Leadership and stress
Indirect leadership and leadership during complex rescue operations

av

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Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract


The overall purpose of this thesis has been to increase the knowledge concerning leadership and stress in complex military and rescue operations. One of the biggest differences these leaders have to deal with compared to leaders in other kinds of organizations is the question of life and death. Their way of leading and handling stress may have consequences for their own lives, their subordinates’ lives, and often also other people’s lives.

This thesis is based on four empirical studies which include multiple research methods, e.g. both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Paper I and II focus on indirect leadership in a military context and the main result are that indirect leadership can be understood as consisting of two simultaneous influencing processes. The first one is action-oriented and consists of interaction with a link which filters and passes the messages down to lower organizational levels. The second process is image-oriented and consists of being a role model. In the favourable case, trust is built up between the higher management and the employees. However, in the unfavourable case, there is a lack of trust, resulting in redefinitions of the higher managers’ messages.

Paper III and IV focused on leadership in complex and/or stressful rescue operations. In paper III, rescue operation commanders from complex operations were interviewed, and in paper IV, quantitative questionnaires were answered by informants from the ambulance services, the police force and the rescue services. The main result are that leadership in complex, stressful rescue operations can be understood as consisting of three broad time-related parts: everyday working conditions, during an operation, and the outcome of an operation. The most important factors in explaining the outcome of a complex rescue operation were shown to be the organizational climate before an incident, positive stress reactions, and personal knowledge about one’s co-actors during an operation.

Keywords: leadership, stress, military operations, rescue operations.

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