructing documents or statements, something that would need to be studied using a different research design.

In addition to its scientific contribution, the study may offer professional value for members of the Armed Forces. This stems primarily from making visible the assumptions and silences that underlie the decision. These include, for example, the assumption that organisational design can neutralise uncertainty, that clarity produces efficiency, that command prevents sub-optimisation and that financial models create order. If any of these assumptions are questioned, the core of the problem representations becomes uncertain.

Equally important are the silences. One of them concerned the idea that war might require organisational forms that differ from those designed in peacetime—an observation that may be easy to accept in principle, but which is nevertheless absent from the decision. Another omission concerned how decision-making in practice may follow informal rather than formal structures, giving rise to the possible effect that structural changes may have limited practical impact if the members of the organisation do not follow the governance design to start with.

By making these assumptions and silences visible, the study provides a basis for reflection on the rationalities of the problem representations embedded in the directive. Given what the findings show, it's important to repeat what the findings do not show. This is not an evaluation of the Swedish Armed Forces' directive for action on structural issues, as neither the method nor the results should be understood as a way of testing the effects that the directive sought to achieve. On the other hand, since even a thesis can be assumed to have an impact on discourse, the next section will present a WPR analysis of this entire study itself. It aims to help the reader assess the analysis and results and is the final step in Bacchi's (2025, p. 83) WPR framework – referred to as Process 7.

### **Process 7 - Self-Problematisation**

Bacchi (2025, pp. 84–85) recommends that, in order to encourage reflexivity, the author of a WPR analysis should apply the WPR questions to the analysis itself: “To problematise the 'self', we ask: If this is my problem representation, where does it come from and how is it possible? What meanings and conditions do I accept that make it possible?” (Bacchi, 2025, p. 84). The results will be presented in a section that integrates all questions

without headings. This section is deliberately written in the first person to clarify the reflexive approach.

Applying the seventh process invites a reflexive examination of how my own analysis constructs the “problem” under study. In my reading of the decision on structural measures, I formulated the initial idea that the Swedish Armed Forces tended to rely on structural and organisational restructuring as the primary solution to perceived shortcomings. In doing so, I simultaneously created an alternative representation of the problem: that structural interventions are not the only—or necessarily the most appropriate—way to address the organisation’s challenges. My analysis implicitly suggested that other mechanisms such as culture, practice, meaning making, and emerging coordination may be equally or more important for warfare capability. This constitutes a normative position on my part, which contrasts with the problem representation analysed in the decision.

Several assumptions underlie this position. First, I assumed that there is no optimal organisational design. Instead, several good enough configurations could possibly achieve the intended effects, depending on the context. Secondly, I assumed that uncertainty was an inherent organisational condition rather than an anomaly to be eliminated. Thirdly, I assumed that military effectiveness does not arise solely from formal structures but equally from informal methods, professional judgement and social dynamics.

My analysis was influenced, or made possible, by both academic and professional circumstances. The educational environment encourages critical examination and problematization, which legitimises perspectives that challenge dominant rationalities. Scientific work by academics at the Swedish Defence University (e.g., Ångström, 2025, Holmberg & Alvinus, 2019 and Alvinus et al., 2023) reinforces my belief that military organisations cannot be fully understood through structural logic alone. My own experience from the Swedish Armed Forces has given me the perception that “we” often deviate from the formal organisational to solve the task at hand, which makes me doubt the usefulness of changing only the written documents on the organisation design. Taken together, these circumstances make my specific problem representation in this study possible and coherent.

However, my analysis—inevitably—contains silences. Concepts such as cultural practice and dynamics are introduced as alternatives without subjecting them to corresponding critical scrutiny. I largely exclude considerations of power and legal

constraints, factors that necessarily shape the organisation of a defence force. Nor do I address how informal governance logics can generate arbitrariness or injustice. As a result, my findings risk indirectly idealising flexibility while underestimating the functional role of structure.

Finally, my problem representation produces several effects. It constructs the Swedish Armed Forces as a structurally fixed organisation shaped by its governing discourse and positions me as the academically distanced analyst with epistemic authority. It privileges theoretically grounded narratives over knowledge based on experience, which can reinforce a perceived gap between academic and practitioner perspectives. These dynamic risks deepen an already existing discursive separation: the Swedish Armed Forces may see such analyses as disconnected from practical realities, while I, in turn, may interpret organisational decisions as causal effects of entrenched discourses rather than based on intention.

### **Methodological Discussion**

This study aimed to investigate how organisational problems are represented in the Swedish Armed Forces' decision on structural measures from 2025, and to highlight the assumptions and rationales that make such representations appear both reasonable and necessary. In line with Berger's (2015, pp. 219–220) argument that reflexivity is central to evaluating the quality of qualitative research, the preceding self-problematisation offered an account of how my own analytical position shaped the reading of the text. For the rest of the methodological discussion, I refer to Cho and Trent's (2020, p. 1383) reminder of a journal's guidelines that emphasised: research should be assessed based on the researcher's awareness of the study's limitations and the breadth and depth of its implications.

The analysis identified three distinct problem representations, supported by underlying assumptions. The analysis also included three subject positions that indicated how actors in the problem representations could act to maintain the representation. However, the results are limited by the constraints of studying only one document and thus only one time frame. It should also be acknowledged that my interpretations, as a sole analyst, inevitably reflect my background which affects the results. Multiple analysts, the inclusion of interviews and multiple sources of empirical material could have resulted in a more nuanced understanding of the organisation.

A brief note is also warranted regarding the use of AI in the analytical process (see the

chapter on Basic Methodology for information on its use). ChatGPT has provided alternative perspectives throughout the process, but I believe that AI results cannot be incorporated without limitations into the analysis, as its internal workings remain opaque and therefore cannot be scrutinised through the same reflexive lens that human authors subject themselves to. On the other hand, ChatGPT has enriched—and sometimes challenged—my interpretations.

Several opportunities for further research are now apparent. One direction would be to broaden the empirical basis by including additional policy documents. This would enable a more comprehensive mapping of the discursive terrain in which the 2025 decision was situated. A second direction would be to deepen the analysis by interviewing people close to the proposed actors in the analysis, to investigate their understanding of the problem representation and its mechanisms. Finally, future studies could experiment with more systematic integration of AI into text-intensive policy analysis and investigate whether such tools can support practitioners in identifying implicit problem representations *prior* to policy implementation.

Overall, this chapter has shown that both the results and their limitations are products of the methodological and interpretative approach adopted in the study. The analysis illustrates how specific problem representations guide organisational meaning-making, while the methodological reflection clarifies the situated nature of these insights. The study thus offers one possible interpretation of the 2025 decision in terms of what it constructs as the problem that needs to be solved.

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